

PROTECT YOURSELF FROM BUYING A 'LEMON'

If you've purchased a used vehicle in the past, you may have first taken it to an automotive mechanic to have it checked out. That's a great idea that can save you from "buyer's remorse," but there's actually one other step you may want to consider.

Many autobody or collision repair facilities also offer a "pre-purchase" check of used vehicles. This service, for which there may be a fee, can help determine if there is unrepaired or poorly repaired previous damage that could impact the vehicle's value, safety or performance.

"A qualified, well-trained collision repair facility can restore both the look and performance of even a badly damaged vehicle," said Tom Mack, Executive Vice President and CEO of I-CAR®, the leading provider of collision repair training. "And that repair facility can also determine if a vehicle that may look shiny and great to the average consumer actually has had substandard or unsafe repair work done."

In some cases, a used vehicle that looks like a great bargain is actually a "rebuilt" vehicle that had been declared a total loss after an accident. Possibly the vehicle was damaged by water in a flooded area. A vehicle that has been severely damaged or totaled can be repaired properly, but not all of them are. Having it checked out by a reputable collision repair business could help you avoid surprises after the purchase has been completed. Those surprises can include paint that begins to peel, electrical problems, wheels that cannot be aligned, a trunk or window seal that leaks – or worse yet, structural damage or an airbag system that hasn't been restored to work properly.

While the collision repair facility can do a thorough inspection of a vehicle, there are a number of things consumers can do when checking out a used vehicle:

- Check for a musty smell – an indication of water leak problems or flood damage – inside the car and trunk.
- Make sure your test drive includes a stretch of flat, straight highway. If the car "pulls" or if the steering feels "sloppy," there could be suspension damage that has not been properly repaired. Uneven tire wear may also indicate suspension problems.
- Look at the vehicle's paint from different angles, preferably in good light, when the vehicle is clean and dry. Compare the color match between panels. Run your hand along the door jambs and the hood and trunk jambs. If they feel rough or look dull

rather than shiny, the vehicle may have been painted poorly or without these areas properly masked. A bad paint job is not dangerous, but it might not hold up well and may be covering poor quality repair work. This could also result in paint peeling problems later on.

- Ask about the vehicle's history. Whenever possible, check with previous owners to find out if it was ever involved in a major collision or totaled for any reason. Vehicle histories are also available to the potential buyer from several information providers. If it was, you should have a qualified repair facility make sure it has been repaired properly.
- Look for fluid leaks on the underside of the vehicle, on the engine or transmission, or on the ground beneath the vehicle. Look thoroughly for corrosion on all areas of the vehicle.

Just as you spend some time choosing the right vehicle to purchase, it's a good idea to spend some time choosing the right collision repair business – whether you need a repair facility to check out a used vehicle you're considering for purchase, or you need collision repair work done.

In choosing a repair facility, look for evidence that their technicians have been properly trained. Many insurance companies and repair facility associations recommend you look for a business that has earned the "I-CAR® Gold Class Professionals®" designation. The Gold Class designation indicates that a repair facility's employees have completed a substantial amount of training. They are up-to-date in collision repair knowledge and technology. I-CAR training covers virtually every step of the repair process. This includes analyzing the damage, structural repair processes, corrosion protection, matching your vehicle's paint finish, and checking safety features such as airbags, seatbelts and anti-lock braking systems. I-CAR established the Gold Class Professionals designation to help consumers identify repair facilities that have invested in proper training.

For the location of an I-CAR Gold Class Professionals business near you, call 1-800-ICAR-USA.