

How to spot a good mechanic or auto repair shop

When it comes to owning a car, there is no way to completely eliminate the cost of maintenance and repairs, but you can give yourself some peace of mind by finding a mechanic/auto repair shop that has credibility and reputation behind them.



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“That way, you know you’re dealing with someone who puts the customer and their safety first,” says Jarrod Berman, managing director of MotorHappy, a supplier of motor management solutions and car insurance options.

The cars on today’s roads are impressive technical feats. These modern marvels are well-built machines with over a century of perfecting the recipe. However, with thousands of moving parts, regular car maintenance is essential and even with good maintenance, it’s inevitable that something will fail occasionally.

“When things go wrong, it is, of course, incredibly frustrating,” sympathises Berman. “It’s extra money that usually wasn’t budgeted for. You then have to ensure you don’t get ripped off by a mechanic who’s trying to take advantage of you. It’s a headache that nobody likes to deal with, but fortunately, there are ways to ease the pain.”

Perhaps most importantly, it’s imperative to check that the vehicle maintenance shop you choose to hand your car over to is part of the RMI (Retail Motor Industry Organisation). The RMI is a proudly South African national industry body for the

automotive repairs and maintenance sector. Businesses can sign up to be a member of the RMI, and with membership comes the benefit of working collectively with thousands of other members. All MotorHappy-recommended auto repairers are accredited RMI members.

To be a member of the RMI, a business has to follow a code of conduct which includes having a quality service and product, fair pricing, guaranteed workmanship, and fair resolution for disputes. With that in mind, you can be assured that a car maintenance shop with RMI membership is one with credibility.

“More specifically, if your car needs body repair work carried out, look for a member of SAMBRA (South African Motor Body Repairers Association),” advises Berman. SAMBRA workshops follow a strictly graded quality system; the better the quality, the more work a business is allowed to carry out. Like RMI, you can be assured that a garage with membership of SAMBRA is high quality and predictable. Similarly, if it is just routine maintenance and servicing you are looking for, a MIWA (Motor Industry Workshop Association) accredited dealership will offer you the necessary peace of mind and quality workmanship.

If you want to narrow your choices even further, Google offers ratings for every business on its database. Users are free to rate their experience out of five stars, and you can use this as further guidance of who to pick. Simply Google search the mechanic of choice, and a rating should show in the results. Be warned, however, that anyone can make a review, and some may be fabricated.

Finally, sometimes it’s hard to beat good old-fashioned word of mouth. “Customers won’t sugar-coat an experience at a vehicle maintenance shop, so ask friends and family what motor repair workshops they use, and if they would recommend them,” says Berman.

“Realistically, you’re best using all three different methods. Unplanned car maintenance is never a fun experience, but by knowing what you’re looking for, it can be just that little bit more stress-free.”

A service plan or maintenance plan can help you better manage your car-care budget, with easy to manage monthly payments. Berman explains that while a service plan and a maintenance plan are similar, key differences between two types of plans could impact your bottom line.

A service plan will cover you for the labour and standard parts of your car’s service. It doesn’t include wear and tear on parts such as the clutch, shock absorbers, headlight globes and brake pads. Each service plan is different, but they generally cover things like brake fluid, coolant, all filters, spark plugs, tyre rotations and cambelts. Service plans start when you buy your car and continue for a set number of years or kilometres. Generally, the lengths are three years and 100,000 kilometres.

A maintenance plan is a level up from a service plan as it includes a warranty against mechanical failures, as well as wear and tear on items such as shock absorbers, brake pads and wiper blades. However, it doesn’t cover the cost of new tyres. Like with a service plan, a maintenance plan also lasts for a few years or a set number of kilometres.

“When your original service or maintenance plan runs out, it is possible to purchase another plan through a provider such as MotorHappy. Service and maintenance plans through MotorHappy include additional benefits such as roadside assistance, towing, car hire or overnight accommodation, message relay, fuel run, jumpstart and key lockout,” points out Berman.