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APPLES AND ORANGES?

I recently bought a new car. My Subaru was vibrating between 65 and 85 mph to the point it couldn't be driven comfortably and slower than 65 just doesn't work for me. I hate car shopping with a passion. So to make it more interesting, I couldn't help but compare purchasing a new car to purchasing a new irrigation system. I looked at the differences in the two purchases systematically and analyzed a number of important issues.

SELECTION. I had no idea what car I wanted, so my selection was huge. With so many different manufacturers out there and I had to use a process to narrow down the list to at least five or less. This problem does not exist with irrigation. There are just a few choices out there and you can quickly narrow your choice to two or three companies and move on to the other buying issues.

STYLE. Cars can be sedans, coupe, cross overs, SUV's or hatchbacks. In irrigation we have block or valve-in-head, decoders or field controllers. In car-buying the style may not be important, but in irrigation systems the control style has become a major decision.

FEATURES. With a car there are lots of different features. Many are included in packaged groups and once you pick a specific package you get everything that it includes. For example, a power package may include power windows, mirrors, door locks and cruise control. Irrigation systems are no different in that once you pick a control system level – for example in Rain Bird there is Stratus, Nimbus and Cirrus the features

are automatically included. Similarly, the price is higher the more features in the package. And as with a car, in most cases you start with a lower level and add in just the individual features for an additional cost. With an irrigation system you also get features that you may not want and therefore will not use. In the car, you will probably use them if they are there.

TRADE-IN VALUE. I got to trade in my Subaru for a fair amount that acted as my down payment. Depending on the

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age of your irrigation system it may have resale value, but it certainly will not be any substantial amount. There are some third-party refurbishes and resellers who might take the old equipment off your hands, or you might find a golf course that can use your stuff for parts. If you get really lucky you might also be able to sell your old pump station cheaply. Basically, there is no trade-in value.

NEGOTIATING. For some, not me, the fun in car buying is the negotiating. Once you know what you want you start seeing how low you can buy it for. Irrigation systems have some negotiating room, but not really that much. Irrigation sys-

tem negotiations quickly get to a point that if you want a lower price you have to decide what you are willing to give up – fewer sprinklers, less isolation, etc. For example, how many sprinklers are you willing to eliminate and where?

FINANCING. New car financing is pretty easy unless your credit rating is crap. There are options: bank financing, dealer financing, leasing or manufacturer financing. Irrigation is a little more difficult. One reason is the cost – millions of dollars are not financed in an hour or less. There is bank financing usually as a mortgage on the property or club house which will require an up-to-date appraisal. Member financing by assessment or savings through capital improvement requires informational meetings and maybe a vote. Many times there is a combination of different financing options. There is also leasing and manufacturer financing but these are rarely used as bank financing is almost always more attractive to a club/owner.

PRICING. A car has a sticker price attached to the window but it just indicates an order of magnitude and a place to start (see negotiation). In irrigation, for each individual item; sprinkler, valve, controller – there is a list price for each. There is no list price for the entire system like a car, but like the car, the list price doesn't really mean anything. In irrigation, the price is based on the package or a percentage off the list price. You're not sure what the price will be until there is a design and something to price from. GCI