

Consumer

How to CHOOSE AN AUTO DEALERSHIP

Things You Should Know

1. **Look for an auto body shop with a good "track record"**
2. **Ask the management about the repair equipment they have to repair your vehicle**
3. **Customer service is as important as the quality of service**
4. **Large selection of vehicles**
5. **Factory Trained Technicians**
6. **Knowledgeable staff in every department**
7. **Involved in the community**
8. **How to choose a technician**
9. **What you should know about the parts to be repaired or replaced**
10. **After the work is done**
11. **Preventative maintenance**
12. **Maintenance guidelines to prevent costly repairs**
13. **Warranties**
14. **Service Contracts**

Oh no! That fender-bender could not have happened at a worse time. Now you need your vehicle repaired. What should you look for in a quality auto body shop? Do they offer a strong guarantee on their work? Does your insurance company recognize them as an approved collision repair center? How long have they been in business?

FIRST; Look for an auto body repair shop that has longevity in the community and has a good "track record." You want to choose a body shop that has trained certified and/or licensed technicians who are experienced professionals.

SECOND, ask to inspect the repair shop. Look for a clean, professionally run facility.

Check the paint area. Is it clean? Is it well maintained and closed to the other body shop operations?

The management should have no problem showing you the facility and any special features or equipment they have available to repair your vehicle.

THIRD, ask the management about the repair equipment they have to repair your vehicle.

- Is it up-to-date equipment?
- Do they have specialized equipment and tools to do frame repairs?
- Do they use factory replacement parts? The quality of repair tools, equipment and replacement parts and materials the repair technicians used will make a difference, not only when you pick up your vehicle, but for the rest of the time you drive that vehicle.

FINALLY, customer service is as important as the quality of repair. Most auto body shops will pick up and deliver vehicle owners while repairs are being made.

They also act as your consultant and advocate with your insurance company.

These efforts are intended to ensure you get the best possible repair work, parts and service, whether insurance covers the entire repairs or not.

How to Choose a Technician

Is one technician better than another? Look for shops that display various certifications, like an Automotive Service Excellence seal. Certification indicates that some or all of the technicians meet basic standards of knowledge and competence in specific technical areas. Make sure the certifications are current, but remember that certification alone is no guarantee of good or honest work. Ask if the technician or shop has experience working on the same make or model vehicle as yours.

What Should I know About the Parts to be Repaired or Replaced?

Parts are classified as: New - Those parts are generally made to original manufacturer's specifications, either by the vehicle manufacturer or an independent company. Your state may require shops to tell you if non-original equipment will be used in the repair. Prices and quality of these parts vary. Remanufactured, rebuilt and reconditioned - These terms generally mean the same thing: parts have been restored to a sound working condition. Many manufacturers offer a warranty covering replacement parts, but not the labor to install them. Salvage - These are used parts taken from another vehicle without alteration. Salvage parts may be the only source for certain items, though their reliability is seldom guaranteed.

What do I do After the Work is Done?

Get a completed repair order describing the work done. It should list each repair, parts supplied, the cost of each part, labor charges, and the vehicle's odometer reading when you brought the vehicle in as well as when the repair order was completed. Ask for all replaced parts. State law may require this.

Preventative Maintenance

What are the consequences of postponing maintenance? Many parts on your vehicle are interrelated. Ignoring maintenance can lead to trouble: specific parts - or an entire system - can fail. Neglecting even simple routine maintenance, such as changing the oil or checking the coolant, can lead to poor fuel economy, unreliability or costly breakdowns. I also may invalidate your warranty.

What Maintenance Guidelines Should I Follow to Avoid Costly Repairs

Follow the manufacturer's maintenance schedule in your owner's manual for your type of driving. Some repair shops create their own maintenance schedules, which call for more frequent servicing than the manufacturer's recommendations. Compare shop maintenance schedules with those recommended in your owner's manual. Ask the repair shop to explain and make sure you understand - why it recommends service beyond the recommended schedule.

Service Contracts

Many vehicle dealers and others sell optional contracts - service contracts issued by vehicle manufacturers or independent companies. Not all service contracts are the same; prices vary and are usually negotiable. To help decide whether to purchase a service contract, consider: Its cost, the repairs to be covered, whether coverage overlaps coverage provided by any other warranty, the deductible, where the repairs are to be performed, procedures required to file a claim such as prior authorization for specific repairs or meeting required vehicle maintenance schedules, whether repair costs are paid directly by the company to the repair shop or whether you will have to pay first and get reimbursed. The reputation of the service contract company. Check it out with your state Attorney General's office or local consumer protection agency.