

# A/C Controllers Are Repairable!

By Ignacio "Nacho" Corella

Customer complaint: On 1997 and newer Chevy Malibu's, after about 45 minutes of running the a/c on Max Cooling, the light on the recirculation control button starts blinking. It

A blinking A/C light and intermittent operation may be caused by failing controller.

Controller may be repairable, saving the customer hundreds of dollars.

doesn't happen on other settings. Cooling becomes intermittent while the light blinks.

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Above: Photo 1. 1997 Malibu panel with the Control Head and bezel removed.



Above: Photo 2. Control Head removed. This unit is probably suffering from dirty contacts. With proper technique, this part can be restored to a servicable condition and live for several years.

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**A/C SERVICE Tip—Fix The Controller, Don't Replace It!**

You can temporarily stop the blink and restart the cooling by leaving the system off for a few minutes. Problem comes back in about 10-15 minutes.

**Dealer repair?**

If the Malibu is out of warranty, most dealers will recommend a new, improved control head. In fact though, all you need is a little curiosity and ingenuity. After we sold a couple control heads, we started experimenting on the "dead" ones. We soon found that they could be brought back to life. The steps are documented in this article.

**Get it right**

The trick is to make sure that both the contacts and brushes make PERFECT

contact. The best way to accomplish that is by lifting the contacts and cleaning the PCB (Printed Circuit Board). We just use a small screwdriver as a lifting device. The PCB contacts and brushes are cleaned with a soft rag and alcohol, and dried with canned air. I do not suggest

using even a very fine sand paper; the PCB can probably not take that abrasion.

After cleaning, we apply one very thin coat of graphite to the contacts and brushes. A #2 pencil can work, but a thinner one is better yet. You are working in a very tight area. continued on page 20



**Photo 3. Remove the knobs from the Control Head.**



**Photo 4. Gently pry the face off of the Control head. Here we are using a small screw driver.**

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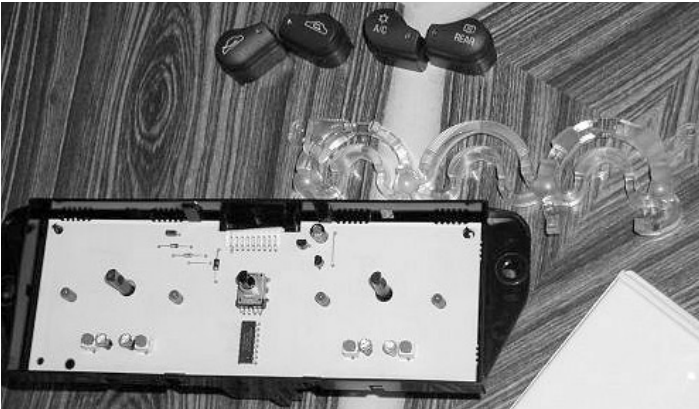
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With everything cleaned and graphite coated, start the reassembly by reversing the steps you used to get to this point.

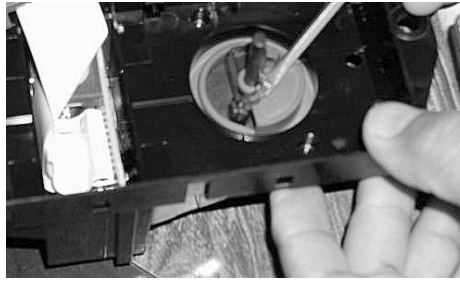


**Above: Photo 5. View beneath the Control Head face plate.**

**Below: Photo 6. Remove Control Head parts.**



**A/C Tech Tip—Controller Repair**



**Left: Photo 8. Screwdriver points to the brushes which must make perfect contact with the related surface on the PCB. Alcohol applied with a soft rag, dried with canned air and a very fine coating of graphite.**

**Cost of Control Head**

I'm sure that most are aware that AC Delco is prone to change part numbers regularly. However, the Delco P/N for the Control Head that I see quite often is: 15-72609. Here in Mexico, this control retails for an average of \$175.00. I'd say that in the U.S., it will retail for less than \$200 including labor.

**Repair time**

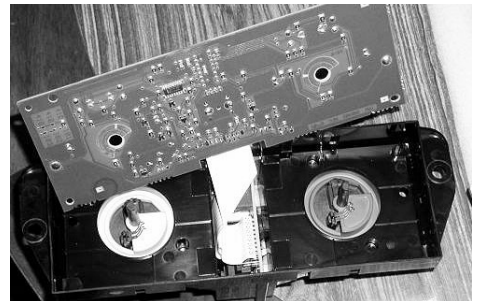
A newbie technician can easily take two or three hours to complete this job, given the fear of the unknown and of breaking things.

Using an experi-

enced tech, for vehicles with this problem, we now turn them around in less than an hour. We charge \$20.00 but do it free for friends and relatives. In writing this article I realized how low that is; we may change our pricing. Of course, it's a great "good will" opportunity for very important customers.

**Reliability of repair**

We've officially performed this serv-



**Above: Photo 7. Loosen and slip out the Control Head's PCB (Printed Circuit Board).**



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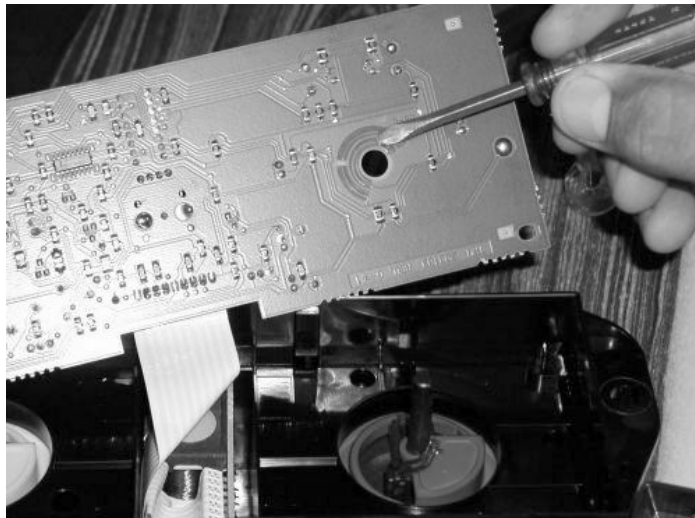
ice on 15 Malibu's. Oldest being 1997 (release year) and newer being 1999 (supposedly, problem has been cured).

We've had only one comeback. Well, even that one wasn't really our fault. I tried to instruct a friend who owns an auto detail facility to do the repair over the phone. A couple of months later, he brought the Malibu in and we fixed it together. Other than this, no problems

have been reported by users. We keep 3 new units on stock, however.

Wonder how many heads are just chucked?...GM/Delco won't care. Gosh! \$20 is way too little money! \$\$\$

**Nacho Corella is the owner of CEKSA Autoclimas, an automotive repair facility in Hermosillo,**



**Above: Photo 9. Screwdriver points to contact surface on the PCB. This area is to be cleaned with alcohol and a soft rag and dried with canned air. Follow this with a very thin layer of pencil-lead graphite.**

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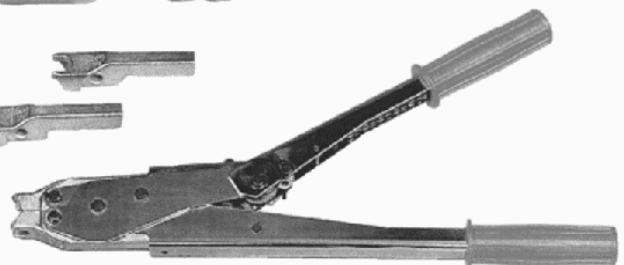
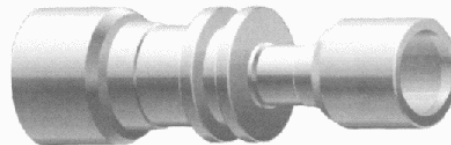
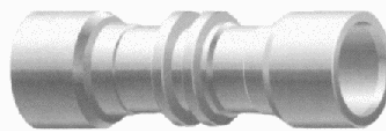


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