Car dealer wins suit against CBC News

Yellowhead Honda awarded $60G over Action Line report

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The CBC, a reporter and news anchor have been ordered to pay $60,000 in damages after a judge ruled a televised consumer report defamed an Edmonton car dealership.

In a lengthy oral judgment delivered yesterday, Edmonton Court of Queen's Bench Justice E. P. MacCallum criticized the methods used by the CBC and television consumer reporter Bill Laing.

MacCallum awarded Yellowhead Honda, 17860 102 Ave., $30,000 in general damages and another $30,000 to former general manager Tom Bradshaw. Bradshaw is now sales manager at the dealership.

The lawyer for Yellowhead Honda, Barry Zalmanowitz, told *The Sun* his clients are satisfied their reputation has been redeemed.

"They have been vindicated and the court found that they had been dealt with unfairly by the CBC," said Zalmanowitz.

The lawsuit, which named the CBC, news anchor Bob Chelmick and reporter Bill Laing, arose after an Oct. 31, 1994, Action Line report about Yellowhead.

The news segment reported that Yellowhead Honda had treated Tom and Joanne Kennedy unfairly after the couple had bought a used Chev Cavalier convertible from them and then wanted their money back after the car developed problems.

The dealership refused but agreed to repair the car and provide the couple with a courtesy vehicle but they were still unhappy and complained to the CBC.

MacCallum said in his decision that the CBC was meddlesome and rather than trying to be fair and objective, Laing had acted as an advocate for a client against the dealership.

"As a piece of entertainment it succeeded, but at the price of intellectual honesty," said MacCallum.

MacCallum also said Laing's actions were outrageous and fell "woefully short" of following the CBC's manual of journalistic policy.

"We are extremely happy, this has been an albatross around our neck and it is like a weight has been lifted," said Debra Blackburn, general manager of Yellowhead Honda.

Ron Smith, regional director of the CBC in Alberta, said yesterday he was disappointed by the decision and after their lawyers read the written judgment, they will decide whether or not to appeal.

Smith added the decision will not affect either Chelmick or Laing, who he said would continue to work for the CBC Alberta News.