



ALLDATA®

Finding an Automotive Repair Shop You Can Trust

Most technicians are knowledgeable enough to take care of our vehicles. But how many technicians are merely “guessing” as to what’s really wrong with a vehicle? The technique of replacing parts until the problem is repaired can cost you a lot of money.

by Rich Diegle

Whether you work on your own vehicle or not, there will come a time when you need to take your four-wheeled friend to a repair shop. Searching for a competent automobile technician can be similar to finding a doctor. The person you choose to diagnose and treat your car has to be both professionally qualified and trustworthy. After all, this is a family member – right?

Most technicians are knowledgeable enough to take care of our vehicles. But how many technicians are merely “guessing” as to what’s really wrong with a vehicle? The technique of replacing parts until the problem is repaired can cost you a lot of money. As in any service industry, there are many people out there who just want to take your money. Obviously, these are the kind of shops you want to avoid.

Since most of us know even less about overhauling an engine than we do about heart surgery, choosing a shop with qualified technicians can be very stressful.

Finding a good technician can be a tough task, but once you locate one, you’ll discover that, in addition to quality work at a fair price, he also brings you peace of mind. And that, my friends, is what you are really looking for.

Here are some stress-relieving tips on how to find a shop you can trust:

Preliminary research

- Look for an auto repair shop before you need one to avoid being rushed into last-minute decisions.
- Ask family, friends and neighbors for their recommendations. You can’t beat referrals from other people who have had favorable, long-term relationships with repair shops.
- Use the Internet. Many search engine websites such as Google, Yahoo and Edmunds, or automotive websites like AutoZone® and ALLDATA® have find-a-shop search features to easily find professional shops in your area – or anywhere in the country if you’re on the road. The find-a-shop feature can save you a lot of time up front because it offers detailed information about shops including certifications, photos, personnel and areas of expertise. Most often, these shops will offer online appointment scheduling for your convenience.
- Take some time to read the local newspaper’s automotive and community events sections. Often, a shop owner or technician will write automotive articles and/or sponsor local activities and charities. If someone is willing to devote a lot of time to their community and their business, you can bet they will invest quality time repairing your vehicle.
- If your state has a department of consumer affairs automotive repair division, contact them and ask if the shop has had any customer complaints.
- Look for a specialty shop that services your particular type of vehicle (Examples: Asian, European, Domestic). Those shops tend to employ technicians with dealership experience for your particular make.
- Check with local car clubs. Many times, car clubs have great lists of recommended shops that their members have used and given positive feedback on.
- If you call or go online to make an appointment and cannot get one the same day, that’s a good sign. A popular shop could be booked-up for as long as two weeks.

Now that you've chosen a shop

It's also a good idea to check out a shop before you actually need their services. First, talk to the owner or service writer. Tell him or her, what kind of car you own and what your concerns are. Are they genuinely concerned with your questions and are their answers direct, to the point and professional? After your initial contact, visit the shop and check out these more obvious quality indicators:

- Is the facility neat and clean? Do the technicians wear uniforms?
- Look around the inside and outside. Avoid garages that have piles of junk sitting around. A collection of old cars on blocks and garbage indicates that the owner doesn't care about his business very much, and probably won't care about your car.
- Ask about the equipment used to diagnose and perform services. Is it up-to-date, and are the technicians educated in the proper use of the equipment?
- Look at the credentials of the business and the employees who will service your vehicle. An important insignia to look for is the National Institute for Automotive Service Excellence (ASE) emblem. This indicates that at least one technician working at that shop has passed tests given by the ASE.
Note: ASE examinations are tough, and you have to know a lot about entire vehicle systems to pass the tests.
- Most shops will post educational certifications, accomplishments, professional business associations and important trade affiliations in their waiting areas. Some to look for include the Automotive Service Association (ASA), the Better Business Bureau (BBB), the Inter-Industry Conference on Auto Collision Repair (I-CAR), or the Automotive Management Institute (AMI).
- Make sure a written estimate is provided prior to letting the shop begin the repair.
- Ask about the shop's warranty program. Most automotive service facilities will warranty their parts and labor either in writing or in shop-posted announcements.
- They should be using a computerized automotive information system (Example: ALLDATA®) that provides up-to-date technical service bulletins and important diagnostic, service and repair information. They also should have some kind of shop management software to help them maximize their efficiency.
- Find shops that accommodate late-night pick up and drop off, transportation assistance and flexible service. It's a good bet that a shop that has considered their customers' needs will treat the customer responsibly.

A Final Word:

It's not a good idea to "coupon shop," or hop from shop to shop based on specials or bargains. There is much to be said for quality, integrity and comfort in a relationship with your repair shop. Remember to be a good customer. The bottom line is, "Quality is remembered long after the price is forgotten!"