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Major Headaches From Minor Repairs

SOMEWHERE we read that "it isn't the mountain in front of you but the gravel in your shoe that makes you lame."

That witty saying might have many applications, such as trying to get your car repaired. You may be able to have a smashed fender replaced for approximately a month's take-home pay but a minor mishap can frustrate you to the point of exasperation.

Last year we bought a new car, standard size of popular make, manufactured in the United States by union labor. It is the most comfortable, most easily handled car we ever owned — except!

One of its modern devices is a lever on the steering column that controls turn signals, windshield washer, windshield wipers and cruise control. One day while we were on a trip this lever fell off. All of the attachments were in working order but none was in use as we drove smoothly along a paved road. The lever just fell off.

We could find no way to make the dangling wires stay in place so we

drove to the dealership in Sulphur. The service man said he had never seen anything like that happen before. He worked on it half an hour and the lever stayed in place another half hour.

Next we stopped at the dealership for this make of car in Dallas, Texas. The service man there said he had never seen anything like it. He used tools and superglue to make it stay in place.

The lever fell off again before we got to Dallas. We bought some packaging tape and bandaged up the wires. In spite of the added hazard of driving Dallas freeways and I-35 without turn signals we made it back to Oklahoma City safely.

Here we took the car to the dealer where we bought it. The service man said he had seen levers fall off 30 or 40 times and that it would be fixed under the warranty. They kept the car all day.

The lever stayed in place but the first rainy day we found that the windshield washer lever would not work.

So back to the garage. In another half day they fixed the windshield

washer button, but they disconnected the cruise control.

So back to the garage. Another half day and the lever that had no apparent reason to fall off in the first place was repaired. If this is American craftsmanship, it is no wonder that other countries are beating us. If it is careless workmanship, we are beating ourselves.

Because of the warranty, the three dealers made no direct charges to us for our five trips for repairs. That does not mean the incident was without cost to us.

To take a car and leave it for repairs, then go back after it requires two people to spend about two hours each. Three round trips in two vehicles requires about five or six gallons of gasoline.

Whatever costs the dealers may have incurred for their attempts at repairs were included in the sale price. There is no such thing as a free lunch.

We just hope we don't have any other minor breakdowns. Another experience like this could give us a major breakdown.