

Tip from the best

'Trust and love a good mechanic'

By BOB MACGREGOR

"If you find a good mechanic, trust him and love him and he will trust and love you."

That is the philosophy of Luigi Della Grotta, once a mechanic for the legendary racing driver Juan Fangio and now the proprietor of a small garage tucked away in a second-floor loft in Westmount.

He does not sell or service very many cars, but Luigi's clientele is a select group of dedicated car enthusiasts to whom the epitome of motor-ing excellence and elegance is the prancing horse emblem of the Ferrari company of Maranello, Italy.

"I am not impressed with big garages that have a lot of men in white coats," Luigi says. "Many of the mechanics in the large shops work on an assembly line basis. They have no feeling for cars and are not really interested in working on them. Working on a car is just another job."

"To be a good mechanic, you have to really love your work and take a sincere interest in the customer's problems. Generally, in the smaller shops, mechanics have a greater respect for the customer's property."

Mr. Della Grotta admits that finding a good mechanic is not easy for the average motorist who generally feels he must have his car repaired at the place where he bought it. He advises motorists to fulfill the obligations of a new car warranty, then look around for an independent mechanic who is not under pressure from a parts manager to install new components.

"It takes a good man several years to build up a good reputation," Luigi says.

"When a car owner finally finds a mechanic who does a good, honest job of fixing mechanical problems, the customer should stay with him, even if he moves to another shop. It's just like the situation women have with good hairdressers who might move from one salon to another."

Luigi's company, Sport's Car Sales and Service Ltd., employs two full-time mechanics who specialize in expensive, temperamental Italian sports cars. When one of the workers has a difficult problem, Luigi pitches in.

"One customer insisted on talking to the owner," he recalled. "I was sweeping up the floor at the time and had a hard time convincing him that I owned the

place."

Some of Luigi's regulars have been with him for years and have followed from previous employers.

Connie Schenker, comparison shopper and consumer affairs expert for CBC Radio's Midday Magazine, takes her Alfa Romeo to Luigi's shop for regular checkups.

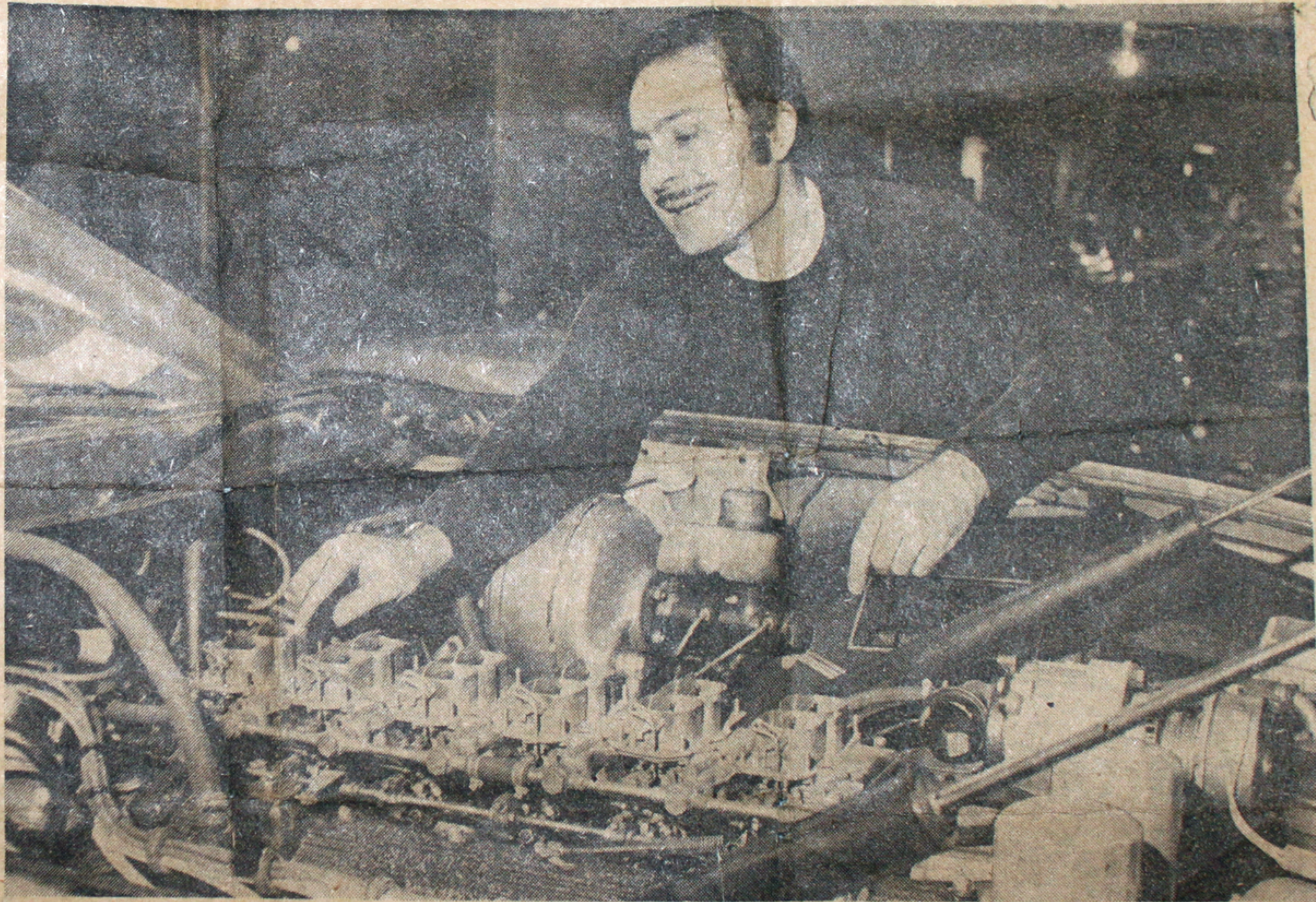
"He seems to have a real feeling for cars," she explains, "and I think the fact that he likes them so much results in his giving much better work than many other mechanics. But he is not inexpensive."

While an engine rebuild job on a standard American car can cost about \$500, Luigi's bill for reconditioning the engine of a Ferrari is more than \$4,000.

"The people who buy Ferraris don't often worry about the cost of repairs," Luigi says. "They trust me to fix the car and generally don't want to know about the details."

High on the list of breakdowns in the expensive sports cars are worn-out clutches, transmission and differentials.

"A lot of sports car owners just can't resist the urge to get into drag races with



Luigi Della Grotta, once a mechanic for the legendary racing driver Juan Fangio, works on an exotic sports car in his Westmount garage.

Staff photo by Morris Edwards