

Manufacturing

Dissection and Nitpicking Inc.

New company offers independent vehicle teardowns

BY DREW WINTER

Sitting in a nondescript building in suburban Detroit, the brand new Honda Odyssey minivan glistens under the harsh industrial spotlights.

Even though it has been yanked off the factory truck before the dealer could even clean it up, it still looks near perfect, proudly displaying its famous Honda quality.

Pity. It's about to be disassembled and dissected like a medical school cadaver.

But first it's torn apart superficially and humiliated as three gangs of anal retentive engineers and manufacturing experts (plus a couple of volunteer automotive journalists) nitpick the vehicle to death.

They scour the door sills and find tiny gobs of extra sealant, and partially visible spot welds. They complain bitterly that it's

too hard to find the dipstick hole, and that the hood prop rod is cheesy.

Every puckered fabric seam and slightly off-color piece of interior trim is catalogued and labeled with sticky little arrows until the poor minivan bristles from stem to stern.

No excuses, no slack — and no ignoring a competitor's strong points either. This is a truly objective analysis — something that doesn't happen in the bowels of OEM tech centers.

Welcome to the Harbour & Munro LLC Benchmarking Information Center (BIC), a new company in Troy, MI, that promises to deliver bench-marking analyses that are more detailed, cost-effective and objective than what's currently being done in-house by most of the world's auto-makers.

The company is a joint venture between Harbour and Associates Inc., the well-known manufacturing consulting company that pub-



Sandy Munro (left), founder of Munro & Associates, and Ron Harbour, president of Harbour and Associates, pose with their first victim.

lishes the influential Harbour Report on auto assembly plant productivity, and Munro & Associates Inc., which specializes in helping automakers and suppliers design vehicles and components that are easier to assemble, service and recycle.

Together they hope to offer a place for engineers, buyers, suppliers and quality representatives to access best-in-class product design and manufacturability information, including cooperative studies and whole vehicle teardowns — without the politics and biases inherent in most in-house studies.

But if you have a personal stake in a vehicle these guys are analyzing be forewarned: They will make you cry. □