

Choose an Auto Repair Shop

Dan Markham

The mechanic in our imagination may be a man who wears his hard work on his sleeve... And his pants... And his shoes.

While we expect cleanliness out of our school teachers, waiters and other professionals with whom we have daily contact, many of us are willing to overlook a little (or a lot) of grease on our mechanic or his shop. Hey, it's a dirty job, right?

Well, if you're in the position of looking for a mechanic, experts say that cleanliness is a trait worth savoring, even in a mechanic.

The California Bureau of Automotive Repair, in its checklist for selecting a good repair shop, advises motorists to put cleanliness next to goodliness. "A good repair shop should have a neat and well-organized service floor, modern equipment and clearly posted policies regarding labor rates."

Shop owner Austin C. Davis, the founder of the website www.TrustMyMechanic.com, is even more adamant about looking for a clean shop and shopkeeper. "Don't leave your car, a huge investment in your life, in the hands of a slob. "We are looking for a shop that we can call home for a long time. You should feel comfortable in this shop while wearing white tennis shoes or new penny loafers. A clean shop will attract clean and well-educated mechanics, service writers and any other shop personnel. Dirty shops attract dirty people."

There are plenty of other things to look for when you're in the market for an auto repair shop. And among the first things to understand is it's better to make your decision before you need work done.

The California BAR, among other experts, recommends choosing a mechanic in advance of needing major service. Doing so reduces the headaches at the time service is required, and allows you to make an informed decision about your mechanic.

The first step in choosing one is to talk to friends, family and others for recommendations. Find a mechanic they trust. "If they're happy with the shop's services, chances are you'll be happy too," the BAR reports.

Stan Adamick, writing on the subject for www.Howtoadvice.com, also recommends setting up alternate transportation in advance, to keep from selecting a shop solely on location.

Once there, you should verify the shop's credentials. Look for diplomas or other items signifying credentials. Membership in the Better Business Bureau or status as an AAA-Approved Auto Repair shop is a sign that the work is of higher quality.

To Adamick, the best indicator of good work is certification from the National Institute for Automotive Service Excellence (ASE). He says ASE conducts the only industry-wide national certification program for automotive technicians.

"Consumers benefit from ASE's certification program since it takes much of the guesswork out of finding a competent technician. ASE certifies the competency of individual technicians through a series of standardized specialty exams."

In California, motorists should seek out licensed shops, which will also include a sign indicating the state's Motorist Bill of Rights. Such rights include the right to a written estimate before any work is done, a detailed invoice of work done and parts supplied, a return of replaced parts, answers to additional questions by the manager and assistance from the BAR with additional questions.

Other states have similar rules protecting motorists, and should be researched before taking your vehicle to the shop.

Also at the shop you should look at the types of vehicles being worked on. Some vehicles specialize in certain makes and models, and it's best to find a shop that is comfortable with your car. Feel free to ask the technician what kind of vehicles the shop typically works on.

One other thing to consider is that you're really not done choosing a mechanic until after the transaction is complete. Once your car is finished, don't hesitate to question any items on the bill you don't understand.

"It is to your advantage to ask for an itemized face-to-face explanation with the service writer of the work that was done to your car," says Davis.

Adamick also believes that you should immediately bring any problems to the owner's attention. "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 keep your business.”

And remember that. It is your business the auto shop needs, not the other way around.

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