



DIRTY

AUTO REPAIR SHOP

SCAMS

*And how to avoid them to
save thousands on your bill*



AUTO REPAIR SHOP SCAMS



WELCOME

Car problems can be stressful enough, worrying about insurance, how you'll get to work, having to cancel trips and of course, finding the cash to cover the repairs needed. In this situation, the last thing you need to worry about is getting screwed by a local repair shop too.

Sadly, auto repair rip-offs and downright scams are all too common. In fact, the Consumer Federation of America states, auto repair rip-offs are consistently one of the top five most frequently reported consumer complaints. National figures indicate \$20 billion is spent annually on unnecessary or faulty auto repairs.

And it's not just the US. The UK has the same problem. The regulatory body for the motor repair industry, Motor Codes, recently found that almost half of UK motorists feel they have been overcharged by garages, to the tune of an estimated £2.4 billion.

To save yourself from becoming the next victim of a car repair scam – and getting ripped off hundreds or even thousands of your hard earned money – keep this report by your side and refer to it before, during and after a repair job.

In this report, you'll discover the most common auto repair shop scams with tips on how to avoid them or address them, if they happen to you.

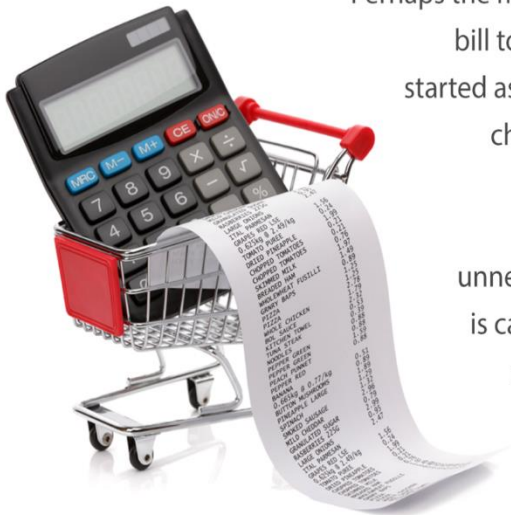
Everything included in this report is based on real life scams, reported by mechanics and customers alike. If you're looking for an auto-repair shop or you've just had a quote, you'll want to check against the scams reported in this report. Even if you're not due a repair job, keep this report handy. You never know when you might just need it.



AUTO REPAIR SHOP SCAMS

#1

PADDING THE BILL



Perhaps the most common scam of all is when auto repair shops that inflate the bill to include all kinds of things you weren't expecting to pay for. What started as a simple tyre change suddenly morphed into new brake pads, oil change and more. From a mechanic's point of view, padding the bill gives them room to negotiate down to the actual price you were expecting to pay in the first place. To protect yourself against unnecessary repairs, make sure you get a full estimate before any work is carried out and ask for a list of urgent and non-urgent repairs. Cross reference all of the "urgent" repairs with another car repair shop or independent expert, so you know what must be done as a matter of safety and law, and what can wait. You may find many of those "urgent" extra jobs aren't actually urgent, or even needed, at all.

#2 DIRTY FUEL INJECTORS

Don't be too quick to pay for dirty fuel injectors. Repair shops will often tell you that fuel injectors need to be replaced every 15,000 miles, but if you are using a good quality fuel, your fuel injection system will last the vehicle's entire lifetime. Dirty filters are often the most common cause of a poor performing fuel injection system, and they're cheap to replace. To protect yourself, spend a little extra money on quality gasoline that already includes a detergent to keep your fuel injectors clean.



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#3



THE 'OIL CHANGE' SPECIAL

Very often the reason for a cheap oil change special is to get you in and sell you more expensive unnecessary work. Also you should know that these oil changes use the lowest quality oil and filter. To protect yourself, read the owner's manual for recommend oil change intervals. Also, always use a quality oil and Filter that meet the manufacturers recommended type in the owner's manual.

#4

THE PARTS REPLACEMENT SCAM



There are two common replacement parts scams. The first is when you are sold new parts, but they installed used parts. If possible check the part before it is installed. Does it look new? Are there any manufacturing labels or codes on it? If not, you could be looking at an old part. To protect yourself from "old for new" scams, demand OEM parts or parts that meet OEM standards. That is Original Equipment Manufacturer. Merely mentioning the letters "OEM" will make it sound like you know what you're talking about, which is often enough. The second scam is to charge for parts that were not even replaced. Always ask to see parts that have been replaced. If the mechanic can't show you the old part that was taken out, then you've probably been lied to.



#5

BROKEN AXLE BOOTS



This is a common tactic where the shop will cut the rubber boots that cover your axle and charge you for an expensive repair. To protect yourself, inspect the cut. A fresh cut looks a lot different to a worn out boot. Real cuts and tears will be jagged and dirty with grease. In addition, always ask to see the damage before agreeing to the work being performed, as with most jobs.

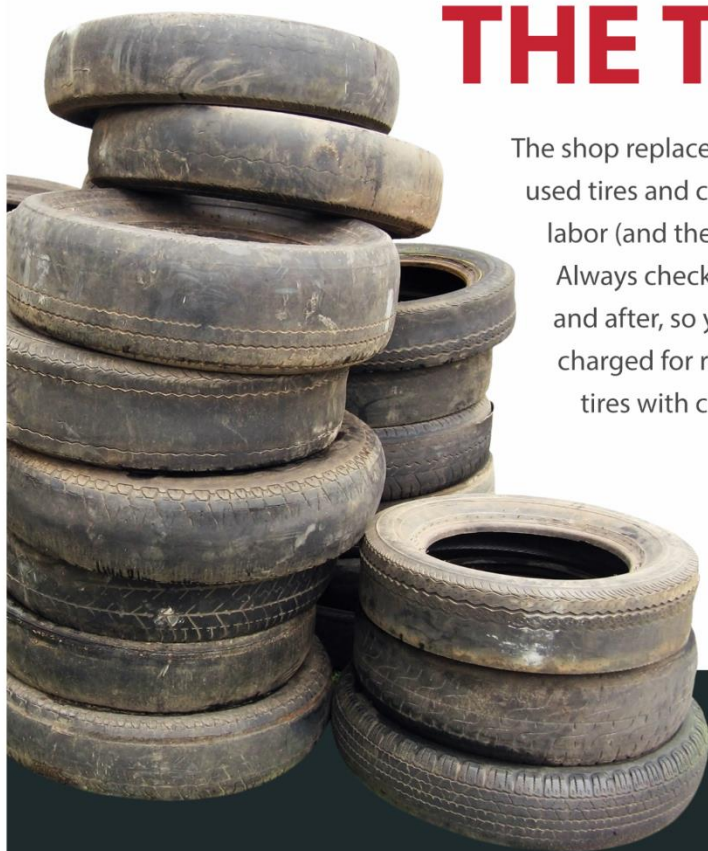
#6 REPLACEMENT AIR FILTER

Many repair shops will tell you that your air filter should be replaced at every oil change. The truth is your air filter should be replaced once a year or every 12-15,000 miles. Yes, it is important to the efficiency of your vehicle, but replacing it too soon is simply a waste of money. To protect yourself, learn how to check the air filter yourself.



THE TIRE SWITCH

The shop replaces your new tires with used tires and charges you for the labor (and the cost of new tires.) Always check your tires before and after, so you don't get charged for replacing your new tires with cheaper, older ones.



AUTO REPAIR SHOP SCAMS

#8 THE FREE ALIGNMENT CHECK



Like most “free checks” on your car, this type of service is designed to open the door to all kinds of upsells and “strong recommendations.” This will typically include shocks or struts, ball joints, tie rods, wheel bearings, and axles. You know, the kind of stuff that’s not easily detectable to the unknowing eye. As usual, to protect yourself, always ask to see proof of a worn-out part before you agree to the replacement. Remember, alignment shouldn’t need adjusting for approximately 50-100,000 miles, unless you’ve had an accident or hit a pothole.

YOUR VEHICLE HAS 'LIFETIME' TRANSMISSION FLUID

This is a shameful lie. Transmission fluid will run 80,000 miles. Repair shops tell you a different story, because when your lifetime fluid runs out, your transmission fails, costing you thousands in repair. Lifetime fluid is a myth. To protect yourself, check the owner’s manual and replace the transmission filter and fluid roughly every 30,000 miles.



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AUTO REPAIR SHOP SCAMS

LIFETIME BRAKE PADS FOR ONLY "X"

10



This scam is deceptive, because although you only have to pay a small one time only amount for the brake pads, the fact is you are buying a low quality set of brake pads, which will require regular replacement. But here's the kicker - in order for your lifetime warranty to apply, you may have to buy new callipers with each set of cheap replacement pads. If there's one thing you should never cut corners on, it's your brakes. Protect yourself by making an investment in a trusted brand, from a trusted brake specialist or repair shop.

MISFUELLING: PETROL V DIESEL

11



Experts agree that misfuelling leads to one of the most common repair job scams in the motor repair industry. It continues to deceive people because many people aren't aware of the potential damage (or not) depending on the engine type. The scam works by telling customers that due to misfuelling they'll need a repair job that will reach into the large four figure mark. In reality, in many cases, this is simply not necessary. Many vehicles are safe when misfuels occur. For petrol cars that have been filled with diesel, simply draining the petrol and flushing the system is enough. Putting diesel in a petrol car is a lot less serious than filling a diesel engine with petrol – which can be a very expensive mistake – potentially costing a four figure sum to fix. However, experts say that it should cost far less to repair a misfuelled petrol car. It's a simple job that is often done at the roadside.

12

THE ENGINE FLUSH

An engine flush uses a machine and chemicals to rid your engine's innards of sludge, but unless you've neglected your engine, it shouldn't be a standard maintenance issue. Providing you change your oil according to manufacturer's recommendations, you won't need an engine flush. If the shop still insists, it's easy to prove one way or another. By simply examining your oil-filler lid, you will find deposits and gunk. Engines with high mileage and deposits may benefit from a flush, to break loose sludge that can get into the engine. However, if you're taking good, regular care of your car including quality oil changes, then you shouldn't need to pay for an engine flush.



13 WARRANTY SCAMS

Here's a scam that isn't on most people's radars: repair shops and garages who con drivers into paying extortionate labour rates by telling them that their warranty will be invalid if they use an independent garage. This isn't true. The warranty depends on using manufacturer standard parts. So, the rule is to use a repair shop or garage that doesn't use cheaper parts. Using manufacturer standard parts is what matters, and doing so will mean your warranty is still valid when you go back to your car's own dealership in the future.



AUTO REPAIR SHOP SCAMS

DIRTY OIL DECEPTION # 14

It's common for a shop to show you dirty oil with metal filings in it, suggesting that you need a new transmission. Quite convenient, considering a new transmission costs several thousand to replace, don't you think? However, virtually all used transmissions have dirty oil with some amount of metal filings in them. This is normal and does not automatically mean that you'll need a whole new transmission. If in doubt, ask for a second opinion or further reasoning for the transmission replacement.



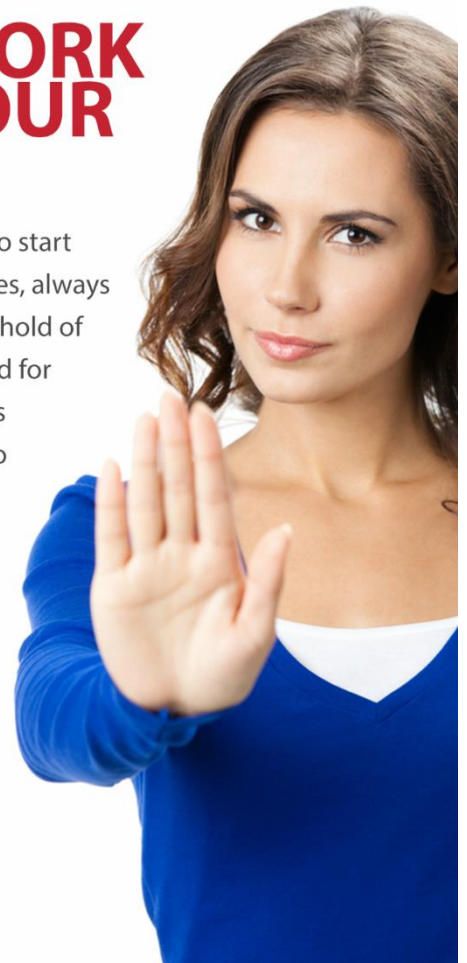
15 ANOTHER TRANSMISSION TRICK

When a repair shop tells you that you'll need a new transmission, costing you around \$5000 or more, check the transmission fluid first. If it's bone dry, it could be due to a leak. Check for leaks first, especially if you've recently had a recent oil change. Fixing a leak for a couple hundred bucks could save you thousands on a new transmission.

16 STARTING WORK WITHOUT YOUR PERMISSION

Although against trade regulations in most countries, it's still a common trick to start work and charge you for it, without your prior consent. For prevention measures, always make sure you give the shop full contact details so they have no excuse to get hold of you. However, that won't negate your right to be informed. So, if you're charged for work that you didn't agree to, then you have the legal right to dispute it. At this point, the garage is entitled to exercise a lien over the car (this is a legal right to hold disputed goods until payment is made.)

In these circumstances, the only way you can recover possession of the car is to 'pay under protest' and to pursue your claim for reimbursement via a trade association (if the garage is a member of one) or in court. If paying under protest it is advisable to make this clear in writing at the time of payment. In addition to this, it's always advisable to agree to any quotes or work in writing, so that it's easier to dispute should the final bill come back higher than expected. It's also worth noting that in any case, the final bill should not exceed 10% above the written quote. Check your own area for variations on this legality.



AUTO REPAIR SHOP SCAMS

#17

BRAKE SYSTEM OVERHAUL

Perhaps one of the most elaborate and common scams is the brake system overhaul. Although there will be many occasions where brake system overhauls are critical as a matter of safety, there are many more occasions where it's totally unnecessary.

When you take your car in for a brake check, the shop might tell you that you need front brakes, as the pads are worn down to below 20% remaining. This might be legitimate, and for many people, replacement pads and rotor resurfacing work will be carried out for a reasonable fee.

However, in this situation, not every customer gets away so lightly. Repair shops use a worn brake pad situation to recommend a complete brake system overhaul.

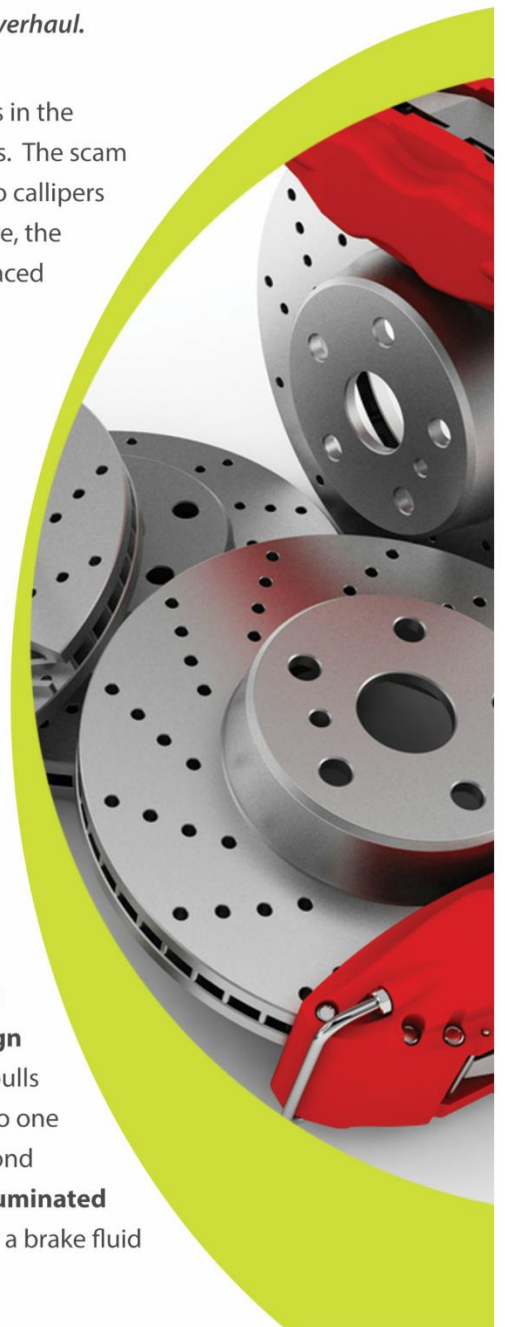
This usually refers to overhauling the brake callipers by replacing the seals in the callipers. Although the parts are cheap, the work is very high in labor costs. The scam comes when the calliper seals didn't need – or were not – replaced. Due to callipers being internal, it's hard to verify that they were actually replaced. Therefore, the outer seal known as the dust seal is usually the only seal that will get replaced during this unneeded service.

The mechanic then throws away the remainder of the brand new seals. In most cases, a calliper overhaul is not necessary as manufacturers make fantastic callipers that should last. They make high quality callipers because it's an intrinsic safety related part that they cannot afford to take risks on, and because they are subject to stopping distance requirements. Poorly built callipers wouldn't meet such rigorous tests.

But surely callipers will eventually fail, right? Not exactly. Manufactures must also ensure that the callipers are over engineered to last an entire lifetime of the vehicle.

Failed breaks on their vehicle could mean expensive law suits, millions in damaged reputation and the deathblow of an entire brand. They're not going to let some low cost callipers cause such a catastrophe.

Of course, there will be occasions when callipers do need replacing, albeit rare. The key is being able to recognize the warning signs. **The biggest sign that a calliper is failing is a strong brake pull.** This is when the vehicle pulls right or left during braking only. The harder you brake the harder it pulls to one side. This is because a calliper is binding on one side or the other. The second biggest sign of a damaged calliper is **if the red brake warning light is illuminated** on the dash. This can indicate the brake fluid is low and may be caused by a brake fluid leak from a calliper.



GETTING IMPARTIAL ADVICE

If you're in a situation where there is some ambiguity over the work required, there are ways to quickly cross-reference with experts who are totally impartial and unbiased. One such service is a website called www.justanswer.com.




For a small, pre-agreed fee, a registered, verified, experienced mechanic can give you an impartial second opinion on your situation. The site has mechanics on standby 7 days a week, so you should always be able to get an answer when you need one.

Yes, there is a small fee, which you can agree to pay only after receiving your satisfactory answer. However, getting a second opinion from an unbiased professional could save you thousands in unnecessary repair work.



REMEMBER YOUR BASIC CONSUMER RIGHTS...

Although different countries have different rights and different states have different laws, the most basic and common rights often include:

-  You have the right to inspect your vehicle before agreeing to any work or final invoices
-  The repair shop cannot charge you for any repairs that are unnecessary or that you did not authorize
-  The shop may not charge you a price more than 10 % over the estimate – unless they contact you with a higher

For more detailed rights in your country, see:

http://www.tradingstandards.gov.uk/cgi-bin/glos/con1item.cgi?file=*ADV0046-1011.txt

(UK trading standards for auto repair)

<http://www.usa.gov/directory/stateconsumer/index.shtml>

(US state and local consumer agencies – choose your state and then proceed to the website to find auto repair legal information for that particular state)

8 SIGNS OF A QUALITY AUTO REPAIR SHOP

AUTO REPAIR SHOP
SCAMS



AUTOMOTIVE EXCELLENCE SEALS

Why it matters: Repair shops that have recognized accreditations, awards or certificates provide reassurance that they're legit and professional

WE CHARGE BY THE BOOK

Why it matters: You'll only pay the standard guideline prices for parts and labor, not what the shop needs to make a profit that day

ALL WORK AGREED UPFRONT, NO HIDDEN CHARGES

Why it matters: You'll never pay for work that you didn't agree on, so you'll have no nasty surprises on your final bill

WRITTEN WARRANTIES

Why it matters: You'll be protected from failing parts or recurring problems that you've paid the shop to fix, within the terms of the warranty

FULLY INSURED SHOP

Why it matters: If the car repair shop has a fire or burglary and they're not insured, you've just lost your car and have little chance of reclaiming, as they

FULL LICENSE, LOTS OF EXPERIENCE

Why it matters: If a vehicle repair shop is not licensed, it may have mechanics that are not trained in properly. Legal recourse is difficult because they move locations making them difficult to track down

FRIENDLY, HAPPY TO ANSWER ANY QUESTIONS

Why it matters: It shows they have nothing to hide and also suggests that should something go wrong, it won't be an awkward, confrontational situation to resolve

CLEAN AND TIDY

Why it matters: It suggests good organization, high standards, safety and respect for customers and their vehicles (if they don't care about the work environment, how much will they care about you or your car?)

LOOKING FOR A REPAIR SHOP THAT MEETS THE GRADE?