

# How to Select an Auto Repair Shop

By Dave Hoffman

Owning a car is a responsibility that goes beyond ownership and requires maintenance. This includes regular maintenance visits to the service station. That means that choosing a service and repair shop is a long term commitment. It's best to have a person working on the car who knows it. That being the case, choosing the right repair shop is an important decision.

Before looking to a service station, you should get to know your car. You're the first line of responsibility when it comes to taking care of your car. Familiarize yourself with the owner's manual so you know what all the gauges, warning lights, and other indicators mean, as well as the recommended service intervals. Regular service is essential to keeping your car running at top form, not a ploy to bring the service shop business. Still, it is a good idea to know ahead of time what is needed to care for your car.

As with any major decision, it pays to plan ahead. Choose your service shop at your leisure before you need it. A good place to start is by asking friends and family for recommendations. You may also want to ask a specific shop to speak to other customers. People who have had their cars worked on at a shop will be able to let you know about service from beginning to end, if there were any unexpected problems, and how the shop dealt with unexpected issues. You can ask questions about how quickly repairs are made, or whether he or she has had to return after the repair was made, and how management handled that. Some other areas you can ask about include billing disputes, delays in completing repairs, inaccurate diagnosis, charging more than the estimates, and the quality of the repairs.

In addition to word of mouth, you can check with the Better Business Bureau, your state's Department of Consumer Affairs, or other consumer organizations to research the shop's reputation. You can also check to see if the shop is certified by ASE (Automotive Service Excellence) or other professional organizations. Some car manufacturers will certify shops for their vehicles as well. Also, ask if the shop has any specialties, and what are the most frequent repairs and service requests they handle.

Visit a few shops in the area. Shopping around gives you an idea what you can expect. If your car has a warranty, make sure that shop is authorized by your warranty to cover repairs. Gather information on all store policies, such as rates for labor and diagnosis, methods of payment, and any guarantees. This information should be clearly posted around the shop. Ask if the shop

routinely handles your kind of vehicle, and what repairs they usually complete. You can also look at the lot to see what other cars they are currently working on.

Look at their work area to notice if the shop is clean and organized. Notice how employees approach you as a customer. Ask about what equipment the shop owns and make sure it is up to date and appropriate for your vehicle.

The shop manager should be able to give you an estimate in writing. The estimate should be itemized, and should clarify whether the parts are used new, or rebuilt. Make sure that they are clear on their policy for doing work that goes beyond the estimate.

Remember this is a group of people you are starting a potential long term relationship with so they should be open to answering questions.

When a mechanic does any work on your car they should notify you of any other potential problems that they encounter. In fact, this is part of their responsibility as a customer friendly business. They are the front line for noticing any minor problems so you can have them fixed before they become a major repair. They should also let you know the consequences of not having the repair done, and how it will affect your vehicle's other functioning parts.

Ask what to expect when the repair is completed. A shop owner can provide an itemized list of each repair, which parts were used, the price of each part, and the price of labor for each part. Doing the initial research can lead to a long and positive relationship with your repair shop. This will also lead to a long relationship with your car.