

How to find the right Repair Shop

No matter what you drive: luxury car, sports car, family sedan, pick-up, mini-van or SUV, when you go in for repairs or service, you shouldn't have to worry about the job being done right. The following advice should take much of the trauma out of finding a good repair shop. Don't just drop your vehicle off at the nearest facility and hope for the best. That's not choosing a shop, that's nothing more than gambling.

Trust you first impressions.

Picture yourself on a first date. Imagine that you are a woman and are picked up for a date by a man whose hair is dirty, his shirt is torn, and his car looks like New Orleans after Katrina. You've got an absolute slob on your hands. He had better be very entertaining or wealthy, because that first impression is permanently implanted in your brain.

You probably won't have a good date, because that image will haunt you all night long. If you like the person enough to contemplate a long-term relationship, this aspect of their personality will certainly be something you will want to consider. Well, hopefully you and your repair shop will also be able to establish a long-term relationship—and even though YOU don't have to bunk with him, your car will.

So don't leave your car, a huge investment, in the hands of a slob. I know it is a repair shop and it gets dirty, and yes, many of the employees have to get dirty to do their jobs.

I won't eat in a dirty restaurant, or take my kids to a school riddled with graffiti-why take your car to a filthy dirty shop?

Let's face it, cleanliness plays a major role in our lives, and your auto garage should not be an exception. Don't think that because the shop is a little dirtier or not as fancy as some of the other shops that you will get a better price. Cleanliness is usually a sign of conscientiousness. If a repair shop cares enough about its image, wouldn't you think that would carry on to each facet of their business? I know of a few shops in Western New York that are very dirty looking inside and out and they charge a higher hourly rate than most other shops.

I have a customer who told me that the reason she visited a competitor was because they **"looked cheaper."** She soon found out that looks can be deceiving, and she felt over-charged for service that she had requested. Customers who don't know what to look for may perceive this shop to be a **"good ole boy"** repair shop where the mechanics spend **all their time** working on cars and **not** on cleanliness. You are probably saying to yourself "I just want my car fixed, why should I care about their house keeping habits"...**you should!**

I have heard this is true in certain ethnic restaurants, that the ones with the best food have the dirtiest kitchens. Where's the logic there? So do you believe the service from these shops will be less expensive than the clean and fancy shop with shinny lobby? Probably not!

You should be looking for a shop that you can call home for a long time. You should feel comfortable in this shop while wearing white running shoes or kakis and a white golf shirt. A clean shop will attract clean well-educated and conscientious mechanics, service writers, and any other shop personnel. Dirty shops attract dirty people. You should be looking for honest, outgoing, and easy-to-deal-with people who will bend over backwards to please you. These quality people are not working at shabby, out-dated, or untidy shops.

I. First Step

- Read your owner's manual to become familiar with your vehicle and follow the manufacturer's suggested service schedule. You don't have to take your vehicle to the dealer for these services.
- Start shopping for a repair facility before you need one; you can make a more educated decision when you are not in a state of panic.
- Ask friends and associates for their recommendations. Even in these high-tech times, old-fashioned word-of-mouth reputation is still the most reliable
- Check with your local Better Business Bureau regarding the reputation of the shop in question.
- Convenience is important. Arrange for alternate transportation in advance so you will not feel forced to choose a facility solely on the basis of location. Better yet if you find a shop you trust that has a shuttle service you get the best of both worlds
- Once you choose a repair shop, start off with a minor job. If you are pleased, you can trust them with more complicated repairs later.

II. At the Shop

- Look for a neat, well-organized facility, with vehicles in the parking lot equal in value to your own and modern equipment in the service bays.
- Professionally run establishments will have a courteous, helpful and knowledgeable staff. The service writer should be willing to answer all of your questions.
- Feel free to ask for the names of a few customers. Call them.
- All policies (labor rates, guarantees, methods of payment, etc.) should be posted and/or explained to your satisfaction.
- Ask if the shop customarily handles your vehicle make and model. Some facilities specialize.
- Ask if the shop usually does your type of repair, especially if you need major work.
- Look for signs of professionalism in the customer service area: civic and community service awards, membership in the Better Business Bureau, Approved Auto Repair status, customer service awards.
- The backbone of any shop is the competence of its technical staff.

III. Follow-Up

- Keep good records; keep all paperwork.
- Reward good service with repeat business. It is mutually beneficial to you and the shop owner to establish a relationship.
- Let the service manager know what you like and don't like about your experience. This allows the shop to expand on what they're doing right, and correct what they're doing wrong.
- If the service was not all you expected, don't rush to another shop. Discuss the problem with the service manager or owner. Give the business a chance to resolve the problem. Reputable shops value customer feedback and will make a sincere effort to make it right.

IV. Finally

- Don't worry about what a shop charges per hour. Value is not determined by dollars per hour.
- Understand what the job is. Get a second opinion if you are not comfortable.
- Be aware of what the owner's manual says, and use that knowledge.
- Let your service professional advise you - trust him, and don't be afraid to ask questions.

Continuity of service is important. Pick anywhere you want to have service done, but try to get all your service done at the same place so they can keep track of your car, and maintain your records. Even the small things make a big difference, like those little oil change stickers on the windshield or mailers -reminders of scheduled service, pending maintenance or repairs mailed directly to your home or office, they work great. A follow-up call to make sure you're happy with the quality of their service is the repair shop's way of letting you know they appreciate your business and want to maintain a working relationship with you as a valued customer.