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Employer and Training Needs: Report 8 Sport and Specialty Engines

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Report Number Eight


SPORT AND SPECIALTY ENGINES

EMPLOYER AND TRAINING NEEDS

PREPARED FOR METROPOLITAN TECHNICAL COMMUNITY COLLEGE



Center for Applied Urban Research

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nebraska 
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SPORT AND SPECIALTY ENGINES

by

Margaret A. Hein

SPORT AND SPECIALTY ENGINE MECHANICS

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to determine the employer and training needs in metropolitan Omaha for sport and specialty engine mechanics.

Sport and Specialty Engine Mechanics Program

Metropolitan Technical Community College offers a nine-month certificate option for Sport and Specialty Engine Mechanics. The catalog states:

The objectives of the Sport and Specialty Mechanics certificate option include: practical technical background in small engine rebuilding, electrical carburetion systems, drive systems and general service experience covering all makes of small engines in recreational vehicles. The small engine repair business is expanding rapidly today, particularly with increased leisure time in the United States. There are ample opportunities for employment in outboard motor, motorcycle repair, snowmobile repair, and lawn and garden equipment repair.

Study Design and Execution

To determine the target population, an exploratory study of the field of small engines was done. The CAUR researcher interviewed individuals employed in the various facets of the field. From this initial investigation, the listings under six headings in the telephone directory were sampled. These headings were: Engines - Gasoline, Boat Dealers, Lawn Mowers - Sharpening and Repairing, Snowmobiles, Motorcycles and Motor Scooters - Repairing and Service and Motorcycles and Motor Scooters - Dealers.

A survey instrument was constructed and interviews were conducted with owners and service managers in the various types of firms. The findings of this study are summarized here, with conclusions about the employer and training needs related to sport and specialty engines.

Research Findings

Motorcycles and Snowmobiles

Employment. All but one of the motorcycle dealers contacted anticipated growth in their businesses during the next three years and hoped to be creating more jobs. Currently, they have three to six mechanics at each firm. The motorcycle is becoming a recognized means of transportation as well as a recreation vehicle. Most workers begin at minimum wage or slightly better and later move to commission ranging from 30 to 55 percent. The work is seasonal and most have not found snowmobiles to be profitable winter work. Snowmobile repair is done by dealers, frequently the same ones as motorcycles, or boat dealers and some "Lawn and Leisure" shops. It has been a very slow and erratic business due to the climate and lack of facilities for use of snowmobiles in this area.

Applicants. When asked the question, "When there is a job opening, do you have too many, too few, or about the right number of qualified applicants?" the respondents stated that the number of qualified people currently is greater than the demand.

Skills and Knowledge Required. The small engine mechanic needs experience and mechanical ability. If the applicant has formal training, it will open the door and will get them into the shop at an hourly wage, and the individual then can work up to commission.

Manufacturers run their own training schools (one week). Metro Tech could provide basics, and then the mechanic could go to a specific school. The recommendation was made that Metro Tech get together with the various companies and have clinics or a cooperative education system. The company schools spend one to two weeks on each phase of the work.

Education and Training. American Motorcycle Institute, a large motorcycle school in Florida, offers 430 hours of training which includes math (conversion to metric and ratios), theory and history of two- and four- stroke engines and two weeks in the shop. Reaction to this school was mixed. Some employers thought it was good and some did not.

Mechanical ability was frequently mentioned as one of the prime factors in a good mechanic. Actual work on motorcycle engines is the best teacher.

Need for Program at Metro Tech. The basic program currently offered at Metro Tech met with approval by the respondents but not a great deal of enthusiasm. More time needs to be spent in actual work on motorcycle engines.

Job Outlook. No great numbers of people are employed in motorcycle repair at the present time in Omaha. The supply of trained people exceeds the demand. Other uses for the training would be to open a shop or work on a variety of small engines.

Lawn and Garden Equipment

Employment. Lawn and garden equipment repair includes a variety of items (e.g., chain saws, mowers, riding tractors, and snow blowers). Most of the businesses contacted had two full-time employees with salary ranges being \$3.10 to \$5.00 or commissions of 30-50 percent of the labor charge. Creation of new jobs in this area during the next three years will be minimal if not non-existent. One-half of the businesses said need for employees would increase, and the rest reported the need would be the same. Factors which influence the need for employees are the high turnover rate and the short season. Most of the work is done in the spring and summer.

Applicants. Trained applicants are equal to the demand in the metropolitan Omaha area, according to the majority of this type of firm. However, the majority of the respondents said when they have an opening there are too few qualified applicants. Primarily, the applicants are lacking in direct experience with the wide variety of small engines. Knowledge of small engines and the new types is another factor. In addition to the one and two cylinder engines, some firms are now working on three cylinder diesel engines on small utility tractors which are used by the cities of Bellevue and Omaha and individuals with "mini" farms.

Skills and Knowledge Required. Factory schools ranging in length from one-or-two days to one week were advocated by half of the respondents. All of the firms emphasized experience as the most valuable attribute. Experience in combination with basic training on small engines was a necessity. Frequently mentioned was the need for mechanical ability and aptitude. Willingness to learn and flexibility were other requirements. Several employers have found that applicants assume that a knowledge of auto mechanics will enable them to work on small engines, but it is not the same as auto mechanics.

Type of Education and Training. Most of the respondents felt that factory training and experience or an apprenticeship program in the company would be adequate. "Theory is "O. K." but you can pick it up fast if you're interested," was the opinion most frequently heard.

Need for Program at Metro Tech. Respondents who were familiar with the current program at Metro Tech or were shown the program by the interviewer were indifferent in their reactions. The program was "O. K.", but experience and actually doing the work were restated as important by the employers.

Job Outlook. There will be an ongoing need for people skilled in this area, but it will depend on the individual and how hard he wants to work. For the most part, the work is highly seasonal (April - June) with a few of the larger firms maintaining year round staff, but the work load is still irregular. Recreational vehicles such as snowmobiles and mopeds have increased the amount of work. There is the possibility of more repair work as people are keeping equipment longer and having it fixed rather than replacing it.

Marine Engines

Employment. Respondents stated that there are 10 to 12 certified mechanics in the Omaha area already. None of those interviewed plan to increase the number of jobs in this area in the next three years.

Applicants. The number of qualified applicants is equal to the demand. The season is short and the amount of recreational water is limited. Engines are not used as hard, nor is there the destructive salt water in this locale.

Skills and Knowledge Required. The marine engine mechanic needs to be able to "trouble shoot" or analyze what is wrong. The majority of the work is in preparing the engine for winter storage and checking it over in the spring.

Education and Training. To become a certified marine engine mechanic four weeks training and two years experience are required. The engine manufacturers offer training, and employees are sent to the school for one week of training at a time. One of the employers prefers to take someone inexperienced and do his own training.

Need for Program at Metro Tech. The consensus was that the program might be all right for retraining or working on one's own equipment, but the factory schools are doing what is required by the employers.

Job Outlook. Presently there is no demand nor any anticipation of additional personnel in the next three years.

Summary

The potential employers of sport and specialty engine mechanics in the Omaha area are motorcycle dealers, lawn and leisure shops, small engine repair shops, and boat dealers. There are no large employers in this area, and the beginning wage is generally minimum wage or slightly more. The work is seasonal, and qualified applicants are generally equal to the demand or more than are needed. The various engine factories offer training schools which employers find adequate. The greatest need of employers is experienced individuals with mechanical aptitude. There is a feeling that the use of motorcycles and recreational equipment will be increasing when the economy improves. Opening an individual business was the only other employment option mentioned, although there may be some demand by individuals who want to know how to service their own equipment.