



Auto Repair - be a winner!!!

Your automobile is one of your most important investments. Protect that investment by choosing the RIGHT Automobile Repair Professional.

The Automobile Repair Professional is your car's doctor. Like yourself, your car requires the highest quality professional care to have a long and happy life.

No matter what you drive -- sports car, family sedan, pick-up, or mini-van -- when you go in for repairs or service, you want the repairs done correctly. Follow these suggestions to take the guesswork out of choosing the RIGHT Automobile Repair Professional.
Before You Need Repairs

- * Read your owner's manual. Become familiar with your vehicle and follow the manufacturer's suggested service schedule.

- * Start shopping for a repair shop before you need one. You can make a better decision when you are not rushed or in a panic. Don't just drop off your vehicle at the nearest shop and hope for the best.

- * Ask friends and associates for their recommendations. Even in this high-tech era, old fashioned word-of-mouth reputation is still valuable.

- * The cheapest automobile repair is not always the least expensive repair. Saving a few dollars and not having your vehicle repaired properly is not a bargain.

- * Check with your local or state consumer organization regarding the reputation of the shop. Call the Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services at 1-800-HELP-FLA (435-7352). Ask about the number of complaints, if any, and determine how the complaints were resolved.

Start with Small Repairs

Once you choose a repair shop, start off with a minor job. If you are pleased, trust them with more complicated and expensive repairs later.

- * Feel free to ask for the names of some customers. Call them.

- * All policies (labor rates, diagnostic fees, guarantees, methods of payment, etc.) should be posted and/or explained to your satisfaction.

- * Ask if the shop customarily handles your type of vehicle. Some auto repair facilities specialize in repair work for certain types of vehicles. Most vehicle manufacturers recommend specific repair procedures and equipment for the repair of their vehicles. Ensure that the facility you choose is trained in these procedures and has the proper equipment.

- * Ask if the shop is familiar with the type of repair you need, especially if you need major work.

If you are unsure you need a repair, get a second opinion -- particularly if you don't think there is anything wrong and the suggested repair is expensive.

Motor Vehicle Repair Shop Registration

Motor vehicle repair shops in Florida are required to register biennially with the Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services. This law does not apply to persons or companies repairing their own vehicles or which repair only vehicles used for agricultural or horticultural purposes.

What to Look for in a Repair Facility

- * Look for signs of professionalism in the customer service area: civic and community service awards, membership in the Better Business Bureau, AAA

Approved Auto Repair status, customer service awards, etc.

- * Look for a neat, well-organized facility, with vehicles in the parking lot equal in value to your own. Also check for modern equipment in the service bays.

- * A professionally run auto repair facility will have a courteous, helpful staff. The service writer should be able to answer all of your questions.

- * Look for evidence of qualified technicians, such as trade school diplomas, certificates of advanced course work, and ASE certifications, a national standard of technician competence.

Florida Motor Vehicle Repair Act

The Florida Motor Vehicle Repair Act was created to assist consumers with matters relating to motor vehicle repair shops.

- * The act applies to dealers of new and used cars, trucks and motorcycles; garages; service stations; self-employed persons; truck stops; and paint, body, brake, muffler, transmission, mobile repair and glass shops.

- * If the repair work will cost more than \$100, the repair shop must give you the option of:

1. Requesting a written estimate;
2. Being notified by the shop if the repair exceeds an amount you specify; or
3. Not requiring a written estimate at all.

- * Consumers must sign and date one of the above options. Motor Vehicle Repair shops cannot force you to waive your right to an estimate.

- * When a written estimate is required, you must be given a copy.

* Ask if the prices quoted are for new, used or rebuilt parts. Make sure the written estimate clearly states which.

* The repair shop must get your approval before exceeding the repair cost by more than \$10 or 10 percent, whichever is greater, but not to exceed \$50, so make sure you give them a phone number where you can be reached.

* You can cancel repairs if they exceed the estimate and the repair shop must reassemble the vehicle, unless it is unsafe to drive. The shop may charge you for tear-down and reassembly only if you were given notice of that charge on the estimate.

* You are entitled by state law to get back any replaced parts if you requested them initially. However, the repair shop may charge a fee, and, if the parts are under warranty agreement with the manufacturer or distributor, they may not be returned to you.

The Repair Estimate Must Include

* The shop's name, address and telephone number.

* The customer's name, address and telephone number.

* Date and time of estimate.

* Year, make, model, odometer reading and license tag number of vehicle.

* Proposed work completion date.

* Description of customer's problem or request.

* Labor charges based on a flat rate, hourly rate, or both.

* Estimated cost and charges for repair.

* Charges for shop supplies or for hazardous or other waste removal.

* Charges for making an estimate and the basis for the charge.

* The customer's intended method of payment.

* Name and telephone number of any alternate person the customer would allow to authorize repairs.

* Terms of the parts and service guarantee.

* Notation if customer wants replaced parts returned.

* Charge for daily storage. Shops notify customers after repair work is completed and customers then have three

working days to pick up the vehicle before storage fees may be charged.

The Repair Invoice

Check the invoice carefully. Make sure you understand the work that was performed and what you are paying for. Keep a copy of all work orders and receipts and get all guarantees or warranties in writing.

The Invoice Must Include:

* Date and odometer reading.

* Description of work.

* Labor, parts and other merchandise costs.

* Nature of parts (new, used, rebuilt, etc.)

* Guarantee, if any.

* Registration number from the certificate issued by the Department identifying your shop.

Amount Over the Written Estimate

If your bill exceeds the final estimate that you authorized by more than \$10 or 10 percent, whichever is greater, and the shop refuses to give you your vehicle unless you pay, here is what you can do:

* Obtain a copy of the bill from the shop and file a bond for the amount of the final repair bill plus storage charges, if any, with the Clerk of the Circuit Court in the county where the shop is located.

* The Clerk will issue a certificate directing the shop to release your vehicle. A law enforcement officer will help deliver the certificate to the shop, if necessary.

* The repair shop has 60 days to file a lawsuit to recover the bond as payment for the repair. If the shop does not sue within 60 days, the Clerk will return the bond money to you. The shop, however, can still file suit after release of the bond money.

If the shop refuses to release your car after it gets the certificate, you may:

1. Consult an attorney and bring legal action against the shop. The winning party may receive attorney's fees and court costs.

2. Ask the State Attorney's Office in your area to file criminal charges against the shop as it is a misdemeanor for the shop to refuse to release your car when it gets a certificate.

Although you do not have to file a lawsuit against the shop, if you choose to do so, the Clerk will give you a form to file.

Under the Law, Registered Shops Must...

* Post in a conspicuous location in the customer service area, the registration certificate and a sign advising consumers of their rights under the Motor Vehicle Repair Act and giving the Department's toll-free telephone number for assistance or information.

* Include in the sign a statement advising consumers they are entitled to the return or inspection of replaced parts, if requested at the time the work order is placed.

* Include their registration number in any advertisements, announcements, or listing relating to motor vehicle repair in any newspaper, magazine or directory.

After the Repairs

* Keep good records. Keep all paperwork associated with repairs, including warranties.

* Reward good service with repeat business. It is mutually beneficial to you and the shop owner to establish a relationship.

* If the service was not all you expected, don't rush to another shop. Discuss the problem with the service manager, owner or president of the company. Give the business a chance to resolve the problem. Reputable shops value customer feedback and will make a sincere effort to keep your business.

* If you do not receive satisfaction, contact the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services at 1-800-HELP-FLA (435-7352). For out-of-state residents, please call (850) 488-2221.