

The Ridiculous Story of Vacuum Cleaner Servicing Going Completely Wrong

Shôn Ellerton, July 9, 2025

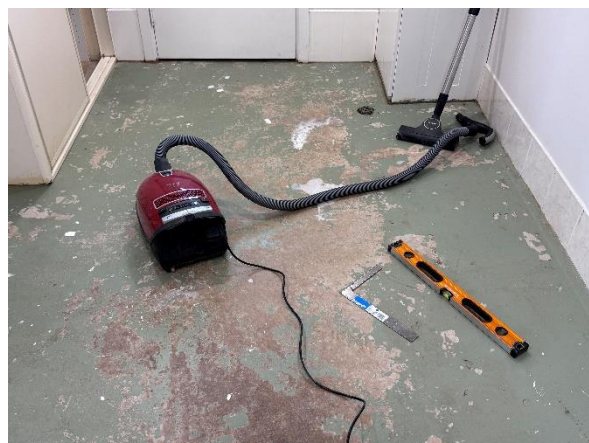
Bring in a working vacuum cleaner to be serviced, only to then be returned in a state of inoperability.



The humble vacuum cleaner is an essential invention that's made the world a cleaner place to live in. Many of us use them frequently and, no doubt, without one to hand, it's surprising how much we miss them when all that dust, most of it from skin and hair, builds up.

I have to tell you the quite ridiculous story of having my vacuum cleaner serviced.

You see. We have one of those Miele Dog 'n' Cat vacuum cleaners and it's running nearly thirteen years of age. It's got all the scuffs and scratches which are expected after more than ten years of use. The buttons are not quite as responsive as they used to be. And, frustratingly, the cord doesn't retract until the vacuum cleaner has cooled down, and then, it's an effort to get the cord in.



Although I clean it from time to time, it really needs a bit of a deeper clean. I've had to change the filter several times, and, of course, it's used up many bags. I'm not a big fan of bagless vacuum cleaners as they, in my past experience, have not been as effective and when they require cleaning, there seems to be a million various parts that need to be put together.

New vacuum cleaners are horrendously expensive, many of which, cost more than a deluxe washing and drying machine. I went into a Harvey Norman electrical store and my eye caught the sign of a so-called 'hot deal' for \$1094, a Dyson V15 Submarine Stick Vacuum cleaner. Apparently I would have saved \$455 should I had the urge to buy it. It didn't look like much to me. A motor encased in plastic mounted on top of a hollow tube, which seems to be the 'in thing'. Imagine that. Without the sale, this retails at around \$1500 Australian!



I decided that somewhere, someone might be able to give a new lease of life to my aging vacuum cleaner in Adelaide without having to contribute to our ever-worsening throw-away society.

I searched on the Internet and made a few calls. Having left a few voice messages, none of them ever got back to me.

I did, however, manage to get hold of an outfit, who I shall keep nameless for the time being, who specialise in vacuum cleaners and professional cleaning supplies. I spoke to a woman over the phone and described my vacuum cleaner's ailments. She said simply to bring it in for an assessment and a quote.

All fair and good so far.

I took my vacuum cleaner to the place that services them. I grin with amusement when I passed one of their outdoor sandwich billboard signs, 'Does Your Vacuum

Cleaner Suck?’ I walk inside an establishment filled with every kind of cleaning fluid known to mankind. They all seemed to be different colours signifying its suitability as to what material it supposed to clean and restore.



I guess this must be the right place!

The woman who spoke to me over the phone served me and I presented to her my vacuum cleaner. She asked me more questions this time and I explained to her that it most decidedly needs a service, a filter change, perhaps a button replacement, and something to fix the failing retracting cord. She gave me a reference number on a slip of paper and told me she will contact me soon to give me a quote. I never thought to ask for a loan vacuum cleaner at the time as I have an emergency battery-operated one at home which, I expected, would tide me over. Nor did I ask her what her definition of ‘soon’ was either!

When I brought in the vacuum cleaner, it was early April.

Having heard nothing for an entire week, I phoned them to enquire what’s going on. They said that it was a particularly busy time for vacuum cleaners and they hadn’t got around to seeing mine. I’ve heard many excuses from service centres, but I couldn’t grasp why April would be significantly busier for vacuum cleaners than, say, any other time of the year.

I made do with the battery-operated vacuum cleaner for the next two weeks and, not hearing anything from the service centre, decided to bug them again. You never know. Perhaps they lost my contact number. Who knows?

The woman over the phone apologised for not getting back to me sooner and said that one of the service guys will call me back as soon as possible. Later in the day, I was, indeed, contacted by one of the service guys who gave me the grim details of the diagnosis quoting me a figure of over \$500 to fix the machine. Knowing full well that a *brand new* Miele Cat n Dog can be had for around \$600, I reeled back in astonishment and asked him why so much. He replied that replacement parts are that expensive and have to be shipped in.

Now, at this point, if I was the service guy, I might have thrown in a suggestion that, perhaps, buying a brand new machine might be a better alternative. But no. Not this guy. He merely asked me if I wanted to proceed with the quote. I declined and then asked him if it was possible just to run with the initial enquiry minus the buttons and the retracting cord replacement. In other words, doing the clean and filter change. He said the cost would be in the order of around \$50 or so.

At this point, I was wondering if it was worth doing this whole exercise at all and thought, perhaps, I should just abort the whole procedure and do it myself. Unfortunately, if I did that, I would be charged \$50 anyway because they had to assess it, so I just went along with the \$50 clean and filter change.

I didn't hear anything from them during May and June, more than two months down the line! I wasn't overly concerned as I was away for a few weeks. Assuming they would have it ready by now, I walked into the store and was told that it still hasn't been done. Apparently, vacuum cleaners were coming in left, right, and centre during this, yet another, very busy period of vacuum cleaner servicing. However, they did promise me that it should be ready by next week and that they would call me to confirm beforehand.

Eventually, they rang me up and said it was ready for collecting!

With unbridled excitement, I made my way to collect my vacuum cleaner. Entered into the shop, presented my number, and waited for the service chap to materialise with my resurrected vacuum cleaner.

He emerged from the backroom *without* the vacuum cleaner, presumably where all the sick vacuum cleaners go to be put right, and then, in a joking manner, said he had a lot of fun with my machine.

As soon as I heard this, my mood, in a flash, had just changed from joyful to highly suspicious.

I asked him why he had ‘fun’ with my vacuum cleaner.

‘Oh well’, he said. ‘It’s a bit old, isn’t it? I was having a look at it, and it seems, one of the buttons came off.’

I was feeling very disappointed by the whole experience during this time, but I managed to keep my composure to the best of my abilities.

‘Can’t you just put the button back on?’, I said.

Considering that I used for this vacuum cleaner for more than a decade without any buttons coming off, I threw in an extra word or two. ‘I’ve never had a button come off during the last twelve years of use. Why now?’

He sucked in air through his teeth and said, ‘Actually, I think there was some damage to it while I was trying to fiddle around with the button. Sorry about that.’

‘I thought you were just going to clean it and replace the filter’, I said. ‘Can you show me, please?’

He went in to the storeroom and fetched it.

I couldn’t attest to it, but my vacuum cleaner, in terms of scuff marks and scratches, looked rather worse than it did when I brought it in. However, it was undeniable that the button *did* come off, but worse, it was *mangled* off rendering the button inoperable.

What followed was one of the most surreal engagements I had with someone from the service department.

Somewhat shocked by my vacuum cleaner’s appearance which, in all honesty, looked like it had been abused rather than mended, I then asked him where we go from here.

‘Well’, he said. ‘We could order new buttons if you like’.

I asked how long it would take and how much.

He didn’t know because the parts would have to be specially ordered in. As for the cost, it would be in the region of \$250 or so. Presumably, the retractable cord would account for the other \$250 initially quoted.

I then asked him why the buttons looked mangled and why it was necessary to fiddle with them to do a general clean and filter change.

A long awkward silence ensued, and now, comes the craziest bit.

‘Well’, he said, ‘You *did* bring in a very old machine, didn’t you?’

If it wasn’t so tragic and if I was in a more appeasing state of mind, I would have burst out laughing. I was even a little lost for words for a moment. But, I couldn’t afford to laugh as this was certainly no laughing matter at that time.

I firmly stated that the vacuum cleaner was functioning *before* I brought it in and now, after it being in your care for more than two months, it has now been rendered useless. I told him that I need a vacuum cleaner that works and then asked him what my options are. I also told him that the quote he provided to fix the machine is nearly the same amount for a brand new one.

He then had the nerve to say that the equivalent model would now cost about \$1200! Which is utterly false. And then he went on to say that we could fix the buttons at extra cost and asked me if I wanted to proceed with the repair. A repair, I hasten to add, that didn’t exist before bringing in the unit.

If not even more absurd as it became already, he then went on to proudly say that the vacuum cleaner was cleaned out and asked me if I want to take it away as is, still charging me the fifty dollars for the service.

I’m not sure how many people at this point would have caved in by now, but I was not one of them.

‘Hang on’, I said. ‘I come in here with a vacuum cleaner that works and you expect me to walk out with one that now doesn’t? Mate! You guys broke the button and I want you to fix the button without charging me for it!’

During this part of the conversation, a few bystanders were listening and the woman who initially served me took interest. She indicated to the service guy that we’ll order a new button and fix it at no cost. The service guy, knowing that he had lost this strange battle, said they will lend me a replacement vacuum cleaner in the meantime.

He went back into the storerooms while I chatted with the woman at the front desk. He returned with a quite nice Dyson vacuum cleaner which I could use until mine was fixed.

I said my thanks to the woman, who, during this whole time was cordial, and left the store with the Dyson.

It's been a few weeks since, and I've heard nothing about my vacuum cleaner. But what does it matter? At least I've got a nicer one to use!

Thinking about all this. What went wrong?

I'm sure, somewhere, there was a communication mix-up. But seriously. If I was in the shoes of the service guy, I would apologise for the damage to the button and get it fixed on the house. Moreover, I would have offered a loan machine from quite some time earlier in the whole process.

But it also asks questions of the whole throw-away society issue and how these service centres work.

Not too unlike getting new parts for automobiles, getting parts for vacuum cleaners is an expensive undertaking. Especially those parts which are labelled as 'genuine'. I guess the alternative plan would be to rummage around places where non-working vacuum cleaners go to die. Like hunting around salvage and damaged cars looking for a replacement alternator or radiator, perhaps I could find a retractable cord assembly. I mistakenly thought that a vacuum cleaner service centre might have an assortment of second-hand parts, but I was quite mistaken.

Lastly, I'm not entirely surprised that this sort of exchange could have taken place in Australia. Unlike the rest of the world, the Brits, Australians and New Zealanders have something in common. They fit the 'mustn't grumble' lot and don't seem too concerned about taken advantage of. We're too damned polite, but when it comes to this sort of thing, or, in fact, anything which gives authority more power over others, it backfires.

After I told my wife about how we brought in a vacuum cleaner to be serviced that was working and then be offered to pay for that service, after which, it was rendered inoperable to use, we both started to laugh about it.