

B SECTION

**For the six women who manage and run a Sarasota County lube shop, it's ...Oil in a day's work**

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Six days a week the crew at the Jiffy Lube gets ready for work: Navy blue uniform? Check. Tire pressure gauge? In the breast pocket. Jewelry, makeup and hair products? Never.

Carolyn Taylor, Tracey Palmquist, Susan Jeletic and Nita Silva leave the feminine accents at home. They'd just get in the way.

The four **women** run the Jiffy Lube on U.S. 41 near Palmer Ranch. And this week another two **women**, Vicki Gore, 52, and Bonnie Sparks, 21, joined their ranks. They're a bit of a novelty, often leaving customers perplexed and skeptical as the **women** peer beneath their car hoods, change oil and replace filters.

"I get a lot of 'Wow!'" said Jeletic, 50. "They're amazed that we can change the filter, change the belts."

Jeletic measures tire pressure and works the cash register. Taylor and Palmquist "run the hood," checking the oil and air filters; Silva works the lower bay, flushing transmissions and draining oil. Sparks and Gore will do a little bit of everything.

The number of female **mechanics** has been growing in the past few years, but **women** still make up less than 2 percent of the nation's nearly 1 million car service technicians and **mechanics**, according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. All-female teams like the one at this Jiffy Lube are especially rare.

The shop has hired men in the past, but "They don't last," said Taylor, 42, a manager. "It's not that we're being discriminatory, it just works out that way."

The female squad runs a clean grease shop. Papers are neatly stacked in a small office that's accentuated with family photographs. The refrigerator doesn't stink. And one of them is usually sweeping the floor or scrubbing down the lower bay, where they work on the underbellies of cars.

"I start from top to bottom, like I do the house," Silva, 22, said.

The shop, which opened in 2001, is one of nine Jiffy Lube franchises that Jason Thomas and Leif Oskarsson own in the Tampa Bay area -- and their only one run entirely by **women**.

A few people have complained about the all-female operation, Thomas said. But customers' qualms are not so much conveyed in what they say as in what they do.

"They're up against the glass," Thomas said. "They're right out there standing in front of their car."

The **women** take it in stride. In some ways, they can even relate to people's fascination with gender roles.

"It would be like this guy over here coming to my door and selling me Avon," Palmquist, 27, said, pointing to Art Machold, who was waiting for Jeletic and Silva to finish up his car.

Machold doesn't go door to door hawking cosmetics, but he's all for **women** doing what in yesteryear might have been deemed "men's work."

"It's great," he said. "I think **women** are smarter than men."

Not all men are so progressive. "Sometimes it gets rough," Silva said. "These guys come in here and treat you a little different. They're too macho for a woman to be working on their car. They'll say, 'Make sure you do this. Make sure you do that.'"

Female customers seem to be most curious about the setup, and the shop has designated Wednesday as "ladies day," with female customers getting a \$5 discount.

"When I first started, I was intimidated," Silva said. "But you get in a routine. It's kind of like doing your hair in the morning."

Silva showed up wearing a fresh set of fake nails her first day on the job. Determined to get her \$30 worth, she let them break off, one engine at a time.

She's since accepted having short nails with grease under them -- except on her days off.

"The whole week I'm not girly, then on the weekend I put on makeup or do my hair," Silva said. "Some people don't think I'm like that."

Female **mechanics'** do's and don'ts

\* Jewelry, long nails and Jimmy Choo slingbacks are not recommended; a baseball cap and anti-slip sneakers are.

\* Macho men need not remind the **women** to twist on the oil filter cap.

\* Male job applicants should know their way around a broom and a mop.

\* Female customers get a \$5 discount at Jiffy Lube on Wednesdays. Note to men: Let the **women** in your lives borrow your car at least once a week.

PHOTO 3; Caption: STAFF PHOTO / THOMAS BENDER Susan Jeletic, left, and manager Carolyn Taylor move a car into position for an oil change at the Jiffy Lube on U.S. 41 near Palmer Ranch. All the employees at the shop are **women**. STAFF PHOTOS / THOMAS BENDER / thomas.bender@heraldtribune.com ABOVE: Tracy Palmquist finishes giving a vehicle an oil change in the pit at the Jiffy Lube on U.S. 41 near Westfield Sarasota Square in Sarasota County last month. All six employees at the **auto** shop are **women**. TOP: Susan Jeletic checks a vehicle's tire pressure while its oil is being changed.