



David Fait, CEO of Auto Body World



For Car-Body Repairs, Find Out Which Shop Offers the Best Body of Work

by David M. Brown

What should the highline-vehicle owner — in fact, the owner of any quality vehicle — look for in choosing a collision center?

David Fait, the CEO of Phoenix-based Auto Body World (ABW), says: Be a smart consumer. As in any industry, all collision repair facilities are not created equal. "Vehicle complexity continues to increase at an incredible rate, largely focused around improving safety for the driver and passengers," he explains, noting that these improvements include the kind of metal used for impact absorption, electronics, including multiple sensors, braking and traction controls, air bags and others.

Begun by his father, Warren, in 1946, ABW is the largest independent collision repair business in Arizona, repairing more than 10,000 vehicles annually in five stores Valleywide and one in Casa Grande. His company has recently instituted Lean business principles (sometimes known as Toyotism) to increase efficiency, customer and vendor satisfaction and profits.

David offers five guidelines for finding the shop best for you.

First, take a serious look at the shop itself, whether it be a dealer-owned or independent shop. Good shops look like good shops — but don't stop at first impressions in the front office, he says. Ask to see the "back" shop where the work happens and how the company will deliver on the universal promise of great quality and service.

David says you don't need to know anything about collision repair to know if it's a good shop: You'll sense it intuitively. Good shops are clean, well-equipped, organized and have processes that make sense. "Five short minutes invested here can make the difference between a regrettable experience and one that leaves you 'delighted,'" he explains.

Second, ask the manager to show you their performance numbers for customer satisfaction, quality, and cycle time

— how long it takes for them to repair a vehicle on average. "Top-tier shops will always have these reports at hand because they live by these performance numbers; it is their pulse, and their people are most likely compensated by them." Best-in-class shops deliver impressive performance numbers — consistently.

Third, ask your agent, your claim representative, friends and family: Who has a reputation for quality, service and meeting completion dates? Everyone has an agenda, so when asking insurers, for example, ask what qualifies the shop to be on their network. "Make sure that it is quality, service, dependability and performance — and not the one that gives the deepest discount," David says. The law allows you to pick the shop of your choice, so pick a great shop, and let your insurance company and the shop work out the details. That's their job.

Fourth: Check out the health of the company. Lifetime warranties are becoming common practice, but any warranty is only as good as the company making it. If you ever hear "I can save your deductible," run and don't look back. That offer usually means that something will be repaired that should have been replaced — at potentially the cost of your vehicle's integrity and your and your family's safety.

Finally, unless you're paying for the repair yourself (the majority of collision repair is insurance funded), don't get hung up on the original estimate. Often the majority of damage is not visible prior to disassembling the vehicle. Estimates will vary and offer no real value — except to mislead consumers. Again, let your insurance company and the shop work out the costs.

"The collision-repair industry has changed considerably in just the last few years," David notes. "A car owner should be aware that there are many places he or she can take a damaged vehicle, but there is only one result they should accept: unconditional satisfaction on its return."