



Finding the right auto body shop

For many vehicle owners, finding the right auto body shop is nearly as important as finding the right physician. The average price of a new automobile continues to rise, and protecting that investment is of paramount importance to motorists hoping to extend the lives of their vehicles and maximize their investments.

Part of protecting your automobile investment is finding an auto body shop you can trust. A trustworthy mechanic whom you're comfortable with can ease any concerns you have when taking the car in for maintenance, whether that maintenance is a routine tune-up or more extensive repairs. Though mechanics differ greatly, the road to finding one you can trust is largely the same no matter where you live.

Get a recommendation

Aside from his skill-set, a trustworthy mechanic's best friend might just be his reputation. Word-of-mouth recommendations from satisfied customers are invaluable assets for mechanics, and such recommendations should be equally valued by vehicle owners. When looking for a new

auto body shop, drivers should ask friends, neighbors, coworkers, and family members if they can recommend any local shops. If anyone offers an especially glowing recommendation, take it to heart and consider that shop the next time your vehicle needs work.



Don't be afraid to get estimates

Drivers who tend to agonize the most over finding a new auto body shop tend to be those with little history taking vehicles in for repairs. This group is likely growing thanks to the escalating costs of new vehicles. Those costs are encouraging drivers to keep their vehicles longer, which means drivers are now keeping their vehicles even after the manufacturer warranty has expired and the dealership where the car had been ser-

viced will no longer do so under the warranty agreement. In such instances, it might be less expensive to take the vehicle to an auto body shop that's not affiliated with a dealership. But that can be a frightening prospect for those who have not done so in the past. To ease those concerns, drivers

should obtain several estimates. The cheapest estimate won't necessarily be the best fit for you and your vehicle, but multiple estimates should give you an idea of how much certain repairs should cost and who may or may not be overcharging you.

Consider the shop's location

Recent transplants to an area who might have relocated for a new job often want to familiarize themselves with their new home base as much as possible, and this can pay dividends when a vehicle needs repairs. The lay of the land also should be considered by those people who have lived in the same town their whole lives. Auto body shops located in affluent neighborhoods may charge their customers more for labor than shops in middle-income

locales.

And those escalated labor costs might not be sinister. Instead, higher labor costs may be a reflection of the shop having higher operation costs, such as rent, than its competitors on the other side of town. So when shopping for an affordable auto body shop, motorists should consider the location of the shop and how that location might ultimately impact their bottom line.

Ask as many questions as you need to

Some drivers, especially those who admit to having limited knowledge of cars, feel as if they must simply accept a mechanic's assessment and estimates at face value. Though a good mechanic won't try to mislead you, it's still good to ask as many questions as possible before agreeing to let an auto body shop work on your vehicle. When the mechanic diagnoses the problem, don't be afraid to ask him to explain the problem, including what might have caused it. In addition, don't be afraid to ask about service warranties, and be as specific as possible, asking what a warranty covers, how long work and/or parts are covered and if the warranty can be delivered in writing. These questions and their subsequent answers can provide you some peace of mind, and a reputable auto body shop should have no problem answering as many questions as you can ask them.

How to keep your bike in top form



According to Glumac, a full-service engineering company specializing in sustainable design, using one gallon of gasoline in a car produces about 20 pounds of carbon dioxide emissions directly, or 26 pounds if you account for processing the fuel.

Opting for a bike instead of a car can have profound environmental benefits.

Bicycles are most useful and efficient when they are properly maintained. Failing to maintain a bike means it could be relegated to a dusty corner in the garage. To keep bikes in ideal working order, consider these bike maintenance tips.

Keep the bike clean

A bicycle is a collection of moving parts. Over time mud and debris can get lodged in gears, tires and other components, impacting the performance of the bike. Regular washing ensures that the bike will operate at peak capacity whenever you decide to go for a ride. High-pressure hoses may damage sensitive bearing systems, so it's better to use a damp rag to carefully clean the bike. Brushing or buffing away debris can be handy as well.

Maintain proper tire pressure

Much like with car tires, air pressure in bicycle tires can impact the ride and likelihood

of damage. According to the CARE Exchange, a group of riders involved in fundraising cycling events, too little air in tires can increase the likelihood of punctures to the inner tube. Low air pressure can put more pressure on bike components and accelerate wear and tear. Plus, it can make for an uncomfortable ride. Similarly, too much pressure can cause the tires to blow out or provide a less enjoyable ride.

Keep the chain well lubricated

One of the most crucial steps to maintaining a bicycle is to keep the bike chain and other moving parts lubricated. This reduces excessive wear caused by friction and can prevent gears from ceasing up. Lubricants also can help prevent rust and corrosion. Apply lubricant to the chain, brake and derailleur levers and cables. But too much lubricant can be a bad thing, attracting dirt and reducing performance. Use only as much as the bike needs and wipe away the excess.

Bike riding is a popular pastime and an activity that is beneficial to the environment. Maintaining a bicycle is a great way to ensure it operates as efficiently as possible.



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