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CONSUMER REPORTS FINDS HIGH PRICES & SHODDY REPAIRS AMONG CAR OWNERS' BIGGEST REPAIR-SHOP GRIPES

Thirty-percent of women who fired a mechanic felt they were treated differently than men

YONKERS, NY—Prices that are too high and the inability to perform repairs properly are the main reasons that car owners become dissatisfied with auto repair shops, according to a Consumer Reports subscriber survey.

Every year, the Consumer Reports Annual Auto Survey asks car owners how satisfied they were with auto repairs performed by dealerships and independent shops in the previous 12 months. This year, the findings on repair service are based on more than 67,000 reports on service visits to independent mechanics and 101,000 service visits to new car dealerships by CR subscribers.

As in past years, most car owners prefer taking their vehicles to independent shops rather than dealerships for repair work. But for the first time, Consumer Reports also re-contacted 5,400 of the respondents and asked about their specific repair gripes. Of that group, about three-quarters were either completely or very satisfied with their repair shop. But of the 27 percent who weren't, 38 percent cited high prices as a reason. This is a more common complaint for dealerships (42 percent) than for independent shops (32 percent).

The second most-common complaint among the re-contacted respondents is even more troubling: more than a quarter of the unsatisfied group said their car's problem wasn't fixed properly, this gripe was reported at the same rate at dealers and independent shops.

Other gripes: Twenty-one percent of the re-contacted subscribers said it took longer than expected to complete the work, and 18 percent said they had to bring the car back because the repair did not "hold up." Again, dealers and independents shared the blame for these complaints almost evenly. There was a slight difference between the two types of repair shops among owners who felt the staff had treated them poorly, with 8 percent citing dealerships and four percent citing independents.

For more information regarding Consumer Reports' survey on car repair shops visit www.ConsumerReports.org

Sometimes, this dissatisfaction prompted owners to switch shops. Of the re-contacted subscribers, almost a quarter revealed that in the past five years they'd had a vehicle repaired at a shop they no longer use because of problems with their service experience. Almost half of that group cited that negative experience was at a dealership, a third saying it was an independent shop, and a fifth citing a franchise chain similar to Midas or Sears.

One other red flag for repair shops: A sizeable 30 percent of female respondents who stopped using a shop said they felt the staff tried to take advantage of them because of their gender.

The top reasons for switching shops: Half of the group said the shop didn't fix the problem properly. About a third said the price was too high. Almost a quarter reported they had to bring the car back or that the shop sold them unnecessary parts or service. And one fifth said the staff treated them poorly, the shop took longer than expected to complete the work, or the price was more than originally estimated.

Tips for getting a repair performed properly:

- **Describe the problem fully.** Give the shop as much information as possible. Write down the symptoms and when they occur. If possible, talk directly to the mechanic who will be working on your car.
- **Don't offer a diagnosis.** Avoid saying what you think is causing the problem. You may be on the hook for any repairs the shop makes at your suggestion, even if they don't solve the problem.
- **Request a test drive.** If the problem occurs only when the car is moving, ask the mechanic to accompany you on a test drive.
- **Ask for an estimate.** And have them contact you for approval if the repair will cost more than the estimate.
- **Ask for evidence.** If you're not comfortable with the diagnosis, ask the shop to show you the problem parts. Worn brake pads or rusted exhaust pipes are easy to see. Don't let the mechanic refuse your request by saying that his insurance company doesn't allow customers into the work area.

ConsumerReports.org/carrepair offers [car repair](#) information service that can help drivers understand common problems, learn how components work, and receive a service estimate that reflects local prices. This special section includes a [Car Repair Estimator](#) and a [Car Repair Encyclopedia](#), which can answer many common questions.

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