

# Choose an Auto Body Repair Shop

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Your new car has just been damaged in a fender bender. You want to find an auto body shop that will do the work quickly and effectively. And you don't have a lot of time to make the decision. Where do you turn?

Stop.

You've already made your first mistake.

Choosing the correct auto body repair shop should be done before your first accident, not after. In the unfortunate event of a car accident, you will have a lot on your minds. Tending to injuries, working with your insurance company and countless other obligations will occupy your time. You don't need to add the search for a good body shop to your list.

Experts recommend finding a good body shop before the first crash. It not only reduces the number of things you must take care of at the time of the accident, but it gives you the time to make a wise decision.

The first step is to talk to others about making a quality selection. Ask friends for their recommendations. Talk to your regular mechanic about who he would use. Speak to your insurance company about any preferred companies they work with.

Once you've made a list of potential shops, you should also do an on-site inspection of the shop. There are numerous things you can look for once you get there.

Austin C. Davis, founder of the website [www.Trustmymechanic.com](http://www.Trustmymechanic.com), suggests a few things to look for when you get to a shop.

"What kind of cars are they working on – newer or older models, antique car restoration, small dings and dents or big-time car crashes?" Davis says. Consider the kind of work they do most often and see if it matches up with the kind of cars you drive.

The California Bureau of Automotive Repair echoes that idea. The state government division offers a helpful checklist on choosing repair specialists at its website.

"Different repair shops will specialize in fixing different makes and models of vehicles, which means they are likely to have specialized experience, training and equipment."

Davis also suggests inspecting the look of the shop. Is it messy and cluttered or clean and orderly?

A shop's cleanliness may give clues to the way it operates. A place with a lot of parts strewn about may be more likely to "make due" with parts, choosing parts that weren't specified for your vehicle.

The walls can also be a tell tale sign. Look for accreditation from various organizations, such as I-CAR (the Inter-Industry Conference on Auto Collision Repair) or ASE (the National Institute for Automotive Service Excellence). In California, you can check a dealer's license through the

BAR's website, [www.autorepair.ca.gov](http://www.autorepair.ca.gov). Other states offer similar systems of checking on a shop's credentials.

The Better Business Bureau is also a valuable resource in checking the shop's reputation.

There is also some vital information to be gleaned outside the shop. Frequently, auto body shops will have a finished product awaiting pickup. Davis suggests asking the owner if you may inspect one of their finished autos to determine their skills.

Start with the paint and see if it matches with the car's original coat. It's best to do this in the sunlight.

"Walk around the vehicle slowly looking at each body panel individually, paying special attention to areas joining two panels. Does the paint on the bumpers match the rest of the car?" he asks.

Also, ask yourself, "do the fenders match and align properly with the hood and the doors; is the roof straight or wavy looking; do you see paint over-spray around the tires, windows and on emblems or chrome pieces?"

"If you can see obvious defects or sloppy workmanship with the naked eye, how many non-visual defects or safety issues can there be?" Davis asks.

He also suggests talking to the shop owner about warranties and who will honor them.

"You should ask the shop in advance what brand of parts will be used, and what the warranty will be on all parts and labor.

"Paint can look beautiful for six months, then start to peel off, crack and fade away all on its own. Poor preparation before painting can cause the beautiful paint job you see now to completely disappear in months after it finally cures and hardens.

"What you see right after your car has been repainted will be the best it will be, so look closely. Dust, hair, small grains of sand and Bondo body filler particles can resurface as the paint dries."