

Consumer How to

HOW TO CHOOSE AN AUTO REPAIR SHOP

All automobiles at some point require repairs or service. Having an existing relationship with an auto repair shop will save time and hassle when your car needs an immediate repair.

If you're not sure how to build a good working relationship with a shop, try taking your car in for regular tune-ups and maintenance; a well-cared-for car will run longer and more smoothly. I also will have lower operating and service costs.

Some things to keep in mind when searching for an auto repair shop:

- Under 40 percent of new auto shop customers are walk-ins. Most people are referred by friends, relatives or co-workers. If you haven't received any recommendations, make sure you ask your prospective auto shop for references.
- The Better Business Bureau can help you determine whether the repair shop's performance and reliability measure up to the industry standards for expertise and professionalism.
- If you travel often, look for an auto repair shop that offers a national warranty. For

instance, a warranty of 12,000 miles or 12 months is handy for issues that keep cropping up, which is especially likely with older cars.

• Check the shop's range of services and whether the shop has the latest technologies to properly diagnose problems with newer cars. For example, can your prospective shop handle brake systems, electrical components and warranty repairs? Do they provide a loaner, rental car, or shuttle service while your car is being repaired?

• Look for a good customer satisfaction policy, equipment that is in good condition, good lighting, and cleanliness and organization. These factors all contribute to a level of professionalism, gaining customers' trust, and to optimal service.

• Look for brand names and proper certification. Does the auto repair shop use brand-name parts? These parts are engineered to meet the manufacturer's specifications and will likely come with a warranty.

Are the auto technicians certified by a specific car manufacturer, the National Institute

for Automotive Services or Automotive Science Excellence? Is the shop approved by the American Automobile Association? If so, this indicates a customer approval rating of 90 percent or higher and the ability to adequately perform the services advertised.

• Whether you are considering a big name franchise or an independently owned shop, compare the usual services and fees of each shop to familiarize yourself with average price ranges.

Don't choose a shop based purely on lower prices; shoddy service or poor quality parts can mean more repairs and higher costs in the long run.

After you've found a shop you like, try to establish a good working relationship with the mechanic. Since your car needs preventive maintenance anyway, take it to your new mechanic for a trial run such as an oil change or air conditioning check.

Some services may be offered free of charge; these can provide you with a good idea of the service you will get.

