

## National Group Helps Take Guesswork Out Of Car Repairs

According to the Car Care Council, October is National Car Care Month, a time when vehicle owners should be preparing for cold weather driving and undoing the damage caused by summer's tough conditions.

But for countless motorists, any thought of car care presents a challenge: how to find competent automotive repair and service. Maybe years ago, a shade-tree mechanic would do; after all, cars were simpler, less complex. But with today's high-tech vehicles, the margin for error is less. Mistakes can be costly. Whether it's the family sedan, a sports car, mini-van, pick-up truck, or sports utility vehicle, today's cars and light trucks represent a sizeable investment.

An increasingly popular way of finding qualified mechanics—one that avoids much trial and error—is to look for automobile technicians who have earned national credentials from the

National Institute for Automotive Service Excellence (ASE), an independent, non-profit organization whose mission is to improve the quality of automotive service and repair through the voluntary testing and certification of automotive technicians.

Here's how the ASE program works. Twice a year thousands of mechanics sit for ASE certification exams at some 500 locations across the country.

Designed by representatives from the automotive service and repair industry, vocational educators, and ASE's own technical specialists, the exams stress real-world diagnostic and repair problems, not theory. The exams are no cinch to pass; about one out of three test takers fails. The exams are administered in the field by The American College Testing Program (ACT), the same organization that offers college entrance and other

professional exams.

Mechanics who pass one or more automobile exam and fulfill the work experience requirement earn the title of ASE-certified Automobile Technician, while those who pass all eight auto exams earn Master Auto Technician status. Technicians must recertify every five years in order to keep current with changing technology and to remain in the ASE program.

Certified auto technicians are issued personalized credentials listing their exact area(s) of certification and blue and white ASE shoulder insignia.

Repair facilities employing ASE-certified technicians usually display the ASE sign on the premises and post their technicians' credentials in the customer service area.

Because ASE offers certification in all major areas of automotive repair and service, it is wise to ask the shop owner or service manager spe-

cifically for a technician who is certified in the appropriate area, say, brakes, engine repair, or air conditioning. Consumers benefit from ASE's national certification program since it takes much of the guesswork out of finding a competent technician.

ASE-certified auto technicians have proven their competency to their customers, their employers, and themselves and have the blue and white ASE credentials to prove it.

Because certification is voluntary, mechanics who have taken the time and expense to earn their credentials can be counted on to have a strong sense of pride in accomplishment, which should be good news for consumers.

Moreover, before taking ASE exams, many mechanics attend training classes or study on their own after work. The time they spend sharpening their skills should also be advantageous to consumers.

And while The National Institute for Automotive Service Excellence does not certify places of business, only the individual technicians, it stands to reason that employers who encourage their technicians to earn ASE certification will be equally dedicated to the other aspects of their businesses.

ASE-certified auto technicians can be found at every type of repair facility: new car dealerships, independent garages, service stations, tire dealers, specialty shops, and major franchises. There are over 300,000 ASE-certified technicians at work nationally.

For more information about ASE-certified technicians, send a business-sized, self-addressed, stamped envelope to: ASE Consumer Brochure, Dept. CCCR, P.O. Box 347, Herndon, VA 22070.

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## AAA Oregon Joins National Auto Repair Education Program

AAA Oregon has joined a national consumer education campaign aimed at preventing auto repair fraud.

The campaign, led by the American Automobile Association, the Federal Trade Commission and the National Association of Attorneys General, offers a free brochure to motorists explaining how to increase the odds of having needed maintenance and repairs performed correctly at a reasonable cost.

AAA Oregon is making copies of the brochure available free to members and the public. Stop in at your local AAA office or call 1-800-452-1643.

Titled "Taking the Scare Out of Auto Repair", the 14-page brochure provides tips on preventing car trouble before it happens and finding a qualified technician at a reasonable price. It also details steps consumers can

take to protect themselves and where to turn for help should something go wrong.

A recent survey of state consumer protection agencies found problems associated with auto repair are the leading consumer complaint.

"Auto repair fraud takes many forms," said Anne O'Ryan. "Repairs that are unnecessary, overly expensive or improperly performed can leave consumers with a sense of betrayal and frustration."

"There are steps consumers can take to protect themselves, however, including learning more about the car they drive and the auto repair industry itself," O'Ryan said. "Knowing about federal warranty rights also gives consumers extra leverage in dealing with auto repair problems."

By understanding what protection is available at the state and local

levels, including mandatory estimates, warranties on repairs and licensing or registration of service facilities, consumers can further protect their auto repair investment.

The free booklet explains the importance of preventative maintenance, how repair charges are calculated and ways to self-diagnose common car problems. Also included is information warranties and service contracts, and tips on how to resolve a dispute regarding billing, quality of repairs and warranties.

Other elements of the consumer information campaign include a three-part feature for television news and radio public service announcements from AAA, the FTC and the National Association of Attorneys General.

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