AutoMate

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Available at: https://works.bepress.com/jan_comfort/38/
Automate

AutoMate is a database containing car service and repair information. From the EBSCO database description: “Powered by the automotive experts at MOTOR, AutoMate provides the most accurate, authoritative and up-to-date service and repair information for thousands of domestic and imported vehicles. All content comes from the Original Equipment Manufacturers (OEM) and includes step-by-step repair information, diagrams, maintenance schedules, parts and labor estimates, service bulletins and recalls and more.”

On the opening screen, you can select a particular vehicle to get started, or choose Help from the Menu link at the top. Here you can access a brief user guide with a description of the contents and screenshots showing how to construct a search. EBSCO also provides training and promotional materials, including a short tutorial. Search history is also available, but it is just a list and does not allow users to return to search results.

Searching

As a novice user who is not particularly mechanically inclined, I boldly enter the year, make, and model of my vehicle. A search box displays on the left side of the screen followed by list of topics. When I type “headlights” into the search box, I get 38 hits, falling into the categories of Component Locations, Labor, Parts, and Procedures. The entries are quite clear, so one can see what parts might be faulty, and how much time and money might be involved in a repair job. Print options are clearly labeled, as are navigation options such as closing windows or moving up or down in the list. Some documents include line drawings, which open automatically in a new window and adjust to various sizes. These drawings are not always clear, and they appear to be scanned images. In fact, much of the text also seems to be scanned images. This is surprising as the content supposedly originates from the Original Equipment Manufacturers (OEM). Although it is not possible to narrow results to documents with drawings, adding the search term “diagram” limits the results to 36 documents. Most (but not all) of these entries include photos or drawings. Photos are clearly viewable in all available sizes from 12.5% to 200%.

A similar search for a different vehicle yields similar results. When selecting from the list of options (as opposed to typing a keyword into the search box) it is sometimes necessary to drill down several levels to reach the desired information. Other times, after selecting a topic, the display window presents a screen needing lots of input via dropdown menus, which is somewhat confusing. Overall, the results are clearly displayed and easy to view and print. When diagrams are included, they are generally quite clear. Even some four-color jogs that were clear at 200%.

Viewing images on the iPad, however, is not optimal. In fact, viewing text on the iPad is not optimal either, despite this claim from the User Guide: “Designed for touch-enabled devices such as laptops and tablets, AutoMate offers a user-friendly search experience and access to a wealth of information to help users diagnose, repair and maintain today’s complex vehicles. Diagrams and images can be easily magnified and printed.” The text is too large for the screen (even when viewing in landscape) with no way to adjust the size.

Coverage

The database covers from 1974 to 2018, which is great because I own a 1974 Chevrolet El Camino. (Really!) It also includes a number of other rare and/or obscure vehicles, which is a great feature for the collector or home mechanic.

Because of the nature of the database, it is difficult to determine if the information is complete. It appears that most of the information in the owner’s manual is available for some vehicles. For other vehicles, less information is available, but there does not appear to be any discernable pattern.
**Audience**

This database is suitable for public libraries who cater to the Do-it-Yourself crowd. It could also be useful for professional auto mechanics when they have a particularly rare vehicle or unusual repair problem. Technical college and university libraries with a strong public service mission might also consider this database. The ability to search for a topic without limiting to a particular vehicle would be a welcome addition. Such a feature would make the database more useful for students.

**Recommendation**

Compare to Auto Repair Reference Center (also from EBSCO) which is very similar but covers vehicles as old as 1954 but only up to 2015. Surprisingly the coverage is not identical. For example, in AutoMate my 2010 vehicle has a very complete set of documents whereas the Auto Repair Reference Center contains only Technical Bulletins and Recalls. A different search shows complete results for a 2012 vehicle in AutoMate but no results at all in Auto Repair Reference Center. For those who are considering a purchase of an auto repair database, I would recommend AutoMate. For further information, follow this link: https://www.ebsco.com/products/research-databases/automate.