

BY AHMAD MUTU

DRIVERS TIPPED ON ROAD USAGE, CAR MAINTENANCE

The explosion in the car population in Uganda means driving becomes tougher on the narrow roads and this calls for refresher training on road usage and common causes of accidents, and how to avoid them.

Victoria Motors Limited, the official dealers of Mitsubishi and Renault vehicles in Uganda, organised a training for both corporate and government clients on common causes of road accidents and how to avoid them. The company also offered a practical session on proper vehicle usage and maintenance. Close to 20 organisations and ministries attended the training.

LEARN CAR TALK

Engineers and mechanics from Victoria Motors tackled the commonest car problems, among which was early clutch failure.

George Mutumba, a consultant on road safety with AAU, was the lead trainer. He said besides looking after their families, the drivers have to look after their vehicles.

He noted that drivers have to learn how cars talk and listen to them. "When a car has a problem, it makes a sound. For example, overstaying in one gear while going uphill, the car will whine and groan. Changing the gear to the right one will make the car purr softly.

Mutumba also reminded drivers of first aid tips on the road, how and where to stop, how to park and observing other road users. He lauded Victoria Motors for not just selling vehicles, but also reminding the owners on the dos and don'ts.

CLUTCH ISSUES

One of the issues was on the clutch. Drivers sought to know what they are not doing right and how many kilometres a clutch system is supposed to cover.

Umar Kasujja, the head of



Drivers receiving skills on how to maintain cars

quality control, said clutches have no specific mileage to be replaced, but depend on the user and factors such as the condition of the road — potholes or muddy roads.

"Bad driving habits lead to a high rate of wear and tear of the clutch system. If you press it hard to the floor on a high way, it wears out fast," he said.

He added that he knows someone with a Pajero GLS, who had clocked 220,000km without changing the clutch. But when the clutch was changed, the system started misbehaving after just 25,000km. In the workshop, they discovered dust had

stopped the bearing from moving freely, so they had to clean it.

"Drivers should be able to report abnormal operations and get them fixed," Kasujja noted.

On the signs of clutch wear and tear before it is completely worn out, Ismail Mayanja, one of the experts, said when the gears stop engaging properly, there is a problem with the clutch.

"You know when you drive a new car, the pedal is soft and when it starts getting harder, there could be a problem. For example, excessive tapping of the pedal and vibrating

means the clutch plate has a problem," Mayanja said.

He added that the clutch is evolving. There used to be one type. Now, new cars have a self-adjusting clutch (SAC) system. Some brands warn the driver before they break down.

MORE MECHANICS

On the issue of stationing their skilled technicians in major districts, Mayanja said they have a mobile garage that moves all over the country.

"We are putting up a branch in Hoima, and have positioned our technicians at some Shell fuel stations in Entebbe, Masaka and Mbarara. We

are planning to take more technicians to more stations," he explained.

WARNING LIGHTS

When the issue of the engine warning light came up, the experts explained that vehicles from 2012 to date are electronically controlled.

The engine control system is electrical, with engine monitors and sensors. They monitor fuel flow, air flow, pressure and engine temperature. Any problem with these areas brings on the engine light.

"It displays the yellow engine symbol, which means

DID YOU KNOW?

"Can a vehicle be driven after 500,000km?" one driver asked. One expert said it is possible to drive an engine beyond this recommended mileage, depending on how you look after your car. Moses Madoa reported seeing vehicles which were beyond this mileage.

"You can go up to that mileage as long as you do proper maintenance and service it at the right time, preventing conditions like overheating, and maybe using one driver who knows the conditions and service schedule of the car," he said.

On the issue of the air conditioner and fuel use, the experts said when the AC is on or while idling in a traffic jam, the engine revs go up to stabilise the vehicle and this consumes a little more fuel.

danger. Some cars warn you to visit the workshop, others to stop but most cars from Victoria Motors are driven to the workshop before the lights go on because they tend to light when you exceed 25,000km without servicing and computer resetting," Kasujja explained.