

**Analysis of the Performance Auto Collision  
Comparison of a BMW Brand Part  
with a CAPA Certified Aftermarket Part  
Televised in a FOX 5 News (Atlanta)  
July 29, 2010 Report**

**October 19, 2010**

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Prepared by



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## **INTRODUCTION**

On July 29, 2010, FOX 5 News in Atlanta, Georgia aired an investigative report by reporter Dana Fowle concerning aftermarket auto body parts used in vehicle repairs. A key element in the report was a demonstration conducted by David Montanaro of Performance Auto Collision and Ms. Fowle that purported to show the relative strength of two radiator support parts for a BMW automobile – one manufactured by BMW, and the other made by an unidentified independent aftermarket manufacturer.

The demonstration portrayed the BMW brand part as resisting attempts by Ms. Fowle and Mr. Montanaro to bend the part, while the aftermarket part yielded easily to a similar demonstration. Ms. Fowle also commented that the BMW-made part was “kind of heavy,” while the aftermarket part was “obviously a lot lighter.”

The aftermarket part involved in the comparison was not identified in the report as a CAPA Certified part. However, the report mentioned CAPA as a certifier of certain aftermarket parts, and a specific CAPA Certification seal (#47725094) was shown affixed to an unidentified body part in the video. A search of CAPA's database revealed that this specific CAPA seal had, in fact, been issued and placed on an aftermarket BMW radiator support part manufactured by Gordon Auto Body Parts Co. A CAPA representative then spoke by phone with Performance Auto Collision staff member Neal Miller, who confirmed that this specific CAPA Certified part was, in fact, the item that had been used in the televised report.

Upon being presented with this information, CAPA Executive Director Jack Gillis directed CAPA's technical staff to conduct an immediate inquiry and report its findings as soon as possible.

As described in the following report, the demonstration conducted by Mr. Montanaro on FOX 5 News actually compared two different parts that BMW intentionally made of different materials with different properties. In addition, the aftermarket part used in the demonstration had been modified and made to appear to be the same part as the BMW brand part to which it was compared.

**CAPA believes it is important for Mr. Montanaro to contact FOX 5 News to correct the misimpression created by this flawed demonstration and for both Mr. Montanaro and FOX 5 News to set the record straight.**

## **FINDINGS**

Given the obvious visual differences in the two parts depicted in the FOX 5 News report, our first step was to identify the proper radiator support parts for the 1999-2006 BMW 3-Series vehicle mentioned in the report.

All car company brand parts are given unique part numbers that identify the proper part to use when a damaged part must be replaced. BMW manufactures three different radiator support parts for the 1999 to 2006 BMW 3-Series. Each part bears its own unique part number and the parts are not interchangeable. In fact, BMW attempts to ensure that the appropriate part is used on their different vehicle models by issuing different part numbers.

Following are three parts BMW makes for this vehicle:

1. BMW Part # 51717111691 - radiator support for 1999-2006 BMW 3-Series Sedan/Coupe/Wagon (Upper and lower tie bar pieces riveted together during manufacturing)
2. BMW Part # 51717114123 - radiator support upper tie bar for 1999-2006 BMW 3-Series Convertible
3. BMW Part # 51717111694 - radiator support lower tie bar for 1999-2006 BMW 3-Series Convertible

A review of the FOX 5 News report reveals that the upper tie bar component of the Sedan/Coupe/Wagon radiator support (#1 above) had been separated from the lower tie bar piece for the demonstration. The upper tie bar for the Convertible (#2 above) was also used in the demonstration. Part #3 was not mentioned or shown in the report.

### **BMW Radiator Support Parts: The Difference Between the Sedan/Coupe/Wagon and Convertible Parts**

Following are photos and descriptions of the two different parts that were compared in the FOX 5 report. While Performance Auto Collision presented these as two versions of the same part, they are not. BMW requires totally different parts for these two BMW styles (Sedan/Coupe/Wagon vs. Convertible).

## CAPA Analysis of Performance Auto Collision's Comparative Demonstration of BMW Radiator Support Parts on FOX 5 News, July 29, 2010

As the photographs below demonstrate, the BMW brand upper tie bar radiator support for the BMW 3-Series Convertible (Figure 1) is a very different part than the combined radiator support manufactured by BMW for the Sedan/Coupe/Wagon (Figure 2).

**BMW Convertible Radiator Support Part:** Not only is the Convertible's upper tie bar visually very different from the Sedan/Coupe/Wagon's riveted radiator support, it also contains a 'honeycomb' structure that is not present in the Sedan/Coupe/Wagon part. Currently, there are no CAPA Certified aftermarket parts available to replace the BMW Convertible upper tie bar.

**BMW Sedan/Coupe/Wagon Radiator Support Part:** As the photo in Figure 2 indicates, the BMW brand radiator support for the Sedan/Coupe/Wagon is very different from the Convertible part. It consists of an upper and lower tie bar riveted together at the factory and only sold as one piece. Because BMW does not want this part sold or used as two separate pieces, BMW has identified it by a single part number.



Figure 1. **BMW-made radiator support #51717114123 – Upper Tie Bar** for 1999-2006 BMW 3-Series Convertible (as received).

CAPA does NOT certify an aftermarket version of this part.

The upper tie bar is not attached to the lower tie bar, which is sold separately and has a separate part number.

This part cannot be used on the Sedan/Coupe/Wagon.



Figure 2. **BMW-made radiator support #51717111691** for 1999-2006 BMW 3-Series Sedan/Coupe/Wagon (as received).

CAPA certifies an aftermarket version of this part.

The upper and lower tie bars are riveted together by BMW during manufacturing.

## **The CAPA Certified replacement part for BMW Part #51717111691**

CAPA records confirm that CAPA Certification Seal #47725094 – the seal displayed on the FOX 5 report and confirmed by Performance Auto Collision staff to be on the aftermarket part depicted in the FOX 5 demonstration – was affixed by the Gordon Auto Body Parts Co. to one of its replacement radiator support parts (BMW part #51717111691) for the 1999-2006 BMW 3-Series Sedan/Coupe/Wagon, not the Convertible.



**Figure 3. CAPA Certified Gordon radiator support replacing BMW part #51717111691** for 1999-2006 BMW 3-Series Sedan/Coupe/Wagon (as received). This part cannot be used on the convertible.

The upper and lower tie bars are riveted together during manufacturing, the same as the BMW brand part.



**Figure 4. Close-up of BMW brand upper tie bar portion of the radiator support for the Sedan/Coupe/Wagon.** In addition to being made of a different, softer material, BMW has designed this part very differently than its Convertible part.



**Figure 5. Close-up of BMW brand upper tie bar for the Convertible.** Both the cast aluminum material and honeycomb structure stiffen the part and give it very different strength properties from the radiator support manufactured by BMW for its Sedan/Coupe/Wagon.

**Radiator Support Material:** The upper tie bar used in the FOX 5 report that BMW manufactures for its Convertible is made of cast aluminum. The cast aluminum that BMW uses for this part (Figure 1 and 5) is thicker and much more robust than the wrought aluminum used by BMW to make the radiator support (Figure 2 and 4) for the Sedan/Coupe/Wagon. Wrought aluminum, in this particular geometric configuration, is relatively light and flexible.

CAPA Certification requires the aftermarket part to match the material of the car company brand counterpart. In the case of the CAPA Certified Gordon radiator support for the 1999-2006 BMW Sedan/Coupe/Wagon (Figure 3), the part is made of wrought aluminum like the BMW brand part.

Not only is the CAPA Certified part made of wrought aluminum like the corresponding BMW brand part, but as the photographs in Figure 2 and 3 show, they are nearly identical in appearance and, most importantly, are both delivered as a single part, with the upper and lower tie bar portions riveted together.



## **CONCLUSION**

The FOX 5 News demonstration presented by Performance Auto Collision that purported to compare the “bend-ability” and strength of a BMW brand radiator support with an aftermarket counterpart was seriously flawed:

- 1) The demonstration compared two items that were actually completely separate and distinct parts.
  - a. The BMW-made part shown in the FOX 5 report was an upper tie bar radiator support (BMW#51717114123) manufactured specifically by BMW to be installed in its 3-Series Convertible.
  - b. The aftermarket part Performance Auto Collision used in the FOX News report shown was a piece of the combined upper and lower tie bar radiator support manufactured specifically to be installed in a different vehicle, the 3-Series Sedan/Coupe/Wagon, as a replacement for BMW part #51717111691. The part BMW designed for the 3-Series Sedan/Coupe/Wagon is dramatically different than the comparable part it uses in its convertible. (The actual aftermarket part used in the demonstration was manufactured by Gordon Auto Body Parts Co. and certified by CAPA.)
  - c. The BMW cast aluminum upper tie bar for the BMW convertible would be extremely difficult, if not impossible, to bend by hand. Both the BMW and CAPA-Certified wrought aluminum upper tie bars for the BMW Sedan/Coupe/Wagon would be relatively easy to bend by hand, especially if separated from the lower tie bar.
  - d. These two parts are not intended to be interchangeable. For whatever reason, Performance Auto Collision represented to FOX 5 and its viewers that the CAPA-Certified aftermarket radiator support part shown was manufactured and marketed to be identical to the BMW-made support when, in fact, they were comparing two different parts.
  
- 2) The Gordon aftermarket combined radiator support part for the BMW Sedan/Coupe/Wagon which Performance Auto Collision used in the FOX 5 demonstration had been modified in an unauthorized manner to more closely resemble the very different BMW Convertible upper tie bar radiator

## **CAPA Analysis of Performance Auto Collision's Comparative Demonstration of BMW Radiator Support Parts on FOX 5 News, July 29, 2010**

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support. Specifically, the rivets attaching the upper tie bar piece to the lower tie bar piece had been removed and only half of the aftermarket part was used by Performance Auto Collision in the FOX 5 demonstration.

CAPA's analysis concludes that the comparative demonstration performed by Performance Auto Collision for FOX 5 News was flawed and invalid. FOX viewers were left with the misleading impression that the CAPA Certified aftermarket part was of inferior strength and quality to its BMW-made counterpart. However, not only did Performance Auto Collision conduct an invalid comparison of two different parts, they also performed an unauthorized and potentially unsafe modification on the Gordon aftermarket part to make it appear to be the same as the BMW-made part in the demonstration.



## **CAPA and CAPA STANDARDS**

The Certified Automotive Parts Association is a non-profit organization that oversees a testing and inspection program that certifies the quality of automotive parts used for collision repairs. CAPA is not a manufacturing, marketing or sales organization. CAPA Certification provides consumers, auto body shops, parts distributors and insurance adjusters with an objective method for evaluating the quality of aftermarket parts and their functional equivalency to similar parts sold under car company brands. CAPA was founded to promote price and quality competition in the collision parts industry, thereby reducing the cost of crash repairs to consumers without sacrificing quality.

CAPA Standards are based on the comparative testing of independently produced repair parts with their car company brand counterparts – also known as original equipment manufacturer, or OEM, parts. CAPA standards include detailed comparisons of the aftermarket part submitted for certification with its car company brand counterpart for all important physical aspects. Tests include: material properties, appearance, vehicle test fitting, and corrosion resistance. Where applicable, compliance with Federal Motor Vehicle Safety Standards is required. The program also includes a rigorous system of part re-inspection following certification.

The final step in the CAPA Certification process is the application of a two part, tamper-proof seal with a unique serial number that allows each individual part to be traced. The CAPA Certification seal provides assurance that the certified aftermarket part is functionally equivalent to the car company brand part it is replacing. Detailed information on the CAPA Certification program can be found at [www.CAPAcertified.org](http://www.CAPAcertified.org).