

15 Insider Secrets to Outsmart the AUTO REPAIR INDUSTRY



Make informed
decisions with
confidence!

Save time, money and
your sanity!

Written by Jason Lewis
Founder of Auto Service Advocates

INTRODUCTION



“I used to be part of the problem. I started Auto Service Advocates to be part of the solution.”

This guide is packed with useful insider information from my years of experience in the auto industry. With this knowledge, you'll be able to make more informed decisions and feel at ease navigating an industry that's often confusing.

Through my 32-year career working in and running Dealer Service Departments I've seen firsthand the horrible experiences customers go through when getting their car serviced and realized the industry's negative reputation was well deserved. Many shops try to sell everything they can to every customer instead of focusing on the customer's experience. Worse still, by working in the industry I realized I was part of the problem! In a post-Covid era of short staffing, sloppy mistakes and poor customer service, I knew there had to be a better way. I founded Auto Service Advocates to be part of the solution. Our process systematically blocks off every avenue shops have to over-promise, under-deliver and over-charge. We are your powerful behind-the-scenes advocate providing expert advice, saving you time, money, and frustration.

Need help with an upcoming car repair? It's what you don't know the ends up costing you the most. Your dedicated advocate is only a phone call away!

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5 GREAT TIPS TO USE WHEN DECIDING ON PURCHASING AN EXTENDED WARRANTY

1. Buying extended warranties from direct marketing campaigns through television, mail or online adds is risky. In my experience these are the worst contracts to have because their coverage is the lowest and there is a lot of duplicitous language in their agreements.
2. Avoid buying warranties from independent sales lots. These lots typically do not depend on repeat business and have nothing to lose by selling inferior products. It just doesn't cost them any future business to sell high profit low coverage contracts. Read the contract before buying!
3. Steer clear of "stated care" contracts if you can. These contracts only cover parts listed as "covered items." Try to buy an "exclusionary" contract. These warranties cover everything that is not specifically listed as "excluded" in the contract. These plans have far more comprehensive coverage. They cost more but are worth it.
4. Buying any extended warranty over the phone is very risky. Try to purchase contracts in person and review the contract in detail before you buy. Otherwise all the promises you get on the phone are verbal and their promises rarely line up with the contract you received weeks later.
5. Be wary of any extended warranty offer that comes directly to your mailbox. These are often titled "Dealer Services" and give the impression that the offer is coming from your dealership. They almost never stipulate what's covered and what isn't until after you buy the warranty and receive the contract later. Some of these may be legit but you are taking a risk to buy in this manner.



BEST PRACTICES TO USE WHEN DROPPING YOUR CAR OFF FOR SERVICE.

1. Make sure you get a copy of the work order before you leave the shop. This gives you the opportunity to make sure everything you discussed with your Service Advisor is on the work order and you can easily spot when things are changed after the fact.
2. Use trackable communication only! It is much easier to hold shops accountable for their promises when they are made in a trackable form like text messages or emails. Verbal agreements are difficult to enforce. Also, when you insist on trackable communication this lets the shop know that you are already on the lookout for any B.S.
3. Avoid accepting verbal estimates over the phone. You need an electronic version so you can hold the shops to their original estimate. This also allows you to audit the final invoice and make sure it is reflective of what you authorized and that there are no expensive surprises at the end.
4. If your car needs to be towed in, be sure to take pictures of the vehicle, inside and out, before the tow truck drives off in case of future damage claims.
5. Make sure you are clear what the starting estimate is before you leave the shop, especially when it comes to diagnostic charges. Ask the Advisor if diagnostic charges still apply on any repairs you end up authorizing.



6 GREAT QUESTIONS TO ASK WHEN THE SHOP IS MAKING REPAIR RECOMMENDATIONS

1. “Do you have any videos or pictures of the repairs you are recommending?”
2. “Can I come down in person and have your shop foreman point out what is needed and why?” The shop foreman will give you the straight story on what’s needed. He does not make any commission on sold repairs so has no built in reason to over-recommend repairs.
3. “Can I have the old parts back after you are done with repairs?” This is always an excellent way to protect yourself. When you ask for the old parts back this puts extra pressure on the technician to do the job right and only recommend repairs you really need.
4. “Which of the repairs on this list is urgent and why?” Ask them to list the repair recommendations in the order of most needed to least necessary. Many times the repairs on these reports are low priority repairs, although they lead you to believe they are all urgent.
5. “Can you check my repair history to see the last time they were done?” Often they will try to sell you something that you recently had done. This happens more often than you might think. Also, check your own receipts as well. Trust but verify!
6. Ask for measurements, specs, pressures etc. Example: If they say you need brake pads and rotors, ask for the pad measurements, the rotor measurements and the min. safety specs on the rotors. Be sure to get measurements in writing.

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TOP THINGS TO WATCH OUT FOR WHEN DEALING WITH AN ACCIDENT INSURANCE CLAIM

1. If the accident is not your fault, find out which rental car company their insurance company direct bills with and get the car through them. Otherwise, you end up paying for the rental out of your pocket and then have to chase the other insurance company for the reimbursement later.
2. If the accident is not your fault, you are legally entitled to “like quality” transportation for as long as it takes to fix your car. Their insurance company cannot hold you to any kind of dollar per day limit or days down limit written in the other driver’s insurance contract. They may try and say no but don’t let them get away with it.
3. If the accident is your fault, make sure any delays your insurance company causes by not following up do not count towards your rental car daily limit. Insurance companies can cause delays that eventually use up all of your rental car allowance. They know you are unlikely to start fighting with them over coverage issues if the cost of the rental car is coming out of your pocket.
4. Tell the body/repair shop that you want to be CC’d on any communication between them and your insurance company. Insist that all communication be done by email only. This way you can hold your insurance company accountable for any time delays that they cause, and also hold the shop accountable for delays they cause as well.

5 QUICK AND EASY TIPS YOU CAN USE FOR INSPECTING A USED CAR BEFORE YOU BUY IT

1. Open the hood and see if any of the front fender bolts have been turned. It's easy to see when paint was scraped off by a wrench. When you see this it typically means the car has been in a front-end collision.
2. Open the hood and check the plastic headlamp mounts that go from the top of each headlight then mount to body of the car. If they are broken or cracked then the car has likely been in a front-end collision.
3. Open the hood and check for any non-matching plastic fasteners or metal screws. Many times body shops install mismatching fasteners and screws because they don't have the right ones in stock. This is another indicator that car has been in an accident.
4. Go around the outside of the vehicle and pull back on any rubber moldings to see if the paint looks different underneath them. Some body shops just paint around these moldings instead of properly removing them before repainting. If the paint looks different under these moldings this is an indicator that the car has been at least partially repainted
5. If the seller states the car has never been in an accident or repainted, ask them to put in in writing. It's not uncommon to have a clean CARFAX on a crashed car as CARFAX can only see accidents that had a police report or an insurance claim.



5 VALUABLE TIPS ON GETTING THE DEALERSHIP TO FIX THINGS UNDER YOUR NEW CAR WARRANTY

1. Give the Service Advisor detailed explanations of your issues and make sure they are correctly documented on the work order. Be sure to review this before you leave. The more detailed explanations of your concerns, the more likely it is that the technician will be able to find and fix them.
2. Let the Service Advisor know how to duplicate these issues, especially if they are noises or drivability concerns. Make sure those descriptions get documented on the work order as well. If they can duplicate them then they most likely can fix them.
3. Offer to test drive the car with the shop Foreman if there are any issues that they cannot duplicate or can't find anything wrong with. Dealers get paid to do warranty repairs but they are not as profitable as the repairs that you have to pay for. Don't give them a built-in excuse to not fix your car under warranty just because of vague descriptions of your concerns.
4. You can authorize an overnight road test when they cannot duplicate your concerns. The shop Foreman or Service Manager can take the vehicle home overnight if some of the issues require an extended drive to duplicate. Make sure they document every mile they put on your vehicle and be sure to get a copy of the dealer's policy regarding how they handle accident claims when the vehicle is driven after hours.
5. Try to reproduce any issues for the Service Advisor before you leave, that way he can write on the work order "duplicated by Advisor." He can then show the technician how to duplicate your concerns. This will increase the chances of the car getting properly diagnosed.

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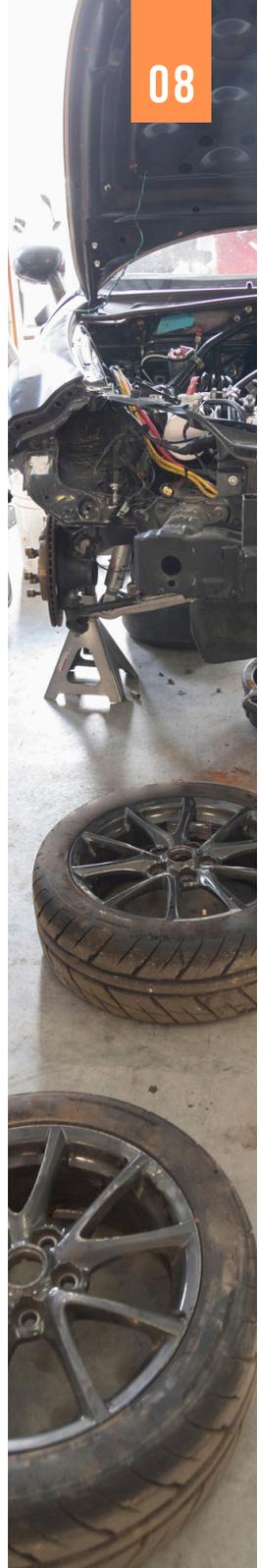


4 EASY WAYS TO SPOT IF A CAR HAS BEEN REPAINTED

1. Buy a paint thickness meter. You can buy a decent one for \$50-\$100 or you can ask a bodyshop to measure the thickness for you. Factory paint has consistent thickness so if the meter reads varying degrees of thickness, this is an indicator that the vehicle has been repainted.
2. Check every body panel thoroughly for “fisheyes” in the paint. Look this up online for examples of what they look like. They are small bumps under the paint you cannot feel with your hand. They can look like small bubbles or even like a grain of sand under the paint. If you find even one, this is a good indicator that the panel has been repainted.
3. Look down the sides of the car from the front corners and check for waviness or dull areas in the paint. Dull areas indicate a cheap paint job or cheap clear coat. Waviness can indicate the use of bonds or body fillers underneath the paint.
4. Check out the space between the doors and body panels, quarter panels and bumper to metal fit. Look for uneven lines where gaps do not match like the factory paint job would. Uneven lines indicates the car has been in an accident.

GREAT WAYS TO PREPARE FOR DROPPING YOUR CAR OFF FOR SERVICE

1. Make a list of the issues you are having along with detailed descriptions for each issue written down. Give this list to your Service Advisor when you arrive and let him/her know you want those notes documented verbatim on the work order. This lessens the chances of miscommunication between technician and the advisor.
2. Take sharp focused pictures of the exterior and interior of your vehicle when you get to the shop. This will help protect you later if you find new damage on your car when you arrive to pick it up, especially when they blame you.
3. Do a walk around video of your car as well for added protection.
4. Set your service appointment with a specific advisor so he/she can take down your information over the phone and add all of the details about the visit before you arrive. This will save you a lot of time as you will not be standing around waiting for the Advisor to enter all of your information into the system.
5. Insist on trackable communication only!! Let your Advisor know that you prefer to communicate only by text or email. This pretty much eliminates misunderstands regarding estimates, completion times etc.



IMPORTANT THINGS TO DO AFTER YOU GET IN AN ACCIDENT

1. Write down the VIN number in addition to getting the license plate number. This protects you if the license plate is from a different vehicle. Trust me on this one, it happened to me!
2. Take as many pictures as you can of the street, your car, their car, skid marks etc. Take as many pictures as you can from different angles and viewpoints as they will come in handy later if there is any kind of dispute regarding who is at fault.
3. If it's the other drivers fault, try to avoid filing the claim through your own insurance company. You will likely have to pay a deductible. They will tell you that they will go after the other driver's insurance company to get it back for you later. However, this rarely works! It is more likely that you will not get your deductible back unless you sue the other insurance company. This happened to me, took me over a year to get it back!
4. Avoid making any agreement where the other driver doesn't want to involve their insurance company. This type of arrangement puts you at risk, plus body estimates keep changing as they find more damage and the other party may not want to keep paying more each time they find something new. Protect yourself and the other driver by filing a claim through their insurance company.
5. You are under no obligation to take your car to a body shop that your insurance company recommends. It's not a good idea to use a body shop that is recommended by them due to a conflict of interest. The insurance company is sending the body shop a lot of business, so when they ask the shop to do things like using low-quality parts or cutting corners on bodywork quality to save money, they are more likely to do it to maintain relationships with companies that keep sending them business.

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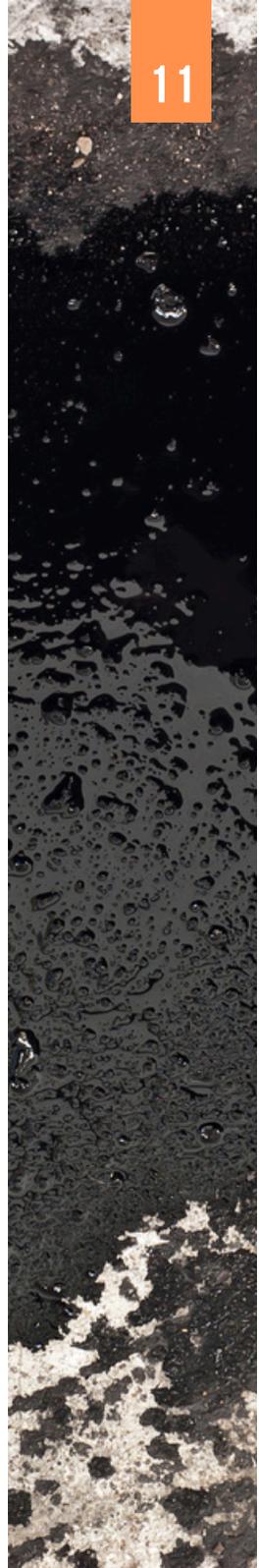


4 GREAT WAYS TO EXTEND THE LIFE OF YOUR TIRES

1. Rotate and balance tires every 5,000 miles if tires are all the same size. If the tires are staggered (rear tires wider than the front) balance the tires every 5,000 miles.
2. Get a 4-wheel alignment once a year or every 10,000 miles unless you hit bad potholes, curb etc. Then get one as soon as you can.
3. Check your tire pressure every few weeks. If your car has a tire pressure monitoring system then check it frequently and respond quickly if the monitor goes off. Having the correct tire pressure not only extends the life of your tires but also helps prevent abnormal tire wear and will help to prevent excessive tire noise.
4. Avoid mismatching tires with different brand or even same brand with different tread pattern. This can cause uneven tread pull, which can cause abnormal tire wear and also excessive tire noise.
5. Buy quality tires or better yet buy OEM tires, the ones the car came with when new. These tires have thicker sidewalls, better quality rubber and stand up to impacts like potholes better as well.

TIPS ON WHEN TO FIX AN OIL LEAK AND WHEN NOT TO FIX IT

1. Oil leaks that are dripping on electrical components, wire harnesses, coolant hoses or rubber belts need to be addressed quickly to prevent consequential damage to other components.
2. Any transmission oil leak should be fixed unless it is just seeping and not an actual leak. A seep is barely moist to the touch, while a leak is more like a drip. If it is only seeping then wait until the next vehicle inspection or until you start seeing small drips under your car when it is parked indicating it's getting worse.
3. Any oil leak that is just seeping doesn't need to be fixed unless there is a potential safety issue, which is unlikely.
4. Oil leaks that cause smoke by dripping onto a hot engine component or exhaust pipe is a potential fire hazard and should be fixed immediately.



BENEFITS OF TAKING YOUR CAR TO A DEALERSHIP SERVICE DEPARTMENT

1. It's easier to hold a dealership accountable for problems or issues they cause. If they refuse to help you, you can always contact their corporate headquarters or the manufacturer for assistance. They have way more to lose from upset customers.
2. Dealers tend to have the newest most updated diagnostic equipment so it is less likely that your vehicle will get misdiagnosed.
3. Dealers only work on one brand of car. Because of this, dealerships are more likely to spot patterns of failures on certain models and can more efficiently and more accurately diagnose vehicles.
4. Dealers typically have far more amenities like loaner cars, shuttle rides, Uber vouchers, car washes, comfortable lounges and parts boutiques.
5. Their parts and labor guarantee is almost always for a longer term and mileage than independent shops. Plus, you can go to any dealer service department of the same brand to get parts and labor warranty work done, even when the original repairs were done at a different location.
6. Dealers typically have a nationwide data base so other dealers can see your repair history in case you are unable to go to your regular dealer for service or repair.

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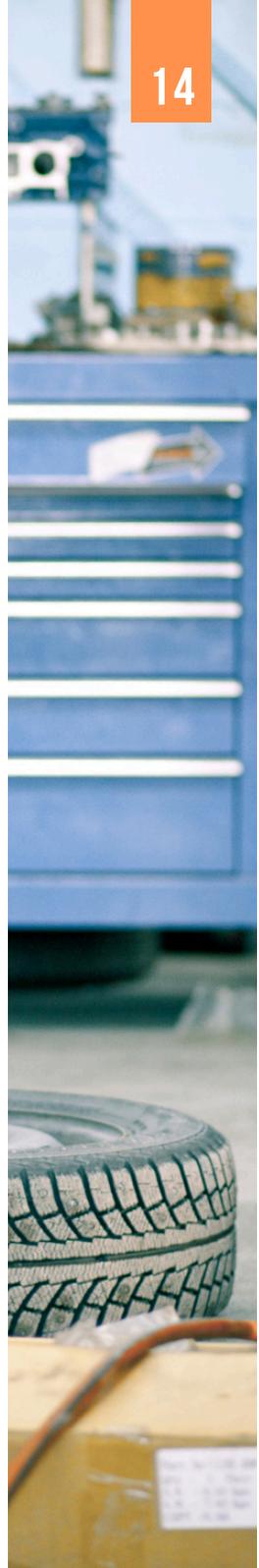


5 ISSUES YOU MAY ENCOUNTER WHEN VISITING INDEPENDENT REPAIR SHOPS

1. They work on all kinds of vehicles so they are less likely see patterns of common failures on certain models like dealerships would. This makes it harder for them to diagnose problems.
2. Unless they are part of a national chain, there is no outside corporate office to call for assistance when the shop will not help you with an issue or complaint.
3. Most of the better highly trained technicians want to work at a dealership because the pay is higher and the benefits are much better.
4. Sometimes it's harder to get an extended warranty company to cover repairs at independent shops because their documentation for diagnosis and testing doesn't meet the warranty companies standards.. This makes it harder for them to prove what is wrong with the car and a covered component can get declined for this reason.
5. Many privately owned independent shops do not have the resources to spend money to make customers happy. This means they are more likely to fight with you over grey area situations.
6. They do not have the most up to date and advanced diagnostic equipment compared to what the dealerships get from the manufacturers.

5 WAYS TO KNOW WHEN A DEALER OR SHOP IS OVER-SELLING REPAIRS

1. They give very vague descriptions of the repairs that are needed and use repair shop jargon that customers may not understand.
2. They go over lengthy lists of recommended repairs that have nothing to do with why you brought your car in and don't break them down by priority or urgency.
3. They do not offer any kind of evidence like pictures or videos. If they do not offer pictures or videos, then have them show you what's needed in person.
4. Thoroughly check your past repair bills. Sometimes they will recommend repairs that you have done recently, and that are still covered by their parts and labor guarantee. Instead of catching it themselves, they try and sell you the repair again so you end up having to correct them on it. This is more common than you might think.
5. The Service Advisor gets defensive or argumentative when you ask them questions about what is needed and why.
6. When their lists of recommended repairs do not include any measurements like tires, brake pads and brake rotor measurements. Avoid buying brake repairs if they will not commit to the measurements in writing.



THINGS TO LOOK OUT FOR WHEN HAVING YOUR CAR TOWED TO DEALER OR REPAIR SHOP

1. Make sure you specifically state what shop you want your car to be dropped off at. Many shops out there bribe tow drivers to take vehicles to their locations, whether you request it or not.
2. Write down the tow company name, driver name, truck number and the name of the person you spoke with when setting up the tow. When the truck doesn't show up and you need to call back this will help you sort things out.
3. Make sure you show up at the shop the same day your car is towed there or as soon as possible after it arrives. Make sure the car gets written up and that you get a copy of the work order before you leave. This prevents your car sitting for days or even weeks when they forget about it.
4. Take pictures of interior and exterior of your vehicle, and make sure that they are sharp and in focus. Otherwise when you have to blow up the picture later everything pixilates. These pictures will protect you in case you find new damage on your vehicle and have to file a complaint with management.
5. Check under the front end of your car for damage also before you leave. Sometimes tow trucks damage or puncture parts under the front end of the car and this type of damage will not show up in pictures unless you look under the front.

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