

How to Find a Good Auto Body Repair Shop

By Dave Hoffman

Anyone can get into a fender bender now and again. It's one of those unexpected eventualities that most car owners eventually have to deal with. Many people don't want others to drive their car, much less rely on others to bring their car back into pristine condition after an accident. Car repair professionals are no different from any other professionals. It's not a skill that can be learned on the fly so a reputable company's track record will be easy to account for. In fact, it may pay to research auto body shops before you need one, especially if your car is vital to your daily life. Nothing puts you at more of a disadvantage when shopping around than being in a state of urgency. Take advantage of the down time to be prepared when an accident happens. Taking the time to shop around gives you the advantage.

Look for a body shop that has been in the area for a while so that they have a track record for you to research. Asking friends and neighbors where they have gotten work done is a good place to start since body work is a common enough need for car owners. Not only will the person be able to let you know their overall impressions they know who worked on their car and how it was handled, as well as any unexpected cost considerations. A reference is a great way to get beyond first impressions.

Like many professions, the auto industry has national organizations which oversee certification and licensing and offer standardized training. The National Institute of Automotive Service Excellence offers licensing and certification for many different automotive repair specialties. The ASE Blue Seal of Excellence Recognition Program identifies facilities with highly trained technicians.

There is also I-CAR, an international, not-for-profit training organization that creates and executes training programs for technicians and professionals throughout the collision industry. It is funded through tuition so the certification is unbiased and I-CAR trained mechanics are among the most thoroughly trained in the collision industry. You may want to see before and after photographs of previous work. You can also check with the Better Business Bureau.

Auto body repair is technical but it is also a service industry, and for that reason, customer service is of primary importance. The body shop manager should act as your advocate with your

insurance company. He can act as a consultant making sure you understand all your options. Some shops will do whatever you ask for if you're willing to pay for it. However, there are often subtleties to body work that you might not be aware of. For example, a paint job should match the car as it looks now rather than having only the repaired area look like new. A good manager will advise you accurately. It is also basic for the shop to provide transportation to and from the shop while they are working on your car.

Don't be afraid to look around the shop and work area. There should be an area for paint jobs that is isolated from the rest of the shop. The shop will have some dust and clutter due to the nature of the work but it should not be excessive. A good manager should have no problem showing you the shop. Don't be afraid to ask about what kind of equipment they use. How new is their equipment? How specialized is it?

Auto body shops should be as flexible as any other business when it comes to method of payment. There is no reason they shouldn't accept cash, checks, and any variety of credit cards. If money is tight ask if the shop offers the option of paying in installments.

Service doesn't end when you take your car home either. Most shops offer warranties and they are common enough that there is no reason to do business with a shop that doesn't. A warranty is a gesture of trust and a sign of confidence and professionalism on the part of the shop owner. Finding a body shop that is right for you shouldn't be a major problem at any rate but a little research will make your search that much easier and set your mind at ease.