

May 26, 2009

Don't drop the box

Friday was just one of those days. As usual, I drove my daughter to daycare, parked, carried her in, dropped her off, walked out, and saw the back end of my car smashed, with the hood lid looking a bit like a fortune cookie. Because the vehicle's 11 years old, it didn't take much to declare the thing totaled, so my wife and I spent Memorial Day weekend car shopping.

One GM dealership got me thinking about a fabricator I spoke with last week. **Boon Edam**, a Dutch maker of revolving doors and turnstiles with a facility in Lillington, N.C., is using a combination plasma/waterjet machine from **ESAB** to cut various materials, from aluminum and stainless steel to Muntz metal and even a hard plastic used in new packaging. That packaging has helped eliminate what used to be an all too common occurrence: A door would arrive at a construction site, broken. According to Jim Sheehan, manufacturing engineer, this no longer happens thanks to some standardized packaging components cut with the company's combination cutting system.

The lesson: No link in the value chain really is more important than another, and the most efficient shop floor in the world doesn't matter much if the delivery guy drops the box and damages the product en route to the customer.

The GM dealership I visited yesterday certainly dropped the box.

As the car salesperson fetched a vehicle to test drive, my wife and I saw him get in the car, get out, and fetch a battery to jump-start the thing. Turns out somebody forgot to turn off the interior lights after the last test drive a few days before. This wasn't a design flaw, and the car drove well, but the snafu was enough to steer us to another car and another dealership.

I don't envy anyone working at a GM car dealership these days, particularly with a **GM bankruptcy filing** expected by the end of the week. But no matter what happens once the automotive industry emerges from this mess, the companies that remain likely will be the ones that rarely drop the box, at the dealership or anywhere else in the value chain.

Posted At : 11:40 AM. | Posted By : Tim Heston