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JUNE 2013



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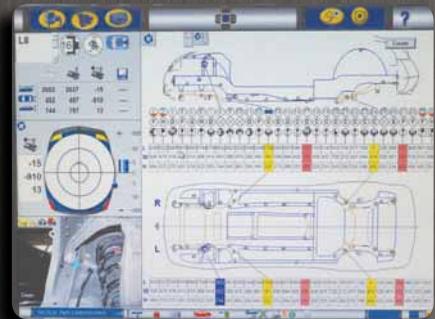
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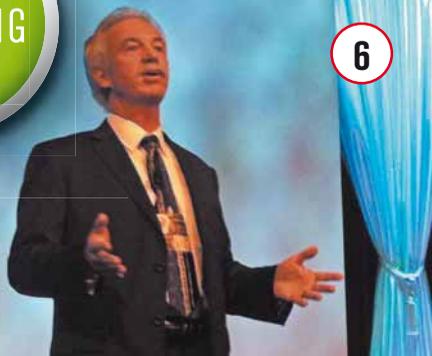
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abrn
TRENDING



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AUTOWORKS PDR HELPS SHOPS ACROSS U.S. TACKLE HAIL

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WHAT IS ABRN COMMUNITY? The ABRN community is an online NETWORK for your business. It's a place to go to post articles, blogs, videos, photos and audio clips to share ideas with other collision repairers. Community content is used in ABRN's twice weekly e-newsletters. Check it out at <http://workshop.search-autoparts.com>

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BY JOHN YOSWICK | CONTRIBUTING EDITOR

Get more production out of your shop's paint equipment.

IN THE NEXT ISSUE OF ABRN
Are you safely and correctly controlling toxic spills in your shop?



HOW2 KNOW-HOW TIPS & TECHNIQUES FROM THOSE IN THE KNOW



COVER FEATURE

PAINING PLASTIC PARTS

TECHNICAL TRAINING

BY AL THOMAS | CONTRIBUTING EDITOR

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FROM ABRN CONTRIBUTING EDITOR AL THOMAS.

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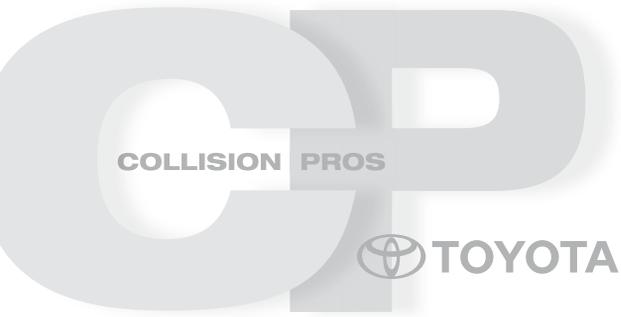
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Everybody Learns. Everybody Wins.

**Rethinking Uncommon Repairs &
Work to Heavily Damaged Vehicles**
Learn How to Recognize a Total Loss.

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- 08/08 460 Structural Body Repair Techniques

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DID YOU KNOW: The latest information about Toyota and Lexus training, including class schedules and registration information, can be found at www.crtraining.com



Passion for the Collision Repair Industry

This is an exciting year for *Collision Pros* because the magazine celebrates its 15th anniversary. When looking back over the 60 issues of *Collision Pros* magazine produced since 1998, I noticed that while the cars and technologies have changed, one core theme remains the same—Toyota's commitment to the collision repair industry.

As we reflect on our *Collision Pros* 15-year anniversary, it is important that we also look to our future. In our last issue, we conducted a readership survey to gauge the value of the publication's content and better understand your future collision repair needs. We received many positive comments and great ideas from our readers. We truly appreciate the time you took to give us your thoughtful responses.

Many of you told us that you find information about current or upcoming technology, Toyota-recommended repair procedures, collision-repair-focused previews of new vehicles, and Toyota training programs very valuable. We provide this information so that—whether you work exclusively on Toyota vehicles or in an independent shop catering to a variety of different brands—you are better able to deliver safe, high-quality automotive repairs to your customers with Toyota, Lexus and Scion vehicles. Today's models are equipped with an array of advanced technology and safety features. It is imperative to follow Toyota-recommended repair procedures when dealing with these systems.

Let's not wait until the next survey for you to tell us what you think—we always welcome your feedback and ideas. If there is a subject you think *Collision Pros* should cover, or even a best practice you would like to share with us, you may contact me at info@collisionprosmagazine.com.

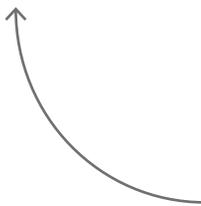
We are committed to helping you build customer loyalty and a strong reputation based on excellence. Thank you for your readership—we look forward to many more issues of *Collision Pros*, with the cutting-edge, comprehensive repair information you have come to expect.

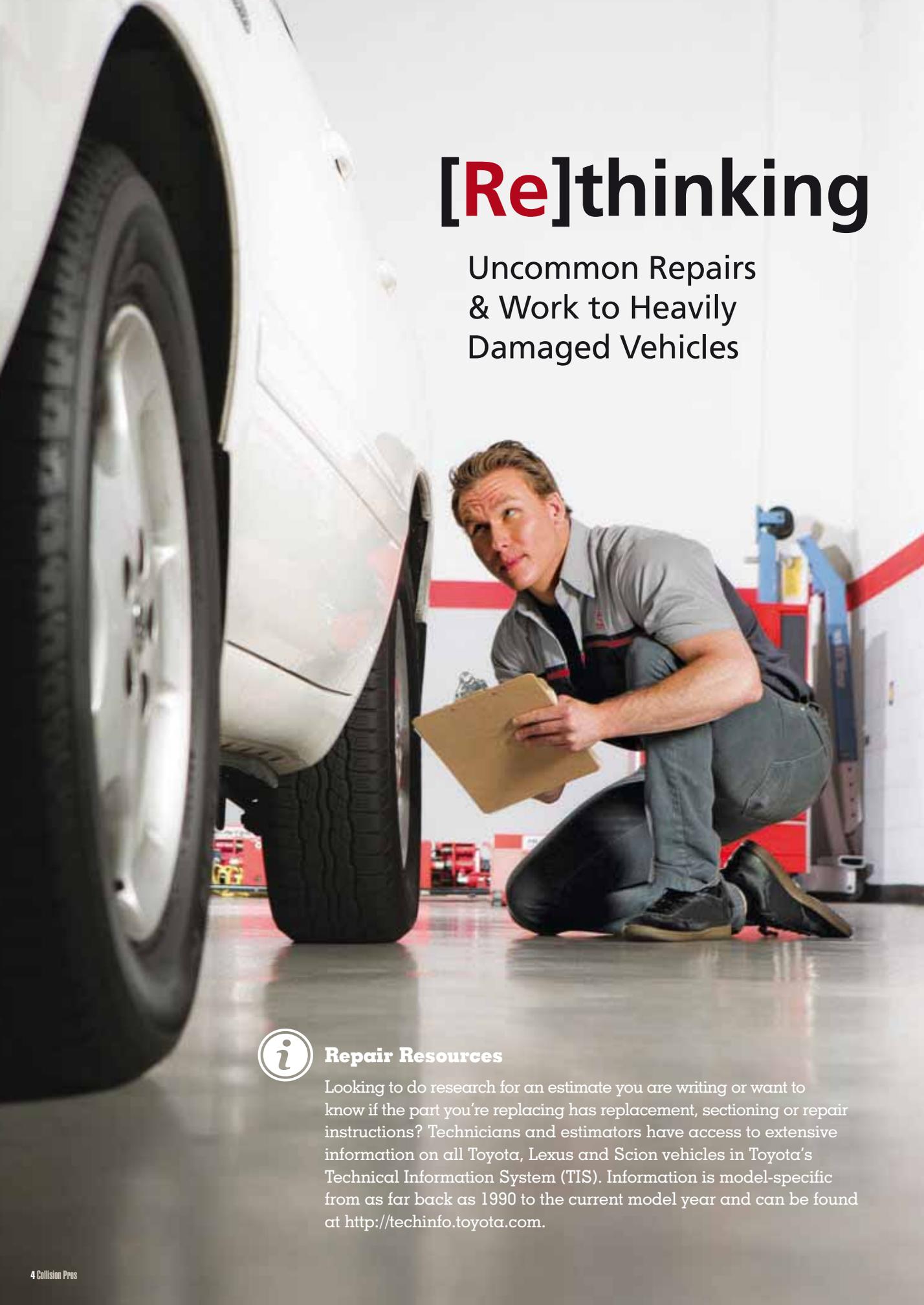
Kathy Capozza
Toyota Motor Sales, U.S.A., Inc.
Wholesale Marketing Administrator Sr.
Toyota Sales and Marketing
Collision Pros Magazine



We are committed to helping you build customer loyalty and a strong reputation based on excellence.

– Kathy Capozza





[Re]thinking

Uncommon Repairs
& Work to Heavily
Damaged Vehicles



Repair Resources

Looking to do research for an estimate you are writing or want to know if the part you're replacing has replacement, sectioning or repair instructions? Technicians and estimators have access to extensive information on all Toyota, Lexus and Scion vehicles in Toyota's Technical Information System (TIS). Information is model-specific from as far back as 1990 to the current model year and can be found at <http://techinfo.toyota.com>.

Have you ever started working on a repair only to discover that there are no instructions for the part you are replacing? Collision repair manuals usually contain instructions for doing light to moderate work on a vehicle. When instructions are missing for a part, it may be because it is an uncommon repair, or it could be an indication that the collision has breached the structure of the vehicle and that extensive repairs are needed.



Evidence of Extensive Damage

Uncommon repairs and extensive damage can complicate both the estimate and the repair. There are a number of clues that should raise a red flag to estimators and technicians that they could be dealing with a vehicle that requires uncommon repairs or has been heavily damaged. These include:

- ❑ Damage that requires uncommon replacement parts
- ❑ Damage that has breached the vehicle's structure
- ❑ Replacement times for the repair not included in the information provider's guides
- ❑ Parts that do not have replacement, sectioning or repair instructions



If you see one or more of these things, you may be dealing with a complex repair that could cost more to complete than the vehicle is worth.



Is It Safe? Is It Cost Effective?

In assessing uncommon repairs or extensive damage to a vehicle, it is important to consider if the repair can be made without compromising the safety of the vehicle and if it can be done in a way that is cost effective for all parties involved.

A mistake that repair shops sometimes make is that they underestimate the amount of work an uncommon replacement component or major repair will require. "Shops end up writing themselves into a corner," says Joe DiDonato, Collision Training Administrator, Technical & Body Training Department, Toyota Motor Sales, U.S.A., Inc. "They don't realize that even though a part only costs \$300, the labor to replace the part may be \$3,000."

In order to avoid this, DiDonato advises that shops take the time, do the research and ensure that they are writing a complete and accurate estimate. A thorough estimate can require a teardown for a complete analysis of what's required to do the job correctly.

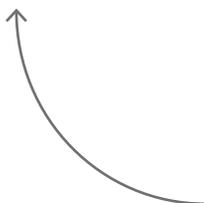
When approaching a complex repair, it may be tempting to cut up a large part and only replace the damaged sections. This is not recommended unless sectioning instructions are provided for the part you are replacing. **If no sectioning instructions exist, the component must be installed in its entirety to the factory seam or mounting location.**

"Shops need to be cautious when writing an estimate," DiDonato explains. "They need to develop a repair plan using TIS and Toyota factory training for a complete assessment, ensuring they are not repairing a vehicle that should be considered a total loss." 🐾



Shops need to be cautious when writing an estimate. They need to develop a repair plan using TIS and Toyota factory training for a complete assessment, ensuring they are not repairing a vehicle that should be considered a total loss.

– Joe DiDonato





15

CELEBRATING 15 YEARS OF
COLLISION PROS MAGAZINE:
1998-2013

YEARS

THIS YEAR, *COLLISION PROS* MAGAZINE TURNS 15. Since its inception, this award-winning publication has delivered direct-from-the-manufacturer collision repair information that is current, in-depth and accurate to shops and technicians around the country. *Collision Pros* represents Toyota's commitment to the collision repair industry and to helping ensure safe and correct repairs for all Toyota, Lexus and Scion vehicles. To mark this significant milestone, let's take a look back at the past 15 years to see how *Collision Pros* has helped shape the industry and think about what the future might hold.





A Look Back at Collision Pros

A lot has changed in the last 15 years—from the types of vehicles being repaired, to the materials, technology and techniques used to perform collision repair and refinish work. Through every change, *Collision Pros* has been there, helping the collision repair and refinish industry remain responsive and up-to-date in this fast-paced environment.

Milestones

WINTER 1999.

Toyota Motor Sales took the NABC pledge, becoming a National Auto Body Council Member.



FALL 2000.

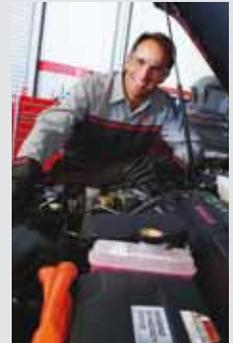
Toyota On Time Collision Repair pilot program was launched, delivering up to 40 percent gains in overall productivity.

FALL 2003.

The Technical Information System (TIS) became available to repair shops online. Suddenly, technicians had a vast library of information about how to safely repair vehicles at their fingertips.

SPRING 2004.

Toyota introduced the 2004 Prius, putting itself at the forefront of the hybrid market. *Collision Pros* began running stories about how to repair these innovative vehicles.





Toyota is proud to support the collision repair industry with the most up-to-date repair and refinish technologies that help ensure safe, quality repairs for our customers. A significant piece of that equation is *Collision Pros* magazine, which delivers a wealth of the most current information and resources to shops, technicians and the industry.

– Jerry Raskind, Wholesale Parts Manager, Toyota Motor Sales, U.S.A., Inc.

SUMMER 2004.

Toyota opened a new state-of-the-art collision repair and refinish training center in Jacksonville, Florida. The opening of the center reinforced Toyota's commitment to collision repair training.



SUMMER 2005.

Two new websites, Collision Repair and Refinish and Toyota Parts and Service, connect independent shops to dealerships committed to providing superior wholesale service.

FALL 2005.

TIS Collision Repair Library moved online.

SUMMER 2006.

Toyota remodeled its New Jersey collision repair & refinish training center.



WINTER 2006.

"Toyota Advanced Painting Techniques" and "Lexus Advanced Painting Techniques," two corporate training videos produced by the Collision Repair & Refinish group, won Telly awards. The awards were symbols of Toyota's commitment to high-quality repairs and training.

A VALUABLE RESOURCE

Collision Pros gives shops and technicians a direct line to the factory for the most current, first-hand repair information.

"We provide the information technicians need to be successful when repairing a damaged vehicle," says John Saia, Technical & Body Training Development Manager, Toyota Motor Sales, U.S.A., Inc. "Consumer safety and a great repair experience are very important."

One thing that makes the magazine so unique is that it gives collision repair professionals resources, support and information directly from Toyota. The magazine publishes

the latest repair information, including ProsTips and Collision Repair Information Bulletins (CRIBs), as well as the latest techniques and technologies.

"And, when technical information is needed, our willingness to react to what the industry wants and needs is a key strength, because we're always here to listen and respond accordingly," says Chris Risdon, Collision Repair & Refinish Training Administrator, Toyota Motor Sales, U.S.A., Inc.

Reading *Collision Pros* regularly also helps ensure you get up to speed with the most current new model introductions from Toyota,

Lexus and Scion. And that's a significant advantage if one of those new models shows up in your shop with collision damage. *Collision Pros* gives you a heads-up about new vehicle systems, paint, body, frame, structure and any precautions that need to be taken during the repair process.

Collision Pros is dedicated to facilitating safe, quality repairs, while helping meet customer expectations. It's about consumer safety and continuity of work. Toyota owners should have the same high-quality service no matter where they take their vehicle to be repaired.



As for *Collision Pros* magazine, we will continue to stay abreast of each change, each new technology and every new technique. Our mission is to remain innovative and work to efficiently communicate critical information to our valued audience of technicians and body shops.

– Chris Risdon, Collision Repair & Refinish Training Administrator, Toyota Motor Sales, U.S.A., Inc.

SUMMER 2008.

Quick bake innovative drying system helped alleviate the challenges of working with waterborne paints.

SPRING 2009.

Auto PartsBridge website went live.



WINTER 2013.

Toyota introduced predictive estimating, a new process that is set to revolutionize how estimates are written in body shops.

The Future of the Industry —and *Collision Pros*

“Without question, the future of the collision repair industry will be characterized by a lot more technology, and a lot less torch and hammer,” says Risdon.

Advances in technology, a continued emphasis on safety systems and an increase in specialization will likely characterize the collision repair industry in the future. Cars will only become more sophisticated and complex. Body shops are changing as well. They are becoming physically larger and contain more advanced repair equipment than ever before.

TOP-NOTCH TRAINING

Over the 15 years since the first issue of *Collision Pros* magazine, Toyota has conducted 785 collision repair classes and trained 7,000 technicians.

Toyota is committed to continuing education, and *Collision Pros* represents a vital part of that commitment. The magazine is a valuable bridge between Toyota’s training and repair shops, offering information about new classes and serving as a resource for what is happening in the collision training world. The goal is to en-

sure that every customer’s vehicle is returned to its pre-collision condition and to enable every technician to reach his or her full potential.

“One of the many reasons training is so important is that, in comparison to 15 years ago, practically everything on our cars today has a wire connected to it,” says Risdon. “Technology, design, manufacturing and safety systems have evolved dramatically.”

The way Toyota designs and delivers training has also changed. A significant portion of training is now offered through online

e-learning modules that technicians can complete at their own pace without spending too much time away from the shop. Once the online element is completed, technicians are well prepared for the hands-on portion at a training center.

Today’s vehicles are not only loaded with an ever-growing tally of electronics, they’re also designed for repair and service from the ground up, with crash standards and simulations considered in all initial vehicle designs. 📱

The Complete Hybrid Training Program

Now, Your Trained Technicians Can Work on Hybrid Vehicles



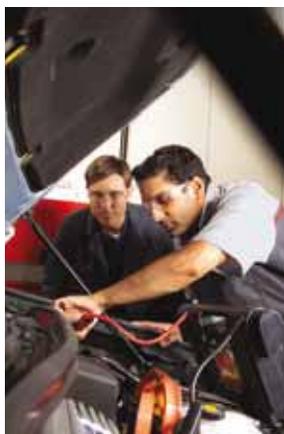
WITH SO MANY HYBRID VEHICLES ON THE ROAD TODAY, it's not uncommon for shops to have multiple hybrids in for repair on an ongoing basis. Having collision center technicians trained in safe hybrid vehicle repair can enable your shop to perform component removal and damaged component replacement in-house. This can lead to reduced cycle time, greater efficiency and happier customers. Toyota offers a comprehensive set of hybrid training courses so that technicians can learn to safely and correctly work on these vehicles.

"Whether you're doing estimating, blueprinting, collision repair or paint refinish work, you'll need some basic knowledge about how the hybrid system functions, where the components are and things you

need to do before removing certain parts for collision repair," says Chris Risdon, Collision Repair & Refinish Training Administrator, Toyota Motor Sales, U.S.A., Inc.

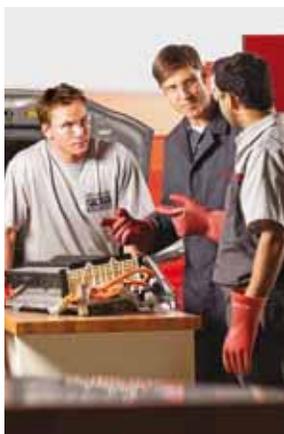
The key advantage with this comprehensive training is the hands-on practice you'll experience with these new skills, so when you're back in the shop, you can confidently perform repairs. Plus, being able to perform these operations in-house saves having to send the vehicle to the dealership to have certain components removed, helping reduce cycle time. Everybody wins—the car is put back together properly and returned to the customer more quickly. To sign up for training, visit www.crrtraining.com.

→ Widening Your Hybrid Horizons



P070/L074

Start with online e-learning module P070/L074 Hybrid General Service prework, which teaches hybrid basics. You'll learn what to do if the battery goes dead, how to jump-start the vehicles, oil change intervals and brake service information.



T601/L601

Once the prework is done, you're ready to attend the one-day instructor-led hands-on course T601/L601 Hybrid for Collision Repair, where the instructor takes you through safety, component location, and operation and handling of high-voltage systems.



PB602/PLB602

With a hybrid foundation in place, the next course in the series is the online e-learning module PB602/PLB602 Advanced Hybrid Systems for Collision Repair prework. This module takes a more in-depth look at the hybrid system.



T602/L602

To gain the proper experience working on the high-voltage system, instructor-led hands-on course T602/L602 Advanced Hybrid Systems for Collision Repair is available. This course enables technicians to practice removing and replacing key hybrid system components.



CR&R Hybrid Curriculum Overview

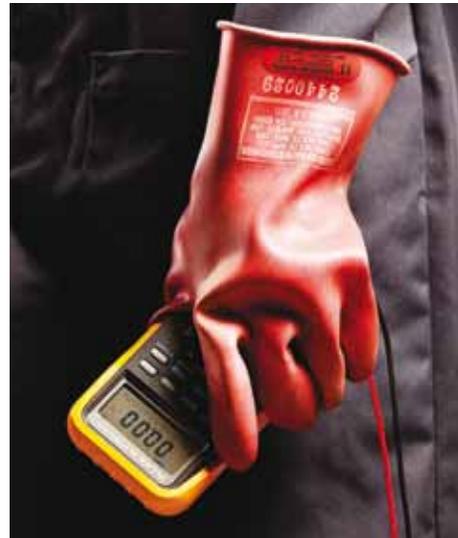
Take a look at what's in store:

1. Learn about basic hybrid technology, terminology and service techniques
2. Identify the location and purpose of main hybrid system components
3. Perform basic service procedures on hybrid vehicles including jump-starting, charging and replacing the auxiliary battery
4. Safely practice disabling of the hybrid system
5. Identify components that require HV gloves and insulated tools
6. Handle HV battery electrolyte spills
7. Use TIS Techstream to perform a health check prior to, and after, repairs
8. Use TIS to find service documents related to hybrid system safing and component removal
9. Safely disable the hybrid system and use a DVOM to confirm there's no high voltage present 🚗



The great thing about T602/L602 is that it allows you to go into the high-voltage system. You'll be removing high-voltage components—after you have safely disabled them—as well as doing voltage checks to confirm the system is properly disabled. For instance, you'll disable the high-voltage system, remove the inverter and learn the steps required to purge the cooling system, along with using our diagnostic equipment called TIS Techstream.

– Chris Risdon



The DOs and DON'Ts of Hybrid Gloves What You Need to Know

All collision repair technicians need to wear insulated lineman's "hybrid gloves" whenever working on or near any high-voltage hybrid components.

Get the right glove—high-voltage gloves must:

- Be rated at 1,000 volts AC max use
- Display a "Class 0" electrical safety glove classification

Inspect gloves before each use, using the following guidelines:

- Check for leaks, tears, punctures or cuts
- Roll gloves up to confirm that they will hold air
- Inspect gloves for ozone damage, which resembles a series of interlacing cracks
- Check for texture changes, such as softening, hardening, stickiness or lost elasticity

Storage and protection:

- Store in a cool, dark, dry place
- Store flat in a protective container or canvas bag
- The location should be as free as possible from chemicals, oils, solvents, damaging fumes and electrical discharges
- Keep away from fluorescent light and sunlight
- Don't wear watches, rings, jewelry or sharp objects that may damage the gloves
- Wash with mild soap to clean

Recertify or replace?

- Gloves must be placed into service within 12 months of production, or be recertified. After 6 months of use, gloves must be recertified or replaced

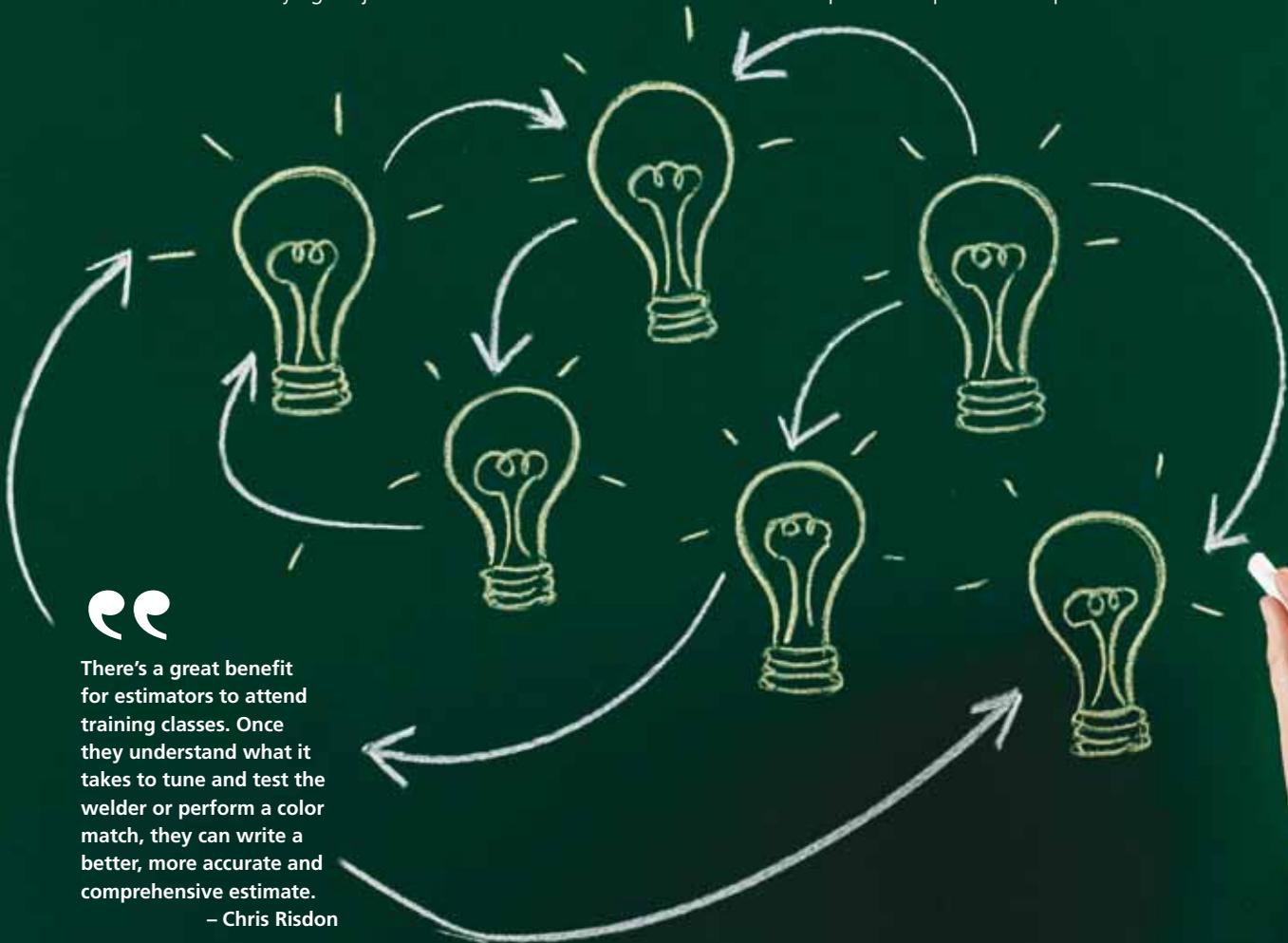
One size doesn't fit all!

- Make sure you have the proper size gloves for your hands. To ensure correct glove size, hold the end of a measuring tape between your thumb and first knuckle, and then measure the circumference around your knuckles. Add one inch to that measurement to determine your glove size.

Cross-Training:

*Train Your Entire Shop.
Everybody Learns. Everybody Wins.*

CROSS-TRAINING IS AN ESSENTIAL ELEMENT of every repair shop's success. That's because when your entire team understands the ins and outs of the business, everybody wins—the shop, the technicians, the estimators and your customers. For starters, cross-training helps keep work flowing throughout your shop, rather than relying on just one or two technicians who know how to perform a particular repair.



There's a great benefit for estimators to attend training classes. Once they understand what it takes to tune and test the welder or perform a color match, they can write a better, more accurate and comprehensive estimate.

— Chris Risdon

The best way to learn new shop skills and techniques is to attend and participate in collision repair training.

"It may seem logical to send a body technician to body classes and a paint technician to paint classes," says Chris Risdon, Collision Repair & Refinish Training Administrator, Toyota Motor Sales, U.S.A., Inc. "It's also wise to recognize that there is a tremendous advantage for paint technicians to know what's being told to the body technicians—and for body technicians to understand all that's involved in achieving a quality paint finish.

"For example," Risdon continues, "if the body technician finishes his or her repair with the proper grit paper, the paint technician can seamlessly take over the repair with less concern for sand scratches appearing in the final finish. If the body technician and painter both know that Toyota requires epoxy primer under seam sealer, together they can move the repair through the shop efficiently."

When your employees are cross-trained, teamwork improves. And, you'll always have someone who is trained to step in and pick up the slack in a pinch. Plus, Toyota training is available to independent shops, when sponsored, and the body shop manager is also welcome to take the training.

ADDING SKILLS, ENHANCING VALUE

According to Risdon, the best way to learn new shop skills and techniques is to come to training, where you'll get hands-on practice with actual vehicles and experienced instructors, along with exposure to the latest repair and refinish technologies. And don't forget to include the detailers' and painters' helpers; they're ideal candidates to attend a paint refinish program.

In addition, technicians who have honed their expertise and learned how to perform high-quality repairs efficiently can play multiple roles in the shop. As a result, they contribute not only to their own personal career development, but also to repair efficiency, quality and, of course, customer satisfaction.

EXPERT ESTIMATES

Along with the importance of all parties knowing what's involved in repair work, Risdon notes that estimators are often a forgotten lot when it comes to the technical side of all that's involved with repairs.

"Estimators are often apprehensive to attend 'hands-on' training because they aren't technicians," Risdon explains. "Have no fear. Everyone learns from seeing and doing in a training environment that forgives mistakes, allows time to practice, and fosters improvement—that's what training and learning are all about."

Plus, when an estimator is knowledgeable in the process and knows where to find electronic resources like Collision Repair Information Bulletins (CRIBs), it can enhance his or her relationship and negotiations with insurance agencies.

KNOWLEDGE: ACCEPT NO SUBSTITUTES

No time to attend training? Too expensive? Too far away? Start with online e-learning to gain valuable information on collision repair subjects. It's self-paced and available 24-7 wherever you have a computer and an Internet connection—and it is free. To learn more, and to sign up for classes, visit www.crrtraining.com. 📄

"At the end of the day, anyone can own a set of tools, but there's no substitute for skills and knowledge. The more employees know, the more efficient they will be—and the more successful your shop will be."
— Chris Risdon



Collision Pros Survey Prize Winners

Congratulations to the participants of the Collision Pros magazine Winter 2013 survey who won prizes in our giveaway:

Rick Meyer, Tim Nance, Caytlin Ortiz, Angel Figueroa, Sharon Mills, Sam Shaw, William Strobel, Wael Attari, Gerald Koren, Misty Sullivan, Ramin Hakimi, John Domar, Greg Ulmer, Dave Matijevich, Dale Tabaka, William Latuff, Brandon Lenz, Mike Stempkowski, James Davis Jr., Tony Shaw, Leo Kozadinos, Jim Dilbeck, Bruce King, Steve Orth, Shawn Dixon, Agustin Diaz, Mike Passof, Mike Parsons, Dave Lockridge, Michael Pressley, Pat Patrykus, Joe Fisher, Don Murphy, John Gustafson, Dave Bradley, Matt Dewalt, Dusty Martin, David Smith, Darrin Bernatowicz, Scott Medlin, Camille Eber

Three Steps to Great Welding

Before any part is welded in a collision repair shop, three essential steps are necessary to ensure that the job is done properly. Performing these three steps every single time welding takes place in your shop is vital to ensuring a correct and safe repair to any vehicle.



1

STEP 1: SELECT THE CORRECT WELDER

To select the correct welder, you must determine the power source requirements and the thickness and composition of the metal being welded. You must also determine what type of weld you will be performing—squeeze-type resistant spot weld (STRSW) or a metal inert gas (MIG) weld.

Information regarding welding type and size can be found in the Technical Information System (TIS) under Fundamental Body Repair Procedures Manual Pub # BRM002E or BRM020U. Metal composition for Toyota, Lexus and Scion vehicles can also be found in TIS.

Whenever possible, body shops should try to duplicate the original

factory weld, including its size, strength and appearance. Sometimes collision damage repair manuals may suggest using a MIG plug weld when making repairs; however, if the original factory weld was a STRSW and you are able to successfully duplicate the original weld, then do so. Refer to CRIB Bulletin #181 for more details.



2

STEP 2: TUNE THE WELDER

Tune the welder so that you can properly fuse the two pieces of metal together. When you are tuning your welder, practice on the old part that you are replacing. This allows you to verify weld quality on a component that is identical to the one being replaced without compromising the new part.



3

STEP 3: PERFORM A DESTRUCTIVE TEST

Performing a destructive test gives you a direct indication of whether you have achieved full fusion of the components being welded, and whether or not the weld will perform as originally intended. To perform the test, secure the welded part on a vise, and then, using a hammer and a chisel, separate the parts by pulling or twisting them apart.

You will know if you have full fusion if a nugget-sized piece of the weld remains on the part that was welded. The size of the nugget must be relative to the original size of the manufacturer weld, while the opposing piece should have a hole in it where the nugget was torn out. 🛠️

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56

PRODUCT FOCUS



56 The Sherwin-Williams Automotive Finishes HP Process with Air-Bake technology ensures a fast cure time, allowing for same-day repairs.

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- Chemicals

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- Marketing Services
- E-commerce
- Information Systems
- Internet

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- Trade Associations

OFF-ROAD

- Abrasives & Cleaners
- Air Filters

BONUS ONLINE CONTENT

ABRN HOW2 VIDEO GALLERY



JUNE'S FEATURED VIDEO
TRANSFER EFFICIENCY OF SPRAY GUNS

VIDEO SPOTLIGHT

CHOOSING THE right part stand for refinish and repairs

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[URL ABRN.COM/PARTSTAND]



BLOG SPOTLIGHT

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[URL ABRN.COM/BETTERFOLLOWERS]

RECENTLY THE DEG received an inquiry asking CCC to add footnotes to 39 parts stating they are one-time or single-use parts. CCC accommodated the request and added footnotes to the database.

[URL ABRN.COM/CCCFOOTNOTES]

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ONLINE COVERAGE

THERE'S MORE ONLINE:
NEW CAR SALES UP

TrueCar.com forecasted an 11 percent year-over-year increase in new light vehicle sales in the U.S. for April 2013.

»» ABRN.COM/TRUECAR

MATT OHRNSTEIN DIES

Symphony Advisors, LLC founder and former Caliber Collision Centers CEO and Chairman Matthew Ohrnstein passed away.

»» ABRN.COM/OHRNSTEIN

PARTSCHANNEL BACKS PRO CONSUMER, COMPETITION LEGISLATION

PartsChannel, Inc. supports legislation that addresses OEM design patent abuse, especially the delay for aftermarket collision replacement parts.

»» ABRN.COM/PARTSCHANNEL

PARTSTRADER MAKES SYSTEM UPGRADES

PartsTrader improvements include a function allowing repairers and suppliers to give feedback on their trading partners.

»» ABRN.COM/PARTSTRADERUPGRADE

PYLE STEPS DOWN AT ASA

Dan Risley has been named ASA interim executive director after Ron Pyle's decision to step down as president and chief of staff.

»» ABRN.COM/PYLEEXIT

INDUSTRY SHOWS CONFIDENCE IN SEMA

Nearly 2,000 exhibitors are confirmed to participate in the SEMA Show Priority Booth Selection Process, a six percent increase over 2012.

»» ABRN.COM/BOOTHSELECTION

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 SEARCH THOUSANDS OF BREAKING AND ARCHIVED
NEWS ARTICLES TO STAY INFORMED


State Farm's Avery speaks at the PPG MVP Conference.

PPG MVP CONFERENCE
Shops told to get social at PPG event

The social media explosion of recent years has created some challenges and opportunities for today's collision repair facilities when it comes to marketing. To truly understand social media, shops must understand engagement and how consumers are utilizing Facebook, Linked-In, Google +, Twitter and a host of other tools in their buying choices. And that's important if shops want to rise above the onslaught of marketing messages consumers encounter on a daily basis.

"We're in a situation that is so destructive because everyone is yelling," stated Sasha Strauss, managing director at Innovation Protocol and adjunct professor at USC's Annenberg School for Communication. "Social Media has added an entirely new level of engagement."

Strauss served as keynote speaker at the PPG MVP Business Solutions Conference held at the JW Marriott Camelback Inn in Scottsdale, Ariz., in April. The conference drew a record crowd of approximately 475 collision professionals. The conference was open to owners and managers of collision centers using PPG Refinish products. MVP conferences are biannual events and key components of PPG's ongoing commitment to provide advanced business thinking and innovative solutions to its MVP customers.

»» CONTINUED ON PAGE 8

BREAKING NEWS
INSURANCE UPDATE
STATE FARM TRANSITIONS OPERATIONS FROM ZONE TO ENTERPRISE APPROACH

BY KRISTA MCNAMARA |
MANAGING EDITOR

State Farm is streamlining processes associated with shop procedures in order to reduce inconsistencies and develop universal best practices by transitioning from a zone to an enterprise approach.

"The idea of being enterprise driven is finding and using the best process. To be efficient, you have to be consistent. We want repairers to have a procedure that is consistent no matter where you are," says George Avery with State Farm. Avery discussed the new approach at the recent PPG MVP Business Solutions Conference in Arizona.

As State Farm rolled out its new claims system, which allows company

Photo: Michael Willins





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>> CONTINUED FROM PAGE 6

SHOPS TOLD TO GET SOCIAL AT PPG EVENT

Strauss delivered a dynamic, insightful presentation titled “Branding 101 | Brand Strategy Essentials,” explaining for the audience how now, more than ever, brands matter and should be built into business marketing, advertising and public relations strategies. He also spoke during breakout sessions about social media and how shops should be tapping into such tools in their marketing efforts.

He cautioned, however, that social media is not an advertising channel. “It’s not designed to introduce (your business),” he warned. “It’s designed to retain those who prefer you.” Focus on your connection to the audience, and not business tidbits that mean nothing to customers. For example, noting through social media that you have a new frame machine will do nothing for engagement, whereas they will react when you ask them to rate photos of recent custom finishing projects at your shop. It’s all about being proactive and creative in your approach, said Strauss.

Frank Terlap, CEO of Summit Software and Marketing Solutions, shared similar social media sentiments during his presentation on digital marketing. Terlap broke down for attendees various forms of digital marketing that shops must take advantage of in order to stay front of mind with today’s consumers. And it’s vitally important, and simpler, to focus efforts on customers you already have to grow your business. He recommends contacting customers at least four times per year after you’ve repaired their vehicle in order to get repeat and referral business.

Each car owner whose vehicle you repaired influences 4.2 other repairs in the last year, Terlap explained. That can help or hurt you depending on your ability to connect with those former customers.

“What’s the daily process that you or someone in your business is doing to market your business every day?” he asked, provoking the audience to think about their communication efforts. “You want to keep your brand in front of your customers and deliver them value.”

Terlap explained the value of search engine optimization (SEO) and how shops should be using proper SEO practices to enhance online visibility of their businesses.

Why is digital marketing so important? Terlap cited statistics, including a note that Internet usage stands at 80 percent for the U.S. population, and 50 percent use smart phones (a number that’s expected to reach 75 percent by 2016).

Along with discussions on branding, marketing and social media, attendees heard from State Farm’s George Avery who presented the insurance company’s overview and perspective on what he defined as “Industry Headwinds” and how State Farm is looking at restructuring to adapt to the changing industry landscape and opportunities (see *story page 6*). He also outlined the company’s history on the developing need for an electronic parts ordering system and addressed several questions regarding the PartsTrader initiative.

-- Michael Willins, Content Director

STATE FARM TRANSITIONS TO ENTERPRISE APPROACH

representatives to handle claims anywhere in the United States, inefficiencies and inconsistencies among the zones were addressed.

The insurance magnate had been operating under a regional approach, with 26 regional offices, since the 1960s. Each office was individually run with its own underwriting, advertising and claims services. About 15 years ago, the company transitioned to a zone approach, streamlining from 26 regional offices to 13 zones, which again, were independently run, Avery says.

The new enterprise system will utilize three major, multi-functional “hubs” in Phoenix, Dallas and Atlanta, along with operations centers across the United States and Canada that house claims, underwriting and any other needed support functions.

The enterprise-driven system allows all those at the same level across the corporation to communicate and develop best practices. These best practices are determined independently at each level, not handed down through corporate mandates.

“This is in the best interest of our customers and our business partner,

the body shops, so that we are consistent wherever we go. However, these changes are not going to affect the repairer in any way as it relates to their current repair procedure. It may be totally transparent to the repairer,” Avery says.

He cites supplement requests as an example of an enhanced efficiency through the new practice. “Say a State Farm job comes in to a non-Select Service facility, and we come out and write the original estimate. The facility tears it down and finds additional damage. One zone may have called a certain number, while another may have faxed it in. We’d like that when anyone has a supplement, no matter where they are located, they all do it the same way,” Avery says.

The improvements may be more noticeable to multi-shop operators (MSOs) with shops across multiple geographic areas that had originally reported to several zones. However, the overall goal is to simply streamline the process whenever a shop is dealing with State Farm.

“You need standard practices to be efficient. We believe this move is in an

effort to give our customer not only a remarkable experience, but at the same time help our business partners get a consistent read from State Farm so they can operate as efficiently as they can,” Avery says. “And it is the customer that wins. A customer is not having a good day if they wreck their car. They are looking to all the stakeholders to get them back to where they were as quickly and efficiently as possible.”

While implementation of the enterprise-driven approach is underway, “the commitment to continuous improvement to benefit our customer is ongoing,” Avery says, citing State Farm’s efforts to continuously solicit customer feedback and industry input.

The company gains feedback through local management, which reports repairer insights; Avery, who works to gather input at industry events; and the company’s advisory council, which interacts with body shops and consultants to gain input.





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KNOW HOW

COMPENSATION EVALUATION

CASE CALLS FLAT RATE INTO QUESTION

BY **BRIAN ALBRIGHT** | CONTRIBUTING EDITOR

A recent California appellate court decision may affect long-standing state flat-rate/piece-rate payment practices, and could pose a significant challenge to autobody and mechanical shops when it comes to compensation strategies.

In an unpublished decision handed down in early April, the California 2nd District Court of Appeal held that piece-rate-paid employees must be paid a separate hourly rate for time spent on the clock not related to their piece-rate repair work.

The class-action suit was brought by technicians employed by Downtown LA Motors (DTLA), a California Mercedes-Benz dealership. The court ordered the dealership to pay the class members for time spent on non-repair tasks and wait time, as well as applicable penalties under California Labor Code.

The dealership paid techs a set rate for their flag (repair) hours. The company calculated tech pay by multiplying the flag hours accrued by the flat rate. Non-repair hours were also tracked, and earnings were determined using hours on the clock multiplied by the minimum wage. If the flat-rate compensation fell below minimum wage requirements, the dealership made up the difference.

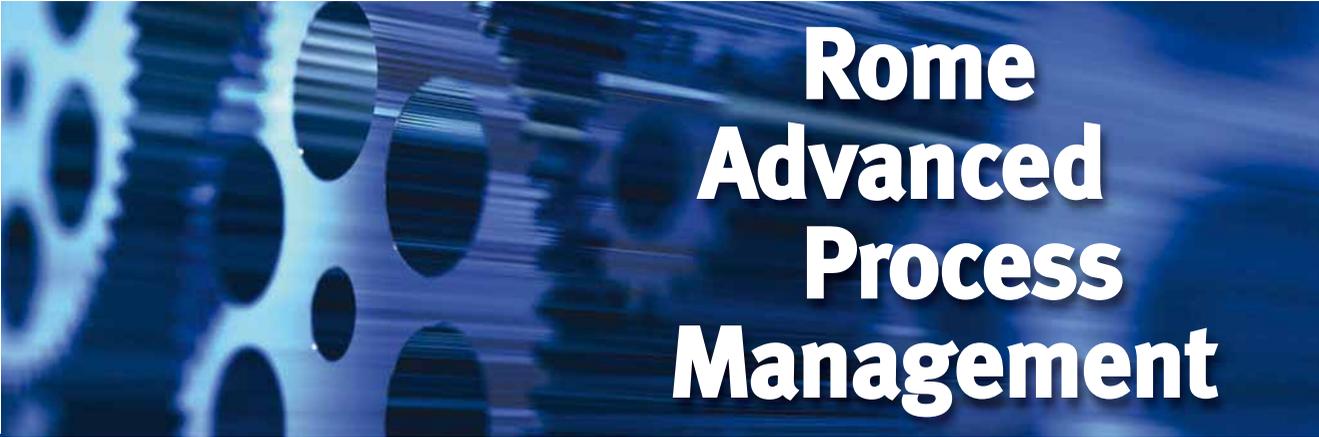
The suit's techs claimed the dealership failed to pay a minimum wage for wait time between repairs. The trial court found in their favor. The dealership argued that it had complied with California wage laws because the company made up the difference if the pay for hours on the clock fell below the applicable minimum wage. However, the court found that the company could not average piece-rate wages across all hours worked.

Under Federal law, the flat-rate compensation system at the dealership would satisfy minimum wage requirements, because the company averaged the pay across total actual hours worked. However, the new ruling holds that non-flag hours should be compensated at least at the minimum wage, separate and apart from the amount earned while performing repairs.

The California Wage Orders require that employers must pay "not less than the applicable minimum wage for all hours worked in the payroll period, whether the remuneration is measured by time, piece, commission or otherwise."

The court avoided the issue of whether other commission- or incentive-based compensation systems would be viewed under this ruling, but it could potentially render such payment programs unlawful unless other standards are met. DTLA is appealing the judgment to the California Supreme Court.

In the meantime, shops in California that use the flat-rate compensation system (the majority of shops) are advised to consult with their legal counsel experienced in the auto repair industry and with flat-rate payment plans to evaluate their compensation programs.



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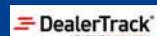
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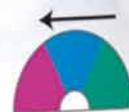
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COLLISION REPAIR INDUSTRY Stats & Trends

Consumption of alternative fuels increased to almost 13 percent in 2011, according to the U.S. Energy Information Administration.



AutoWorks PDR helps shops across the U.S. tackle hail

Owner Mills explains how his company can save shops a lot of headaches

BY AAGEDITOR | ABRN BLOGGER

When a hail event occurs, it inundates the repair facility with an enormous amount of extra repair assignments, scheduling conflicts and cycle time issues that require extensive coordination to meet the demands of the repair facility's existing collision customers and their insurer partners' needs. Bottom line — a hail event brings pure chaos and stress to a repair facility that specializes in collision repair, not hail repairs. "It is easy to get overwhelmed pretty quick," says Bob Mills, president of AutoWorks, Inc. And that is where his company comes in.

Mills founded AutoWorks PDR, based in Denver, Colo., in 1996. He brought in Cliff Mayer as his business partner in 2003, and they shared a vision to provide quality and service while building a company that now competes on a national level in the paintless dent repair (PDR) industry.

The PDR hail repair provider for CARSTAR Collision, which has more than 400 repair facilities in North America, AutoWorks sets itself apart from the competition with its training methods for staffing, organization, coordination and streamlining during a hail catastrophe for repair facilities, Mills says.



The first step is knowing what partners like AutoWorks can help you tackle, and what they can't.

ABRN: Explain some of the types of damage that can be PDR'd, and examples of what can't.

Mills: Hail damage, minor dents and door dings are all candidates for PDR. Cracked paint, location of damage and the severity of damage all play a role in deciding what can and cannot be PDR'd.

Hail damage: We have a little more leeway with

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When BI turns to BS

BRIMARC

Technology and the huge capability that comes with it has revolutionized the sales and sales management worlds by making data available, which a few short years ago would have been unimaginable.

Business Intelligence (BI) refers to the process of making better business decisions through the use of process, data, key people, and related tools to report, analyze and predict what is going on in a particular market with customers and potential customers or with specific marketing campaigns.

Intelligence here is not referring to a bunch of smart people sitting in a room planning our next marketing campaign, but more to-

ward our understanding of what people in the field are observing, customers and would be customers are saying or doing, and what actual strategic and tactical trends are showing. Business intelligence is solely designed to get information into the hands of owners, stakeholders and senior managers as soon as it is possible and in a format that will allow them to make better, more informed and timely decisions, and to identify opportunities.

BI is the process that gathers information, warehouses and presents operational data, and does this in a format that is timely, concise and actionable. More and more, BI relies on near real-time data that includes operational data, marketing, CRM, logistics, and supply chain and other pertinent enterprise-wide

data that affect our ability to service a market, or allow us to respond to emerging trends and opportunities. BI is the process of our knowing our market so that we can own our market and ultimately retain our market. BI is not only having the quality data but being in a position to do something with it.

I would purposely draw the correlation between historical events we should have anticipated and responded to and the use of business intelligence in our current-day corporate and organizational worlds. At both Pearl Harbor in 1941 and on Sept. 11, 2001, we were in possession of specific and credible information that should have allowed us to avoid these disasters; but in both of these cases, the data either failed to make it to key decision

makers, or we made conscious decisions to disregard what the data was telling us. This is not an attempt to relive history and certainly not an attempt to critique what was or was not done in these two instances, but it is an attempt to highlight the fact that having the intelligence is only half the battle. Having the qualified, quality data on time and in a format that will discern a threat or an opportunity is the key.

Having important, actionable information buried beneath a mountain of irrelevancy is little different than not having the information at all. Having business intelligence is only useful if you are able to act upon it. Continue reading at abrn.com/BItoBS.



June 26 @ 12 p.m. EST

MSOs: Value of OEM certification

Sponsored by PPG Automotive Refinish Register at www.abrn.com/MSOEM



PAGE 14



THE SHOP OWNER

CAMILLE EBER

Getting your records in order

PAGE 21



THE CONSULTANT

TONY PASSWATER

Stop double dipping

PAGE 70



MIKE ANDERSON

Not just 'set the toe and let it go'

what can and cannot be PDR'd with hail. In most cases with severe hail, we can do what is called "push to paint" (this is mainly performed on roof panels), which will help in the repair cycle time for the shop, save the customer from having the roof cut off, and is a better, faster and cheaper repair for the customer and the insurance companies. Push to paint repairs are performed on severe dam-

age, which PDR cannot return 100 percent back to pre-loss condition. The process involves pushing the dent up as close to being level as possible. There can be a texture difference based on the severity of the damage. In most cases after we PDR a push to paint, all that is needed is prime and block time before paint. To continue reading this blog, visit abrn.com/AutoWorksPDR.

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Noteworthy

READER FEEDBACK TO ONLINE ARTICLES

To the LinkedIn discussion started by Eddie, "Has anyone used a business coach for their body shop? I've thought about looking into one who can hopefully bring my shop to the next level. Thoughts? Advice? Personal experience?"

From Sandra Baker-Assemi: We used a coach that I had some rapport with initially and thought he could succeed with our closely held family business. He zeroed in on our goals and personal styles. That has helped us define our direction and improve communication. Finding realistic solutions that lead to growth does require an industry specialist who can examine financial practices and growth. The best person I've seen is Mike Anderson. He is personable and can spout ratios like a Greek mathematician!

From Greg Lobsiger: For the last five years I have had help from consultants in our business, and boy,

has it made a huge difference. I had to swallow my pride when I figured out that even though my family has been doing this since 1951, something wasn't right. There is good money in this business, and the sky is the limit. We have seen a very high net profit and have grown consistently. The ROI is way more than the cost.

To the LinkedIn discussion started by Krista McNamara, "Matthew Orhnstein passed away. The Symphony Advisors founder and former Caliber Collision CEO will be missed in the collision repair industry."

From Jay Pope: Matt was instrumental in helping our company lead the charge with implementing lean manufacturing in the collision industry. He will be missed by all of us in the DCR Systems family!

Louis Pope, Jr.: My condolences to a forward-thinking gentleman of our industry.



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Ensuring your records are in order

Shop owners need to protect employees, themselves through proper personnel files

The addition of a second shop this year has us doing some hiring, and one key step in that process is setting up a personnel file for each employee. It may sound like a minor detail, but it's important to do it right for several reasons.

You have an obligation, for example, to protect your employees' personal data. You have state and federal regulations you must abide by. And good personnel files can help protect your business if you have the misfortune of having an employee file some sort of complaint against you.

While state laws about employee personnel files vary somewhat (so always check with your attorney), here are some guidelines I suggest. The first thing is true in every state: Personnel files should be stored in a locked file or office so that no one has access to them unless they have an authorized need to see them. The files contain sensitive, private data, and you don't want someone viewing or removing items from them if they aren't authorized to do so.

Here are the kinds of items we keep in each employee's personnel file:

- The employment application. Employees have signed their application indicating the information is true and giving us certain rights during the hiring process. It's important to have this documentation should an issue involving it arise.
- A signed acknowledgement that the employee has received our employee handbook and agrees that it's their responsibility to read it and abide by company policies. We also use a separate signed acknowledgement indicating the employee received and agrees to abide by the company's policy against harassment.
- Drivers' license records. Our insurer requires a copy of Department of Motor Vehicles driving records for all employees who drive company or customer vehicles. Once the employee supplies us with this, we provide it to the insurer and keep a copy in the personnel file.

- Signed state and federal tax forms, such as the IRS W-4 withholding form.
- Direct deposit authorization forms. If employees give us written authorization to direct deposit their paychecks, this authorization goes in the file.
- Time cards or records. In my state (and probably many others), no matter how an employee is paid – hourly, commission, flat rate or salaried – they should be punching a time clock as a record of their actual hours worked. Much of this is now stored electronically, but any paper records can be stored in the personnel files.
- Attendance, vacation and absence records. You want to keep careful track of employees' use of paid time off or other absences from work.
- Performance-related notices. Records of all warnings, discipline or termination of employees should be kept in their personnel file.

There also are some important restrictions on what should NOT be in the files – some of which may be surprising. Federal regulations, for example, prohibit employers from keeping I-9 records, the forms used to confirm that new hires are authorized to work in the United States, in personnel files. Those, too, must be retained and kept in secured files but separate from personnel files.

Medical records or information about an employee's medical situation also should not be stored in the employee's personnel file, but in a separate file that is locked and only accessible to those few people in the company with a need-to-know basis.

A final category of information that should not be stored in personnel files is investigation materials: reference letters provided to you by applicants, background check reports or materials related to an investigation of an employee's violation of the company's harassment or other policies.

Also make sure you understand your state's rules about allowing an employee to see their personnel file. You generally are required to give access, but usually you can require them to make an appointment to do so. This can give you an opportunity to make sure the file is in order.

In an ideal world, you won't need to access personnel files often. But if you do, having them complete can protect your business.

“GOOD PERSONNEL FILES HELP PROTECT YOUR BUSINESS IF YOU HAVE AN EMPLOYEE FILE A COMPLAINT AGAINST YOU.”

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Camille Eber

Camille Eber is the second-generation owner of Fix Auto Portland East in Portland, Oregon.



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The influx of sub cars

Electric and gas-powered environmentally friendly vehicles are gaining traction

Sorry to disappoint you James Bond fans, but we won't be discussing the Lotus Esprit that turned into a submarine in *The Spy Who Loved Me*. The sub cars under discussion here are the growing class of small, environmentally-friendly vehicles meant to cruise economically around urban settings and college campuses.

Many of these are offered as both electric and gas-powered vehicles. Many can be driven on city streets, meaning a large exposure to other vehicles, so the chance of literally running into one of them is growing.

The ZENN (Zero Emissions, No Noise) car is a good example of the new sub car class. The ZENN is a two-seat, full battery-powered electric car built by ZENN Motor Company. According to the company's website, the ZENN has a range of up to 40 miles (64 km) and is speed-limited to 25 mph (40 km/h) – ideal for a neighborhood run-about. The manufacturer is based in Canada, but the ZENN is not legal in most Canadian Provinces. It is, however, legal in most U.S. states. Because it qualifies as a neighborhood vehicle, it doesn't require side beam protection or airbags. You can watch how easily the plastic body crushes in the IIHS test by visiting abrn.com/ZENntest.

Another vehicle in the sub car class is the Tiger Truck, which is aimed at taking out the 'Cushman carts' we remember from our school campuses. Unlike the ZENN car, the Tiger Truck is not legal for street use, but since 1999 the Tiger Truck company has been delivering a series of light utility trucks and vans for "off-road use" (meaning around large campuses). The unique thing here is that all Tiger vehicles meet the stringent EPA standards, are available powered by a variety of fuels or an electric

motor, and feature a traditional standard shift transmission. Tiger Truck has the largest available array of truck body options for niche applications. Primary distribution in the U.S. is through a select dealership network. Tiger Truck is headquartered in Poteau, Okla., where the company has an advanced assembly plant with more than 180,000 square feet in five interconnected buildings. It sources components both domestically and globally.

Limited-use vehicles like the ZENN and the Tiger Truck may sound like toys, but wait, there's more.

Moving into the mainstream and definitely street legal is the upcoming BMW i3. This little urban car is almost ready for U.S. streets and will be priced at \$35,000 – around the price of a new 3-Series Beemer. And what will that \$35K get you? BMW has leaked some interesting details. The i3 will feature a surprising 150-horsepower motor – a lot for its size and good for a range of 160 miles between charges. Of course, if you take the i3 to its alleged 100-mph top speed, that range will probably be drastically reduced. With the electric motor mounted in back (like the old VW Beetle), the i3 leaves 14.1 cubic feet of luggage room up front and under the seats. In a joint venture with Volkswagen, the passenger cell will be made from carbon fiber to keep weight down and balance out the batteries that line the floorboards.

Advanced technology doesn't come cheap. BMW is banking on moving 40,000 examples annually from its Leipzig plant, which is currently being retooled to produce "i" electric vehicles. The i brand is BMW's future sub-brand of clean, cheerful electric vehicles, meant to coexist in the same slightly bizarre temporal plane with Mini Cooper's electric 1-Serieses.

So, while the ZENN and Tiger, with their limited use, may have limited exposure to crashes, the BMW i3 will definitely be out there trading paint with other mainstream gas-powered and hybrid vehicles, albeit with panels and structure made from carbon fiber. The question is: will BMW's repair strategy for its carbon fiber shell be similar to their restrictions on aluminum? We will have to wait and see. ■

"LIMITED USE VEHICLES LIKE THE ZENN AND THE TIGER TRUCK MAY SOUND LIKE TOYS, BUT MOVING INTO THE MAINSTREAM AND DEFINITELY STREET LEGAL IS THE UPCOMING BMW I3."

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Greg Horn is vice president of industry relations for Mitchell International.



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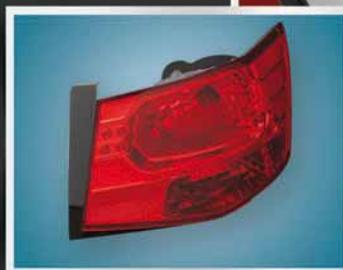
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Information is the key

Keeping pace with tomorrow's technology requires training, education

In a recent industry forum, leaders for both the insurance and collision repairer segments cited rapid advances in vehicle technology as one of their top concerns for the future. To the shop, this means investment in new technology and equipment, along with the training to use it effectively.

For those who read this column regularly, you know I view the collision estimating process as much more than just converting the concepts surrounding vehicle damage to words on a printed page. The business model we all function in today has evolved gradually to an ever-increasing level of complexity. With that in mind, I want to pose a question for the next five years and beyond: how are you investing in your business and in your staff to compete in tomorrow's collision repair industry?

The fact is, equipment and training should always be top of mind when it comes to the need for shops to restore safety to clients' damaged vehicles. In higher education several years ago, a video was produced showing that colleges are now educating students to perform work with technologies and in fields that may not even exist today. Technology is moving so fast – what was considered next generation a few years ago is obsolete today. As an example, look to recent OEM announcements regarding new construction materials and manufacturing techniques. Driven by higher safety and fuel economy standards, auto manufacturers are moving toward designs that essentially put the everyday passenger into a vehicle on par with an airframe in a fighter jet. Honda recently launched the 2013 Accord with a new ultra high-strength steel body structure, constructed with new welding technology. And mainstream vehicles using state-of-the-art construction methodologies, such as Honda's Advanced Compatibility Engineering (ACE), are quite possibly in your shop right now.

I think most of the industry understands the tidal wave of new technology from the OEMs, but what resources can you tap into to stay on top of the wave? New coatings, materials and collision avoidance technologies all present different challenges to diagnostics as well as repair processes. In every instance, information is the answer. Knowing the substrate material at the time of the estimate makes for a better repair plan, and accessing the information specific to the collision avoidance technology on board the customer car in your shop could impact even a simple bumper repair or windshield replacement.

Training in OEM repair requirements, along with a core industry education, are essential, and represent a great start to getting up to speed, but how do you know what was built into the client car that just rolled into your shop? OEM certification programs and accessing the information through the dealer parts department was the answer in years past. If we take a page out of what is driving intelligence throughout other industries around the world, tighter integration of information is the answer. And by that, I mean having knowledge at your fingertips about exactly what was on the vehicle when it left the factory – in the form of RPO (Regular Production Option) data – is the best solution for estimators to stay on top of what goes into cars today.

Imagine knowing the build sheet data before you create a repair plan, or addressing the on-board advanced technology and vehicle-specific construction before you commit to a repair method. In today's fast-paced environments of doing more with fewer resources, quick integrated access to this level of information may well solve many collision repair pain points today as well as in the future.

Just for a twist to my common theme of the ongoing need for training, and for access to information that is available at the right time and in the hands of the right people, think about how you will improve your business by not only keeping pace, but also embracing the value that OEM vehicle data and training can bring to your business. It all comes down to understanding the partners that are driving your business now and in the future. Take their lead and learn from them; apply new knowledge to your business each and every day. 

“HOW ARE YOU INVESTING IN YOUR BUSINESS AND YOUR STAFF TO COMPETE IN TOMORROW'S COLLISION REPAIR INDUSTRY?”

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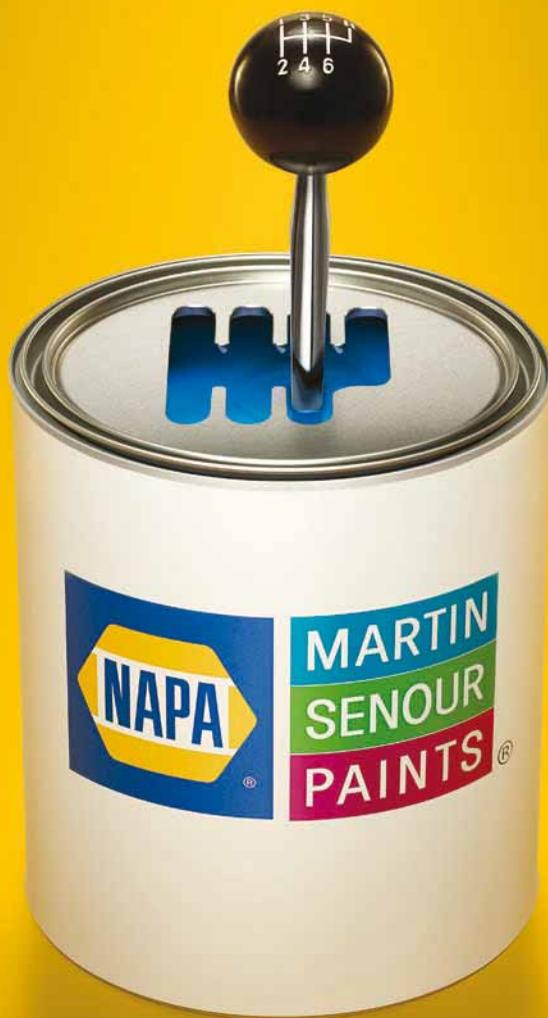


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Richard Forness

Richard Forness is national account manager – West, for Audatex North America. He has 19 years of experience operating repair shops.





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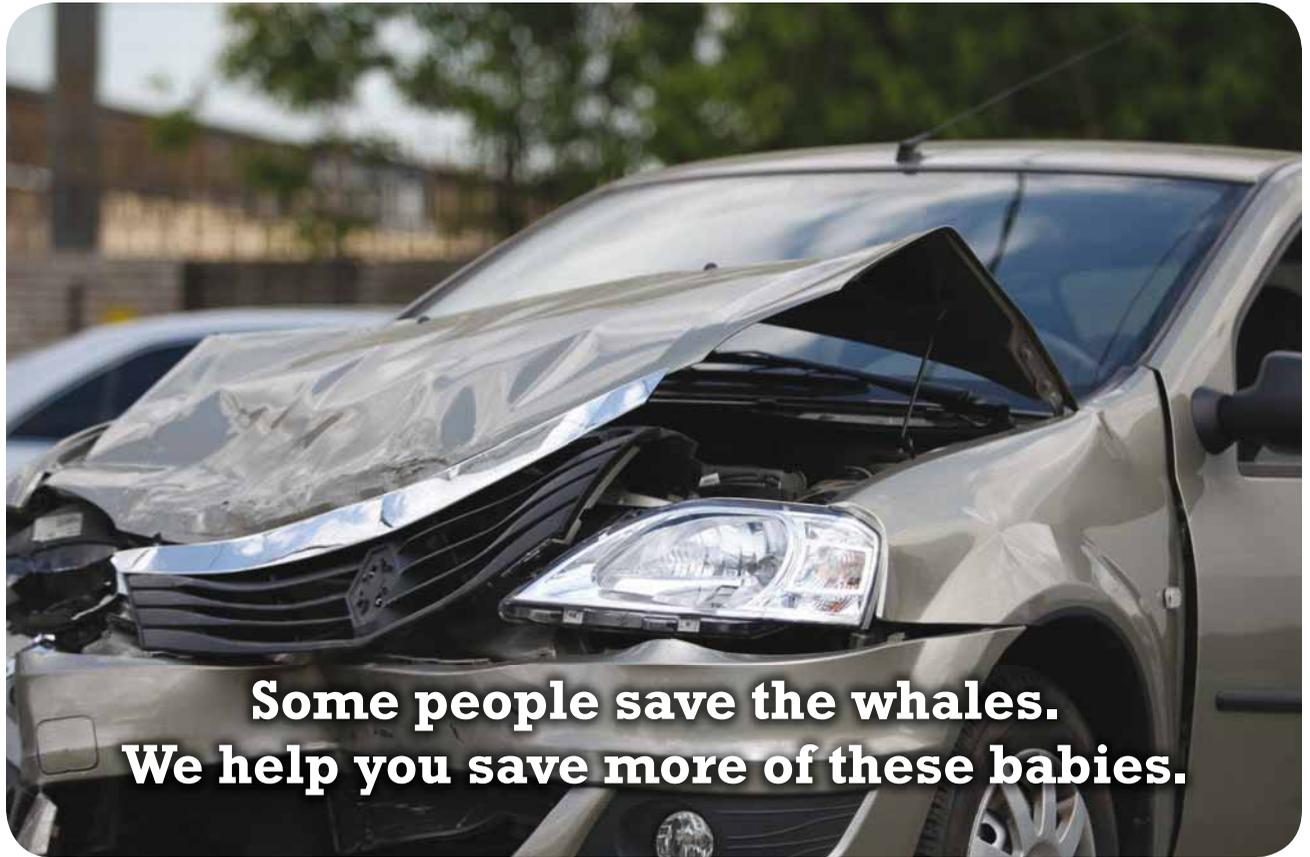
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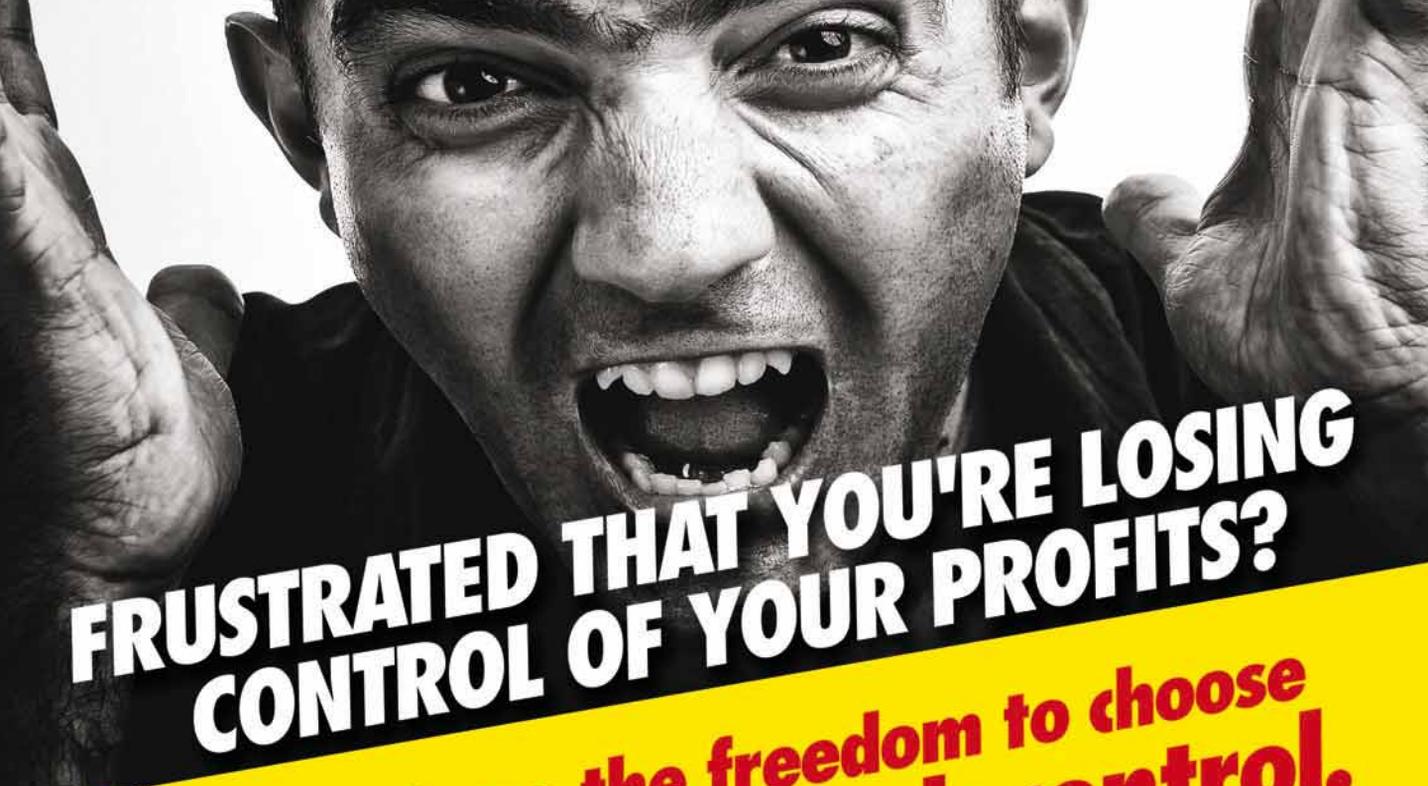
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THE PROBLEM

“Our paint shop was the bottleneck of our entire operation with frequent re-do’s, color-matching issues and product performance. Products were continuously changing which lead to complications, confusion and more down time for training. These issues were drivers for slower cycle times.”

THE SOLUTION

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DAMAGE CONTROL





Stop double dipping

Fix inefficiencies, not your software

I am sure you have seen or experienced the frowns when someone (maybe yourself) at a reception or party double dips their chip, vegetables or chicken in the sauces available.

At my house my kids even set the ground rules when a bag of chips are opened at the table by stating before anyone grabs the chips, "No double dipping!"

As I have stated in my last two columns, let's focus on the real issues and not believe that an insurer-mandated software program is the solution. In my last columns, the key issue with used parts is their "real" condition, and that it is completely hidden from the vehicle owner. But why has this become such a huge problem, and what does double dipping have to do with all this? Believe it or not, double dipping is probably one of the key root causes for the present condition of used parts and the inefficiencies it has added when procuring used parts, not the system in which we use to order them.

In the distant past, it was not uncommon for salvage value purchase agreements ranging from 11 percent to 22 percent of the actual cash value (ACV) for the totaled vehicles. These vehicles then entered into the supply chain at a much larger percentage, even though there was still a level of "rebuildables" that were not "parted" out. Today it is much different.

Today, the Internet bidding process has opened a new lucrative business opportunity for insurers that didn't exist in the past, and they are taking full advantage of it. However, it is causing issues with the parts that are left and available for the supply chain. This has quickly turned the "total loss" department of an insurance company into a formidable profit center, and one of the key drivers in whether a vehicle is going to be repaired today or totaled. This is simply double dipping, and is a key root cause

"DOUBLE DIPPING IS PROBABLY ONE OF THE KEY ROOT CAUSES FOR THE PRESENT CONDITION OF USED PARTS AND THE INEFFICIENCIES IT HAS ADDED WHEN PROCURING USED PARTS."

of many of the issues that the repair industry faces every day when being held to requirements set by insurers for usage of used parts, or mandated parts procurement programs.

Today, talking with many recyclers, the purchase prices paid by foreign buyers who simply rebuild them in their country, often with different and lower safety standards and tax advantages for bringing them into their country as "parts" verses the tariffs imposed on imported new vehicles, is almost ridiculous – at times more than 55 percent of actual cash value! The good vehicles with Grade A parts are simply not going into our supply chain. What is left from being filtered by foreign buyers and domestic rebuilders is far from being acceptable to any collision repairer.

The industry generally should expect and receive true "Grade A" parts if they are going to be used in the repair process; however, this is not like school when the teacher "curves" the grades. Grade A is a standard (less than 1 unit of damage) that needs to be upheld, but the double dipping is a major reason for the parts being unacceptable and causing a loss of efficiency. This again should not be buried into the original price quoted as "new and undamaged" or it continuously goes undocumented and hidden from the vehicle owner.

Economics are very clear why this happens: \$18,000 ACV vehicle with \$8,000 of damages. The vehicle is totaled because the rental bill is lessened; the claim is closed quicker, with no supplements; and a high price is paid for the salvage. Why would a typical vehicle owner have any problems with this, unless they are upside down with financing? They often get a new car quicker than ever before, and they don't have a "repaired" vehicle any longer.

The high salvage value pressure has gotten so extreme that another industry has been created that is loosely termed "middle men." Their sole purpose is to take vehicles that are going to be sold at auction (online or live) and make them look better for resale. In this process, anything goes to raise the prices paid. Again, less goes back into the supply chain.

Isn't it time to stop the double dipping? It is time to allow the true collision repair professional to do his job unhindered by software mandates that aren't part of the true solution. ❏

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Tony Passwater, president of AEII, has been in the collision industry since 1972.



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IMAGE / AL THOMAS

GET MORE PRODUCTION OUT OF YOUR
SHOP'S PAINT EQUIPMENT

BY JOHN YOSWICK | CONTRIBUTING EDITOR

THE NUMBERS may seem surprising to some shops, but Steve Trapp said improvement in paint products, equipment and production systems have raised the benchmark for the number of jobs that could flow through your paint booth each day.

"We have gotten our booth window down to 72 minutes," said Trapp, collision services development manager for Axalta (formerly DuPont) Performance Coatings. "Instead of 90 minutes like it used to be for booth cycle, we've gotten it into the 70s. In an 8-hour day, you can paint seven cars."

Extrapolate that, he said, and it comes to 140 jobs a month per booth. Work a staggered shift to run the booth 12 hours instead of eight, and you should finish 11 cars daily or 220 monthly. With a full second shift, it's 260 jobs per month with just the one booth.

If your shop is not close to that level of production, you're



Steve Trapp

not alone. Steve Feltovich, manager of business consulting services for Sherwin-Williams Automotive Finishes, said his company's production benchmark is six or seven cars per day per booth, but the industry average nationwide is far below that.

"It's right about 3.1 units per booth per day," Feltovich said. "So our run rate is about 50 percent of what it should be on a national average. I've seen shops that are even below that, usually because they have too much equipment."

How can you move your shop's paint department closer to six or seven jobs per day? Paint company representatives say it takes a combination of the right equipment, processes and talent.

The right equipment

As the shop facility planning manager for Akzo Nobel Coatings, Rick Farnan says improving booth car count begins with having the right booth



Steve Feltovich



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being used in the most efficient manner. He said a full-downdraft booth, for example, offers better air and heat flow throughout than a cross-flow or semi-downdraft.

"In a downdraft booth, depending upon the length and width of the floor exhaust area, the air flow through the cabin should be uniform from front to back and side to side," Farnan said. "In a semi-downdraft, the area below the ceiling filters near the floor is subject to little or no air movement. So you tend to get better air flow and drying on one end of the vehicle than the other."

MEASURING BOOTH CYCLE TIME

Shops have long measured cycle time in terms of "keys to keys." The average number of days from when the customer dropped off their damaged vehicle to when they get back their keys and repaired vehicle.

But Joe Skurka, manager of OEM and industry relations for BASF Automotive Refinish, said shops may want to measure – and work to improve – a subset of that: booth cycle time.

"I typically hear people talk about how many cars a day can you get through the booth," Skurka said. "That's usually the productivity measure, and that's a valid measurement, for sure."

But, he said, shops can also check how they are doing by dividing the number of repair orders (ROs) processed in a week or month by the number of hours the shop is working.

For example, he said, Shop A has one booth (running 8-hour days) and processed 89 ROs in a month with 21 weekdays. Divide 168 hours (8 hours times 21 days) by 89 to get a booth cycle time of 1.9 hours per RO.

Or Shop B has two booths working 10 hours a day and processed 246 jobs in that same 21 day month. Divide 420 hours (20 hours a day – 10 per booth – times 21 days) by 246 to get a booth cycle time of 1.7 hours per RO.

Skurka said BASF suggests a booth cycle time benchmark of 1.6 to 1.8 hours per RO; the lower the number, the better.

A drive-through booth is generally ideal, he said, because cars ready to be sprayed can be staged just in front of the booth, rather than having to wait for the car inside to be backed out.

Farnan said location should be a consideration when deciding on booth burner design. Direct-fired burners will deliver a constant temperature regardless of how cold it gets outdoors; indirect-fired burners are subject to temperature swings when used in extremely cold climates.

"In direct-fired units, the burner is basically maintenance-free and should last a lifetime," Farnan said. "In indirect-fired units, the drum or heat exchanger is exposed to constant temperature swings, and will likely need to be replaced."

The right process

But there's plenty shops can do to boost their booth's throughput aside from upgrading to a better booth. Process can be just as important as equipment.

Sherwin-Williams' Feltovich said scheduling can impact how much work the paint shop can get through the booth in a week.

"The age-old pattern of scheduling all cars in on Monday and out on Friday sets you up for mass chaos in the paint shop one or two days a week, and under-utilization of the booth on other days," Feltovich said. "Schedule cars in every day of the week."

Next, he said, get ahead of any potential bottlenecks by identifying colors and specialty coatings on each vehicle during damage analysis.

"Also, inspect your paint and material inventory daily to make sure you have the products for the cars you're painting in the coming week."

Feltovich also said shops should get away from cutting in or painting some parts for a job one day, then spraying the rest of the job on another.

"Move toward painting everything at one time, for the entire job," Feltovich said. "There are some exceptions to that rule, but try to set each job up so everything pertaining to it can be refinished at one time in the booth."

Axalta's Trapp said seemingly simple things, like having the right type of racks, can boost the amount of work that can be processed through the booth.

TIME TO ADD A BOOTH?

Adding a booth is no small investment, so how can you know it's the best solution to an apparent bottleneck in your production?

BASF's Joe Skurka thinks it's generally a mistake to add an additional booth until you've truly maxed out production with your existing equipment.

"Consider extending your paint shop hours first," Skurka said. "You can have your booth running 10 or 12 hours a day before you're at all maximizing the use of your equipment."

Akzo Nobel's Rick Farnan said when he is planning shop layouts, he keeps a simple "10-2-1" formula in mind. For every 10 metal shop stalls, he said, a shop should have two prep stations and one booth. Fewer body stalls, he said, and use of the equipment won't be maximized; too many body stalls, and the booth becomes a bottleneck.

Farnan said that before adding another booth, he recommends considering a closed-top, open-front (CTOF) prep station unit with a minimum of two solid vertical walls and a pressurized ceiling plenum. They can be used for spraying and drying of primers as well as basecoats and clearcoats. The air quality is similar to an enclosed booth, and they can handle both vehicles and small parts.

"So if my shop has 10 body stalls and one booth, and I have too much work in my paint shop that I can't get out, should I consider a CTOF?" Farnan said. "Because of its flexibility, it can handle multiple jobs and reduce the workload on your single booth."

Don't bring parts into the booth on the same racks on which they were prepped, Trapp cited as an example, because that introduces sanding dust into the booth. Instead, transfer prepped parts to flipper-style racks used only inside the booth that make the parts quick to maneuver during spraying.

Shops are increasingly painting





Joe Skurka

parts off the vehicle, Trapp said, which enables parts for multiple jobs in the booth at the same time – if the booth airflow is properly balanced.

If the booth is equipped with a variable frequency drive to balance airflow in and out based on what is in the booth, Trapp said, make sure painters are trained on its use.

Feltovich agreed that painting parts off the vehicle is the way to go.

“Some shops are even removing parts at their own expense to paint them off the vehicle,” Feltovich added. “A shop at a training class I was doing recently brought up that they are removing panels to blend them off the car. They’re not getting paid to remove them, but they’re doing it because it speeds up the process. It’s really increased their production rate per day.”

Maximize throughput

Bryan Robinson, North American manager of national accounts for PPG Automotive Refinish, said he’s seen shops improve booth car count simply by ensuring there’s always another job ready to move into the booth.

“To always have a vehicle ready to go into the booth, you may have to pull a guy off priming to help get another one prepped,” Robinson said. “That makes sense when you consider that every hour that booth sits empty, presuming you have the inventory of work to put in there, it’s costing you \$2,000.”

Trapp said really good lighting in the prep area will help ensure the jobs staged to move next into the booth are truly ready to be sprayed.

“You want to be able to see any shiny spots that need to be handled,” he said. “You want to catch it outside the booth so you’re not bringing any of those contaminants or doing any of those processes inside the booth.”

Robinson said cleanliness improves paint department profits by reducing time spent denibbing and buffing.

“The vehicle should be cleaned before it comes into the shop,” Robinson

said. “Otherwise that dirt travels with that car all the way through the process and into the booth. Now you’re paying guys to go back once it’s been painted and get the dirt out of the paint. It’s costing you a lot of money, time and energy.”

“Three things — personal protective equipment, a clean booth and a clean

mixing room — lead to less buffing,” Trapp agreed. “If the painter can go in and paint and not buff, he can keep the flow going. We’re taking shops that were 80 percent buff down as low as 15 percent buff.”

Trapp and the others said improvements such as these are the key to a shop boosting a booth’s car count. 📡

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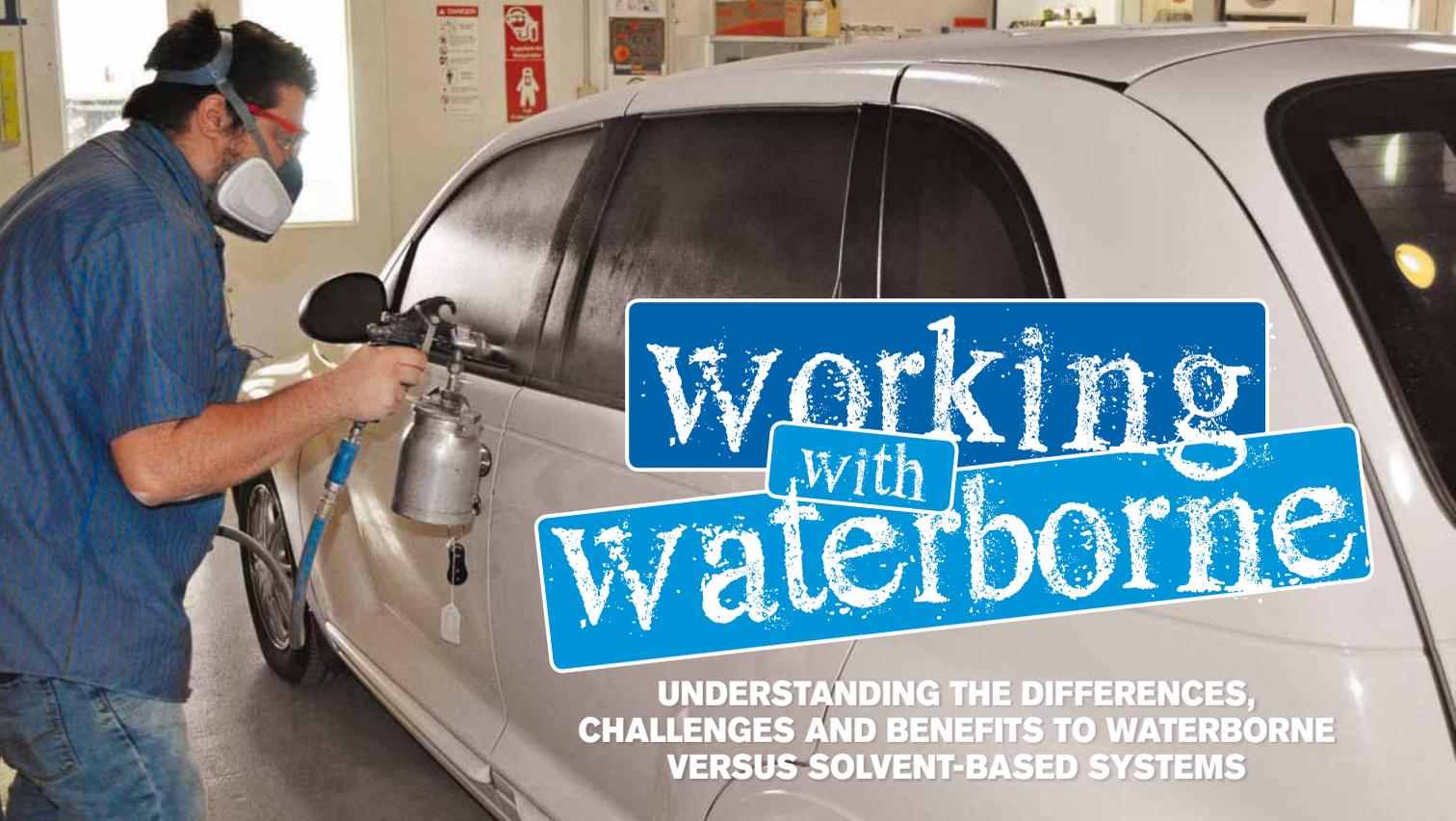
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MINDING YOUR BUSINESS



UNDERSTANDING THE DIFFERENCES, CHALLENGES AND BENEFITS TO WATERBORNE VERSUS SOLVENT-BASED SYSTEMS

BY KEVIN MEHOK | CONTRIBUTING EDITOR

WE HAVE ALL painted a room or two in our homes, apartments or offices. In every case, if you were painting indoors, you used a water-based paint product called acrylic latex paint. It has little or no odor, covers well and dries fairly quickly, unless it is really humid outside. When the humidity is high, a few fans strategically placed in the room usually help it dry much faster. It's not a very complex project to paint a room, but without proper application techniques and surface preparation, the results can be less than desirable. This is a pretty simplistic explanation of painting with a water-based product, but it is accurate for both the acrylic latex paint you use in your home, and the automotive grade of water-based paint.

Although it seems as if waterborne technology is a new and mysterious thing, in reality, it has been around for decades and is used in many OEM automotive painting envi-

ronments. The use of water-based paint technology has been widely accepted in Europe for a long time, and has more recently found a foothold here in the U.S. because of the lower VOCs (Volatile Organic Compounds) it produces over a traditional solvent-based refinish system.

Just so there is no confusion, the base applications are the only product currently available as water-based compound. The clears are all solvent based, although most manufacturers are developing water-based clears as well. So far, these do not have the durability needed for the automotive market, but I know of one company that seems to have cracked this problem. I am certain that in the very near future the clear coats in these systems will be available in water.

Many collision shops today are thinking about converting to a waterborne product, but are hesitant to do so because of the negative things they may have heard about its use from



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Convert with Confidence



some industry peers. Many shop owners look at the systems like they are contagious diseases, and they stay very far away. The reason for some of this is, initially, at its introduction, waterborne products were difficult to use, had color-match problems and were very expensive. Many shops that tried these first incarnations switched back to solvent systems very quickly because of these and other issues that arose out of what may have been premature releases of the products. Shops that tried them and found they did not work well are understandably very hesitant to try again today.

In reality, the paint manufacturers have invested heavily in waterborne technology and have been producing better and better products consistently in recent years. The changes in the product are staggering, and as a user of a waterborne system in my facility, I can say with authority that they really do work well today. They are, however, not the same as using a solvent-based system, and there is absolutely a learning curve involved, both for your painters and your production staff, in using a waterborne product.

The most important thing to understand about water-based painting systems is that they require lots of air movement in order to dry properly. I didn't fully understand this principle until I began using a water-based system, but think about it like this. In any painting operation, the painted/sprayed material dries by solvent evaporation. Common sense will tell you water evaporates much more slowly than thinner or reducer. By increasing the air movement over a painted surface, the solvent will evaporate faster.

When using a solvent system, humidity in the air of your spray booth has only a small effect on the drying time of the base coats. Heat will really help the solvent evaporate quickly, so even with lower air movement and higher humidity in your booth, the base will dry fairly quickly. Not so when spraying water. If your booth does not move enough air, the base will dry at a snail's pace, slowing down production tremendously. If there is humidity in the air, it's real-

ly a problem. Therefore, it is very important to make certain that when you switch to water, you have your spray booth tested to make sure it moves enough air.

I know what you're thinking. Who the heck do I call to do that? It's really easy, and your local painter should be able to do it for you, or have someone from the paint company come to your shop. In general, if you have a clean, modern booth, it should move enough air.

Each manufacturer has different metrics regarding the air movement required for their product, so refer to the paint manufacturer's recommendations here. If you have a downdraft booth with baking capability, the heat will help the base dry faster as well. If you don't have a baking booth, you can still use water; you simply have to make sure you move enough air.

The air movement in the booth, created by the booth's exhaust fans, may not be enough to effectively dry the product, however. This will likely be the case, so you will need to move more air by using fans or venturiers. I have seen the expensive retrofit fans and know they work very well, but I was looking to try and utilize a less expensive option, so I chose to use a few sets of portable venturiers and commercially available electric fans with built-in heaters. So far, they have worked well to facilitate the base drying issue. These units are basically the same as your standard shop quartz drying lamps, but in addition to the heat lamps, they have two small electric fans mounted to the top bar.

Since you are spraying a nonflammable product, using electric fans in the spray environment is perfectly OK. (Just don't use them when spraying clears and solvent-based products like primer or clears.) The air venturiers gobble up air, and if you use the same compressor in your paint and body departments, you may run out of air quickly, or burn up your compressor.

Most manufacturers recommend that you use a separate compressor for your paint department only, so that could get expensive. I like the electric fans for this reason, as well. I do use the venturiers, but sparingly. I run my entire shop on one compressor, and

it works fine. By utilizing the electric fans more often than the venturiers, we can conserve air easily.

The humidity of your paint shop air is a concern as well. Waterborne paint systems require very dry air. The more humid the air in your lines, the slower the paint will dry. I have added a refrigerant dryer that is mounted just before the paint booth, which dries only the sprayable air. In addition to that, a good regulator and desiccant drier help assure Arizona-type, arid air going to the booth.

With good booth air movement, dry air and good fans, the base will dry fairly quickly. To me, this is the largest issue any shop will have to overcome when working with water. You must be patient with the base coat! It naturally dries slower than solvent systems, so your staff will need to alter their production processes slightly. They will need to learn to spray on a coat of the base, turn on the fans and walk away!

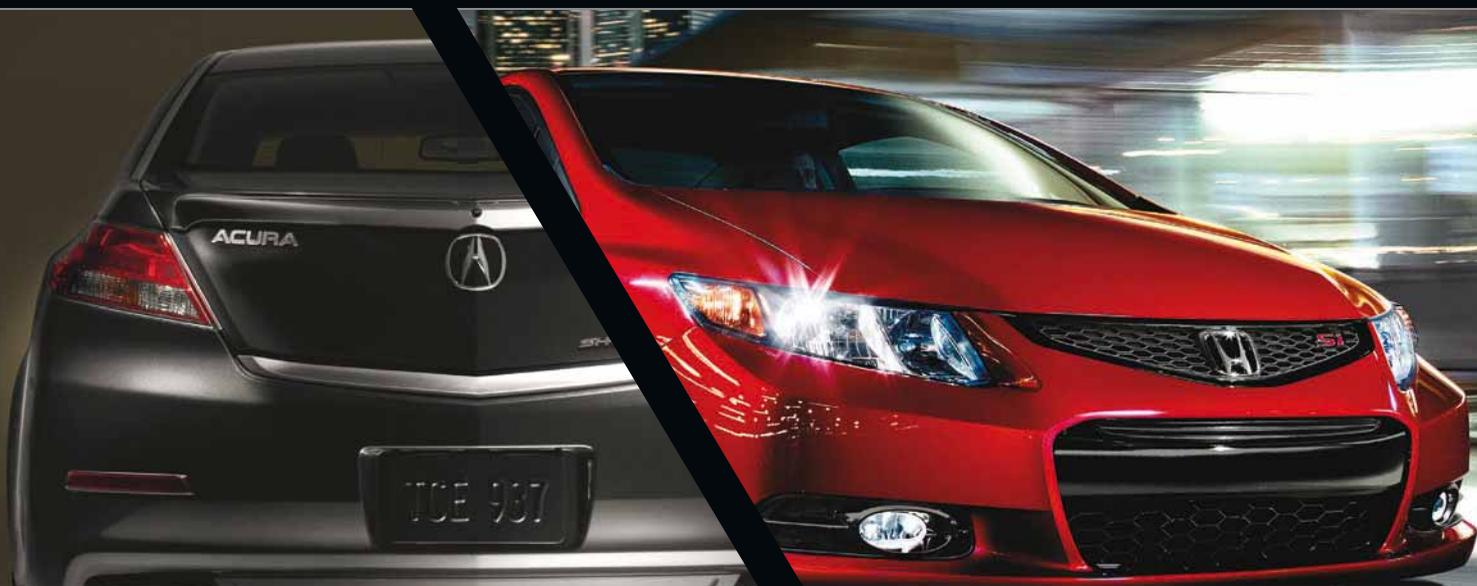
Leave the booth, and while the base is drying, prep another vehicle, do spray outs on the next car going into the booth, mask up another vehicle, or prime another panel. Don't watch the paint dry. If you do, your production will slow way down. The key with water is to use the base coat drying time to get other things done. Doing so will keep the line moving and flowing well.

One of several advantages to waterborne paint systems is that the color matching has been really good. Obviously, tinting and spray out cards are still a staple of the painting process, but many of the formulas are right on when mixed properly. We do our best to avoid blending, since generally the blend panels in most instances are undamaged factory paint, and I really hate to get into those panels if it is avoidable. Sometimes it is not, but I feel we blend less than what I was accustomed to using a solvent-based system.

Another advantage of water-based paints is generally the coverage is much better. This saves application time and material cost because you don't need to use as much material to get good coverage. It does take a little time to get used to the look of the



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sprayed base material, because some times during application, the surface will look horrible, with mottles and discolorations that look like you forgot how to paint. These weird anomalies all go away as the base dries. Once your painters are acclimated to using a product, the fear of using it goes away quickly. Neither of my painters

had ever sprayed water before working in my shop, and they picked it up pretty quickly. Of course, there was a learning curve, but there is with anything new or different.

Another advantage is that I generate very little liquid hazardous waste in the shop. In two years of using water, in a pretty busy shop,

I have only generated two 55-gallon containers of waste that had to be picked up by my waste hauling company. That's an average of one drum per year, much less than I am accustomed to generating. As you know, disposing of waste isn't cheap, so this savings was an added bonus for me. The savings generated through using fewer products, not running a huge bake burner in my booth, and generating less waste more than offset any cost issues with the products.

In reality, the cost of the base tints, binders, etc., for the water-based system I use are comparable to solvent. The clears I use are a little pricy, but they are made for use with the system, and as I always suggest, do not mix products or stray from what the manufacturer suggests. Using all the right products that are made for the system will guarantee success. If you mix and match, you won't get a finished product that's warrantied, and you more than likely will run into other problems. Cheap materials are generally cheaply made, and don't work as well.

Lastly, we all know water-based systems are better for the environment. The federal government understands this as well, and is in the process of drafting legislation that will, at some point, require your shop to use waterborne paints. I feel like I am doing something to help the environment by using it, so there is some satisfaction there. I also market the fact that we use water to consumers, especially hybrid owners. I do a lot of import hybrid repairs, and when I tell a prospective customer we use water-based paint technology, they just beam. I do, too, because I get the job.

If you are opening a new shop, it just makes sense to install a water-base system at start up. If you are doing a conversion from solvent, it will be a little more challenging, but your jobber or manufacturer will help you get through the transition with as little down time as possible. Using water isn't black magic, it's about being open minded and willing to learn and accept its nuances. ☺

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SHOP PROFILE

A snapshot of one of the industry's leading shops

EDDIE'S AUTO BODY / EAST HADDAM, CONN.



Pushing the pedal

Eddie's makes fast work in adopting the newest auto repair technologies

BY JAMES E. GUYETTE | CONTRIBUTING EDITOR

They don't use the word "lean," but Eddie's Auto Body in East Haddam, Conn. is certainly fast on the pedal with a lean-styled learning curve that focuses on embracing the latest methods for doing things quicker and better.

The quest applies to all aspects of the business. "We are always striving for constant improvement," says Edward M. Lupinek, owner of the 8-bay, 3,300-square-foot facility that grosses \$1 million per year.

"If you're not growing, you're dying," he says. "If you're not changing, you're antiquating yourself. I believe there's always room for improvement and growth."

Set to be up and running by 2014, the company is currently constructing a shop addition "to cater more to the needs of our customers." It includes a new waiting room, an estimating bay with a lift, a wash bay/detail area, a parts room/prep area and more work space.

With phone calls pouring in from curious shop owners, Eddie's has received significant industry recognition for last year's unveiling of a new paint system "that could be the most productive, safest and energy-efficient booth in the

world," according to Lupinek.

Only two companies offer this technology, Symac from Italy and Canada's SunSpot, he notes, explaining that the project involved modifying the existing cross-flow booth to a negative-pressure down-draft booth that utilizes cutting-edge medium-wave infrared technology.

"We can dry clear coat in 10 minutes and put it directly out in the rain with no consequences," Lupinek says. Waterborne can be dried in 6 minutes with no air flow; primer dries in 6 to 8 minutes and can be sanded immediately.

"Having that technology in our shop has all but eliminated wait time," he reports, "and we have doubled our staff since implementing them."

The HT-200 units in the booth, which have two heads and two rails while occupying both walls, burned only 15.6 gallons of propane in the first four months of use.

"We would like to spread the word that there are options to the high cost of running booths," says Lupinek. While other operations are spending \$25 to \$35 on the bake cycle, Eddie's pays a mere 30 cents per cycle. "We have received



Edward & Carol Lupinek

AT A GLANCE

Eddie's Auto Body

Name of shop

East Haddam, Conn.

Location

Edward M. Lupinek

Owner

1

Number of shops

57

Years in business

7

Number of employees

None

Number of DRPs

\$1,200-\$3,000

Range of repair orders

4 days

Average cycle time

\$21,000

Average weekly volume

DuPont Axalta

Paint supplier

Auto Robot, Guidechart

Frame machines used

CCC One

Estimating system used

www.EddiesAutoBodyCt.com

Internet site

calls from all over the country expressing interest in how this technology and design could work for them."



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IMAGES / EDDIE'S AUTO BODY

At present, the shop is applying solvent-based paints, but “we are ready with our paint booth to go forward with water if we choose,” he continues. “We get excellent color matches with solvent, and with the infrared drying units, can fully cure the coating in 10 minutes. We believe that waterborne is going to always be a choice, as opposed to being mandated as we once thought. If we make the change to water, with the infrared units we will be able to dry it in 6 minutes without air movement. How cool is that?”

Other equipment innovations include a bumper rack designed by Lupinek that attaches to an automatic garage door opener suspended from the ceiling. “In essence we’ve added an extra bay by utilizing the bumper rack. We also use induction heating to remove glass from cars.”

Much time is spent on planning to maximize an already-efficient repair process. Cars to be worked on Monday are dropped off Sunday night. “They are cleaned and arranged in the shop in a way that makes the repair process flow smoothly. Every night, the shop is rearranged and cleaned for efficiency.”

A team effort

Lupinek’s wife Carol serves as office manager, and the couple takes pride in operating the business as a team. “We are together all the time and enjoy it

immensely,” says Eddie. “We work hard together and play hard together. It is great to be on the same page as your partner – we motivate each other.”

That same attitude extends to the staff. “We appreciate their feedback and opinions,” he says. “Every one of my employees is unique in their own way and they are important to me; they are treated with respect and paid as fairly as possible.”

Word-of-mouth has proven to be the best recruitment technique. “Once we hire someone, they tend to stay around for years,” Lupinek reports. “We offer full benefits, even in a world that’s making it challenge to do so. We give our employees the respect they deserve and the freedom to work at their own pace. We do not micro-manage.”

The shop maintains the necessary qualifications to repair numerous specialized nameplates, and ensures techs meet ongoing education and training required.

In return, Eddie and Carol reap the benefits of a highly motivated, content and professional workforce eager to please the clientele. “Customer service is what drives new customers to the door,” says Lupinek. “Our employees take pride in their work and know the importance of a happy customer.”

A consultant has been retained to increase Eddie’s Internet presence through an updated website – upon which the company already publicly posts its labor rates, search engine optimization and participation in Facebook.

“The way to attract new customers in today’s environment is to reach out to them via social media,” Lupinek says, citing the importance of the online augmentation efforts. “In addition, we believe that every day we increase our sales by having happy customers. People talk to people. We get many recommendations and referrals from happy customers. We are often surprised at how far a person will travel based on a referral from a friend.”

The company’s vehicles bear the Eddie’s name and logo, and advertising is placed on restaurant placemats, roadmaps and at the local theater and movie house. Ad space is also purchased in area newspapers, magazines and other publications. An ambitious and varied program of charitable donations is also in play, although Lupinek points out that “the biggest service I do for my community is fix their cars.

Because we have so very little personal time, we contribute to our town and state the best way we can, and that’s by making monetary donations to their causes.”

Rocking the industry

Forthright communication combines with the shop’s efficiencies to ease the parts procurement process. “Whatever I can do to save time for my suppliers will save them money and allow them to profit,” he observes. “If their costs are lower, they can sell it to me lower, too. It’s a win-win situation.”

And the vendors are not delivering components produced by the aftermarket; it’s been six years since a non-OEM part has been affixed to a customer’s car. Issues with fit, form and function solidified a reliance on components from automakers’ factories. “My belief is that when you knowingly substitute a part of lesser quality, you are then cheating an unsuspecting customer. You are committing fraud. I will not do that to my customers for the benefit of the insurance companies.”

Eddie’s participates in zero direct repair programs (DRPs), and has no desire to do so.

“When the programs first started, we had eight DRPs,” Lupinek recounts. “Then the insurance companies started pushing aftermarket parts. I was forced to choose who my customer was going to be – the insurance company or the people. I chose to eliminate the DRPs so that I could maintain an honest relationship with my customers and continue telling the truth.”

An arrangement with Consumer Reports magazine had the shop taking part in the publication’s damage analysis processes, along with providing auto body repairs when needed for the nearby test facility. “We get to see a sampling of all



IMAGE / EDDIE'S AUTO BODY





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IMAGES: EDDIE'S AUTO BODY

Eddie's was established in 1956 after Lupinek's father, Edward L. Lupinek, mustered out of the Army. The younger Eddie grew up in the business, even waiting for his kindergarten bus at the facility. As time went on, he spent many years in the bays and attending schools and seminars on how to properly run a body shop.

"As our business grew we needed more space, and in 1985 we built a new shop and moved into it. In 1992 my father retired to Florida and I bought the business," he reports. "We have had steady growth, and in the last six years since my wife has come into the business we have been consistently making improvements to how we do business." 📶

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the new stuff that is coming out from the OEs." Lupinek also assisted in a review of the aftermarket parts segment.

"The idea to test was mine; they chose the cars and the tests," he says. "[The editors] are very serious about their testing and reporting their true findings. Reporting the truth is their only goal," says Lupinek.

Reaching for excellence

A past-president of the Auto Body Association of Connecticut (ABAC), Lupinek enjoys networking with industry colleagues. "I learn from everyone and try to understand other people's point of view, even if I don't agree. I get together with other shop owners; we are always learning from each other."

PROFIT MOTIVE: YOUR COMPASS TO FINANCIAL SUCCESS

Standardize to meet expectations

Ensure consistency and repeatable quality for your customers

BY TOM MCGEE | CONTRIBUTING EDITOR

To remain competitive today, collision repair businesses are required to make a tremendous number of changes in their operations. Some are being driven by changes in vehicle technology, while others are driven by relationships that the shop has with insurers.

Regardless of what is driving change, stronger shops today are focused on standardizing their procedures and processes both in the front office and the shop. This helps ensure that the repair process is consistent and repeatable.

I always recommend shop owners create standard operating procedures (SOPs). You want to make sure you are providing a quality repair and a positive customer experience. Most of your business customers don't know what to expect throughout the repair process; and losing the use of their vehicle can create a difficult situation for many families.

One of the keys to providing a positive customer experience is to educate them on the repair process and what needs to be done to properly repair their vehicle. This must be put into terms they will understand, not the terms that come out of the estimating system you use. Provide the right amount of communication in the manner that your customer wants to receive it.

Recently, my family had to have several vehicles repaired due to collisions. Each vehicle was repaired at a different business, but there were some commonalities — the communication to the vehicle owner was inconsistent.

With one vehicle, the shop asked how I wished to receive updates on the repair status: phone, email or text. I chose text, but all further communication was done by phone, not text.

With the next vehicle, the shop asked if receiving repair status updates through text would be acceptable. I agreed text would be preferred. Again, the shop set an expectation and then didn't follow through.

I received a call providing preliminary repair costs, but they didn't have all part prices or an expected delivery date. I received another call informing me that the parts had been ordered, but they were still unable to provide an expected delivery date.

Eight days from the time they received the vehicle, I received my first text message, advising that the shop would be sending repair status updates and a survey. Seeing that I had not yet been provided with an expected delivery date, I wasn't pleased to get a message focused on the CSI survey.

Throughout the next several days, the text messages provided me with a percentage of repairs completed, an update on expected delivery date, a notification that repairs had been completed and two thank

you messages. These were great from a communication process viewpoint, but the expected delivery date in the text was six days later than what I was originally told.

When you set an expectation with your customer, it is critical to meet or exceed that expectation. Don't set an estimated delivery date until you know exactly what is wrong with the vehicle and have expected delivery dates of the required parts. Make sure that you are communicating with the customer in terms that they will understand. Then meet or exceed the expected delivery date that you set!

Setting an expectation that you will provide updates throughout the repair process should be a high priority. Again, if the expectation is that a text will be provided every two days, make sure that is happening.

Sell your business when customers pick up their vehicles. Make sure to explain what was done, your warranties, what to do if they have any questions; and thank them for their business! Don't let your customers leave with only, "A third party will be contacting you and please give us a 10."

If you click atlinetraining.com/abrn1306, you can see an outline for a Standard Operating Procedure that I have created that may help you provide great communication to your customers.

Tom McGee is Director of ATI Collision for the Automotive Training Institute, founded in 1974. ATI's 99 associates train and coach more than 1,150 shops across North America to drive profits and dreams home to their families. You can contact Tom at tmcgee@autotraining.net and visit ATI's website at www.autotraining.net.

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TRAINING # IN FOCUS

PAINTING
PLASTIC
PARTSSPECIAL PROCEDURES AND
PRECAUTIONS SET PAINTING PLASTIC APART
FROM CONVENTIONAL TECHNIQUES

BY AL THOMAS | CONTRIBUTING EDITOR

What is so different about painting plastic parts (Fig 1)? Don't you use the same procedures and techniques as you do when you paint other parts of the car? To those who may wonder, the answer to that is both yes and no. Many of the techniques that are used for painting plastic parts are extremely similar to the way other things are painted every day. The parts need to be cleaned, sanded and scuffed, primed or sealed, inspected for any imperfections, have basecoat applied then be clear-coated. So what's the big difference?

Although painting plastic employs many of the same techniques used when painting other types of materials, there are also special procedures and precautions to use when painting plastic to ensure a long lasting quality finish. In fact, almost every automotive or paint manufacturer provides special instructions that should be followed when finishing plastic. These special instructions differ for finishing new unprimed plastic, new primed parts, repaired plastic and also for refinishing undamaged, previously finished products. The stages of painting plastic, while similar to painting steel, involve many specific steps and products that

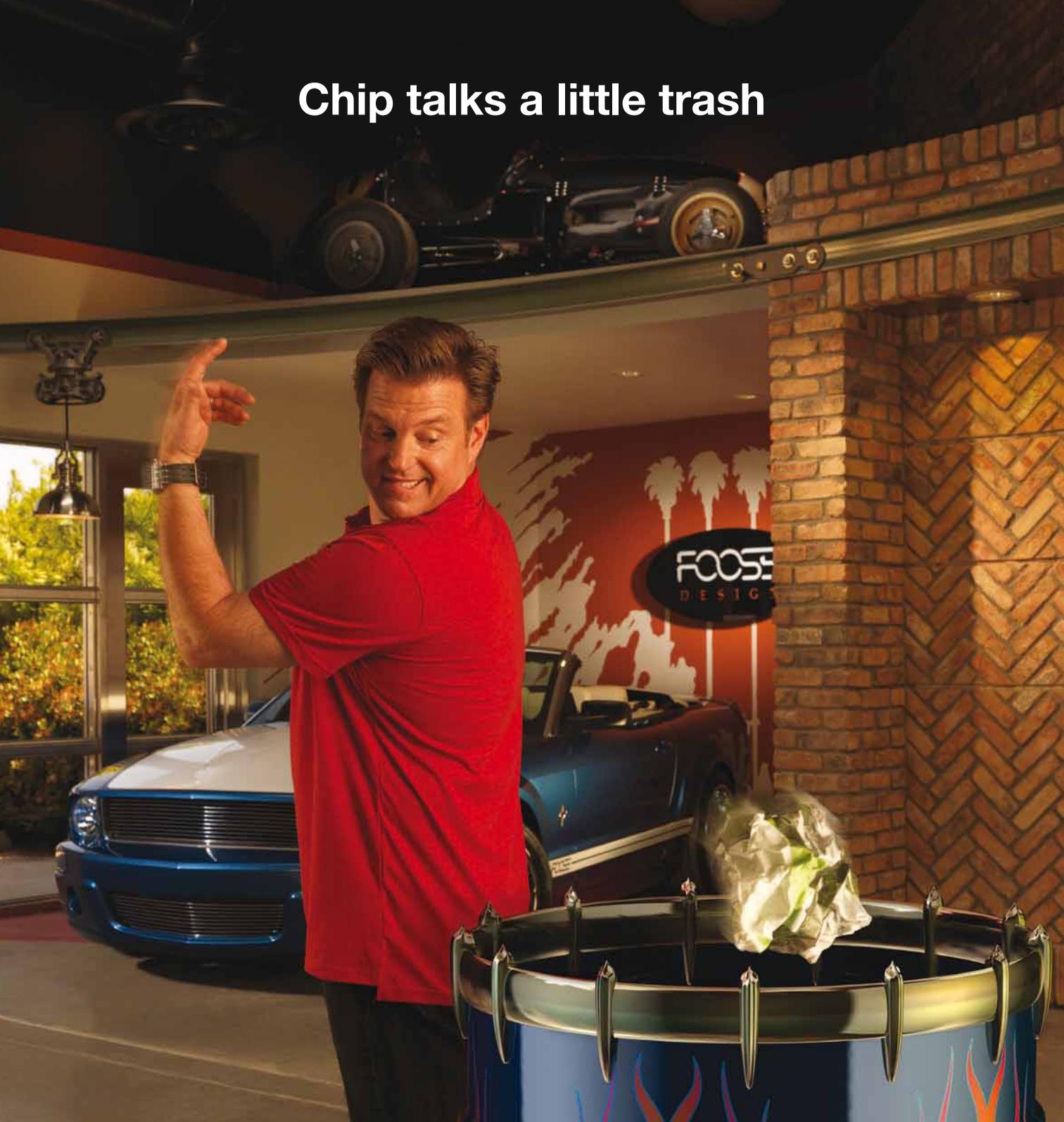
must be used to ensure the type of high quality and longevity that is demanded in today's collision repair market.

The type of plastic being painted will vary, and identifying which type of plastic you'll be painting is critical for a good paint job. Though we use the general term "plastic" to identify many different non-metal parts, there is a staggering array of plastics used in manufacturing a vehicle.

Many flexible parts on a vehicle, such as front and rear fascia, are made of a thermoplastic material that, when heated, will become even more flexible. In contrast, mirrors and grilles are made with a thermoset plastic that does not soften when heated. Parts can also be made from many different compounds such as Thermoplastic Olefin (TPO), Polyurethane (TPUR), Acrylonitrilebutadiene-Styrene (ABS), Sheet moldable compound (SMC), or Fiber Reinforced Plastic (FRP), just to name a few. Plastic parts have a plastic identification ISO code molded into the back that identifies the type of plastic the part was made from. Parts that are made from Olefin Polymers must have an adhesion promoter used before refinishing to assure that the finish will not delaminate later.



Chip talks a little trash



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Painting primed plastic parts

Many of the steps that will be taken in painting parts are similar for all the different types of plastic substrates. Cleaning is one of them, and it is one of the more critical steps when dealing with plastic parts. During the manufacturing of all plastic parts, a substance known as mold release agent is applied so that the new plastic part can be easily removed from the mold it is cast in. And though this mold release agent is very helpful when manufacturing a new part, it can be very troublesome when it comes time to paint that part.

Cleaning

As with any surface preparation, the first step is soap and water washing (Fig 2). The difference with plastics parts is that the water should be hot; one paint manufacturer recommends that the water be as hot as the technician can stand, to help dissolve the water-soluble contaminants. In addition, because mold release agents are on all surfaces of the part, it should be washed both inside and out, to avoid transferring the contaminants later when moving the part. The soap should be a Ph.-neutral automotive soap to avoid contaminants found in other types of soaps. To be sure that the part has had all the mold release agent removed, the technician should take note of the clear water that he or she used for rinsing the part. If the water beads (Fig 3), all the release agent has not been removed, and the part should be re-washed. But if the water sheets off (Fig 4), it's likely that all the release agent has been removed, and the technician can proceed to the next step. That step is chemical cleaning; plastic parts should be cleaned with an isopropyl alcohol, which will remove any non-water-soluble mold release agents. The third step is to clean with a wax and grease remover to remove other non-mold-release-agent contaminants. Remember that a thorough cleaning of both the inside and outside of the new part is necessary to prevent re-contaminating the surface of the part.

After the three-step cleaning process, the part should be inspected for

cleanliness. If you suspect that the part is not completely clean, when the part is dry, the technician should use a gloved finger to lightly drag the surface for about 6 inches. If contaminants remain, a trail from the finger will be noticeable, and the cleaning process should be repeated.

Sanding/scuffing

Plastic substrate is one of the softest materials that technicians repair for paint, and special care must be taken when choosing the abrasive for this process. A common mistake when preparing plastic parts for paint, especially soft olefin plastic parts, is the choice of abrasive. While thorough sanding is essential, the choice of abrasive is also critical. Avoid using coarse and aggressive paper: P-320 or even P-400 is far too aggressive for soft plastic surfaces. If you choose to use paper, it should be P-800 to P-1000 grit. A better method, though, is to use a gray abrasive pad with sanding paste. (Red abrasive pads are too aggressive for soft plastic.) There are many sanding pastes to choose from, but the types that are designed specifically for plastic scuffing are the best. The sanding paste helps lubricate the gray pad as it is used, lengthens the pad's usefulness, and helps keep the surface clean as the part is scuffed. By scuffing the surface wet with sanding paste, (Fig 5) the part will not take on a static charge during the scuffing process.

Caution: Some technicians make the mistake of combining the scuffing and cleaning processes. If the surface is not completely cleaned before the surface is scuffed, the contaminants will be driven into the scratch marks made by the abrasive pads. The contaminants then become even more difficult to remove. The technician who believes he is saving time by combining the two steps is in fact creating more time-consuming work, as well as the possibility of paint defects or failure.

One of the more critical steps with plastic preparation, especially after using a sanding paste, is the removal of all residue from the sanding process. The part should be rinsed thoroughly





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 DALE SPRADLEY KIA STEPHANIE THOMPSON
 LARRY GEWEKE KIA BRAD GUYNES
 SHAWNEE MISSION KIA OF LAWRENCE DARIN DENNING





with large amounts of warm water, using a clean cloth to go over the scuffed areas, making sure that no sanding paste film or sanding residue remains. The part should also be dried, which is often done with compressed air — although my choice has become an air amplifier (Fig 6), the type that is used for waterborne paint; it seems to dry the parts quicker. The prepared part should have a clean, uniformly dull sheen. If any shiny spots remain, the scuffing should be repeated. When sanding has been completed, the part should be placed in a holding fixture (Fig 7) so that it will be painted in the same position as it would be on the vehicle. This procedure is used to assure that any metallic in the paint will be sprayed in the proper orientation, thus producing a better color match. Parts sprayed out of position may reveal metallic orientation problems once they are attached on the vehicle. Often when the metallic orientation is different, the paint that would otherwise match well may not appear to match properly. A parts stand that holds the part in its proper position will help with correct metallic orientation when the part is placed on the vehicle. Not all holding fixtures are created equal, and although they are designed to hold most bumper configurations, it is always tragic if a part, for whatever reason, slips out of

the holding device. Therefore it has become my practice to use plastic tie wraps to secure the part in place, just to be sure (Fig 8).

Sealing

This new, primed part is now ready for sealing. The part should be thoroughly inspected for any imperfections that may have been missed. Then, if there are no spots that have broken through, the sealer should be applied according to its manufacturer’s recommendations. Flex additives are agents that can be added to a coating to increase its flexibility, though there has been some controversy regarding their use.

Some argue that when used, flex additives only provide extra flexibility to the topcoat for a short time, and that if the part is painted on the vehicle, flex additives are not necessary. Others state that the flexibility remains for long periods of time, and therefore all coatings should have flex additives added. I have even heard that if flex additives are added to primer or sealer, they make the coating a chip-resistant coating. (However, I have not been able to find a single paint manufacturer that supports this claim.)

The safest recommendation regarding flex agents is that all paint manufacturers’ recommendations should be followed. If your system recommends

that flex additives be placed in the primer, sealer or basecoat before application to a flexible part, that guideline should be followed.

When applying any coating to a plastic part (Fig 9) that has many curves, indentations or even holes for lights, it can be difficult to apply the coating evenly.

Color, clearcoat application

After the sealer has been allowed to flash its recommended time, a color coat can be applied. Though the application process of applying color coat to a plastic part is no different, it is sometimes more difficult. The part has many varied surfaces that can be difficult to paint with a uniformly even coat. And as stated above, it can be difficult to apply an even coat to a plastic part.

In addition, good gun control is critical for uniform color appearance and proper metallic orientation (Fig 10). Making sure that the gun is held perpendicular to the part being painted requires dexterity, as the different levels of the surface result in many position changes.

One of the techniques used by many techs to assure that the deep cavities have sufficient coating is to apply the coating, at least partially, from the back. This should also be done when applying color coat (Fig 11).



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Clearcoat

Once the base coat has flashed, application of clearcoat can be performed. As has been mentioned, getting a uniform covering to such a diversely shaped object can be difficult. Because at this point metallic orientation is no longer a concern, the part can be sprayed in an upright position, which allows gravity to help coat the inner surface better. Most good holding devices are capable of letting the part be moved into a horizontal position, and the clearcoat is then applied with somewhat less difficulty as gravity helps it flow (Fig 12).

Painting new unprimed parts

Although the painting of a new, unprimed part is very similar to that of painting any unprimed part, the main concern becomes its cleaning and scuffing. An unprimed part (Fig 13) also is more likely to have mold release agent remaining from its manufacturing. It is cleaned using the three-step method mentioned before, but special care must be taken to assure that the cleaning is done completely, both inside and out, checking carefully for any residue that might be left.

Once the technician is a sure that all mold release agent has been removed, he or she can proceed to the scuffing process. A technique sometimes used to bring any mold release agent to the surface for easier cleaning is to bake the new part in the paint booth at 140° for 40 minutes. This helps consolidate the mold release agent, and subsequently it is easier to clean.

Scuffing is done in the same manner as explained earlier, with gray Scotch-brite and sanding paste, and is rinsed and cleaned with large amounts of water, leaving the now slightly rough finish that an adhesion promoter can be applied to. Although not all plastics require an adhesion promoter, most bumpers are made from polyolefin plastics, which do. Identification of the plastic is required to determine whether an adhesion promot-



13



14



15

er is necessary. Because plastic easily takes on a static charge and plastic parts with a static charge attract dust, an anti-static agent should be sprayed on. The next step is to apply adhesion promoter to the prepared plastic. Any plastic made from Thermoplastic polyolefin is inherently difficult to paint. Because adhesion is difficult, all olefin parts must be sprayed with an adhesion promoter, which will allow the plastic and a coating applied over it to coalesce, or fuse together. Olefins that are not treated with an adhesion promoter often result in the finish delaminating in large sheets following painting. Depending on the paint system that you're using, you should read and follow the instructions provided by the

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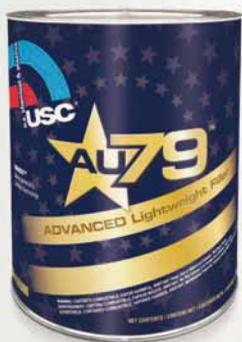
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paint manufacturer for the proper application of adhesion promotion.

If no repairs are necessary, then sealing, basecoat application and clear application are done as outlined earlier.

Repaired plastic parts prep

A repaired plastic part presents a challenge in that it is truly two different surfaces: the raw or newly repaired plastic and the non-repaired, previously painted part (Fig 14). The newly repaired area on the part should be treated like a new raw plastic part: it should be triple cleaned, sanded and have the repair edge feathered as needed (Fig 15) for application of primer filler. If your paint manufacturer recommends the adding of flex additive to primer filler or if special plastic primer filler is recommended, the recommendations should be followed. Before applying

the primer, adhesion promoter should be applied to the newly repaired area; it should be extended slightly over the feathered edge to assure full coverage of the raw plastic. When the repair has been blocked and the remaining areas scuffed and prepared for paint, the part should be cleaned and anti-static agent applied. The part can then be sealed as needed, and color- and clear-coated in the normal fashion.

Previously finished parts do not need adhesion promoter applied if no defects are found when cleaning and scuffing; but these parts should still be cleaned thoroughly, because the tech does not know how well they were cleaned before their original painting. They should be triple cleaned, scuffed, re-cleaned, have anti-static applied and then be painted normally.

Two controversial topics remain that must be covered when talking

about the painting of plastic parts. They are the baking of new plastic parts and tacking the part after the spraying of anti-static agents. Two cautions should be included in this area: the first is that when cleaning raw plastic, which includes newly repaired raw plastic, a wax and grease remover specifically formulated for cleaning raw plastic should be used. Wax and grease removers, which are used normally on non-plastic substrates, are easily absorbed by raw unpainted plastic. This causes the plastic to swell, which will result in contra mapping (bull's eye) following refinishing.

The second caution regards static electricity. Plastic, both thermoset and thermoplastic, will quickly become statically charged. It is charged by rubbing cleaning cloths (either cloth or paper) over its surface. It will also be charged by rubbing a tack cloth over it. Some painters will spray a plastic part with anti-static agent after it has been completely cleaned and tacked, and then never tack it again throughout the painting process. By not tacking it, they do not add static charge, which will attract dirt. However, sometimes in spite of efforts to avoid it, a plastic surface will collect particles that require tacking during the operation. If tacking is necessary, very light tacking between color coats may only add a minimal amount of static.

As an alternative, a steel parts stand that is grounded on the steel grates of a booth floor may help eliminate any charge that may be added by tacking after the anti-static agent is applied. In booths with no steel grate, the tech could wet the concrete floor so the stand would be grounded. Paint technicians must use their experience and consider their options when deciding to tack after applying anti-static agents.

Though it might seem at first that painting plastic correctly is a long and complicated process, once a standard operation procedure is set up and the shop has all the necessary products at hand, the process will actually go very quickly. Painting plastic correctly the first time will eliminate costly repairs later and will help promote customers for life. 



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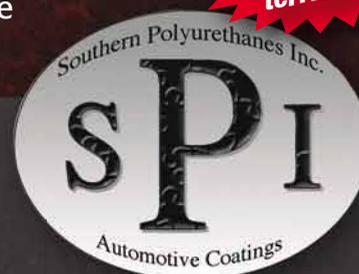
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With the right technique and plenty of hard work, automotive clay can help remove water marks and oxidation.

IMAGE / TIM SRAMCIK

BY **TIM SRAMCIK** | CONTRIBUTING EDITOR

View the situation from your customers' eyes. You own a vehicle that's not new, but one you've taken great care of. You've kept up with the vehicle maintenance schedule, regularly washed and waxed the finish and cared for the interior like a first-born child.

The vehicle runs great, the interior is like-new, but even with all this work, the finish suffers from some of the same problems you'd see on a vehicle that received little care — water marks, scratches, paint bubbles and damage from bird droppings, tar and other harsh substances. When you talk to your local body shop, they recommend a new paint job, which your wallet can't accommodate. Or, your vehicle is in a collision and is repaired, but because new paint isn't warranted, you're stuck with a like-new repair wrapped in a less-than-inspiring package.

You and these customers share the same problem. They want an affordable, good-looking finish, and you want the work. Meet them halfway with a trip to your detail department.

The latest tools, equipment and practices in the detailing industry can handle paint repairs that once were automatically turned over to your paint department. A detailing

solution can help you capture business that once passed by your door and build a customer base that will come back regularly for detailing work and potentially a whole lot more.

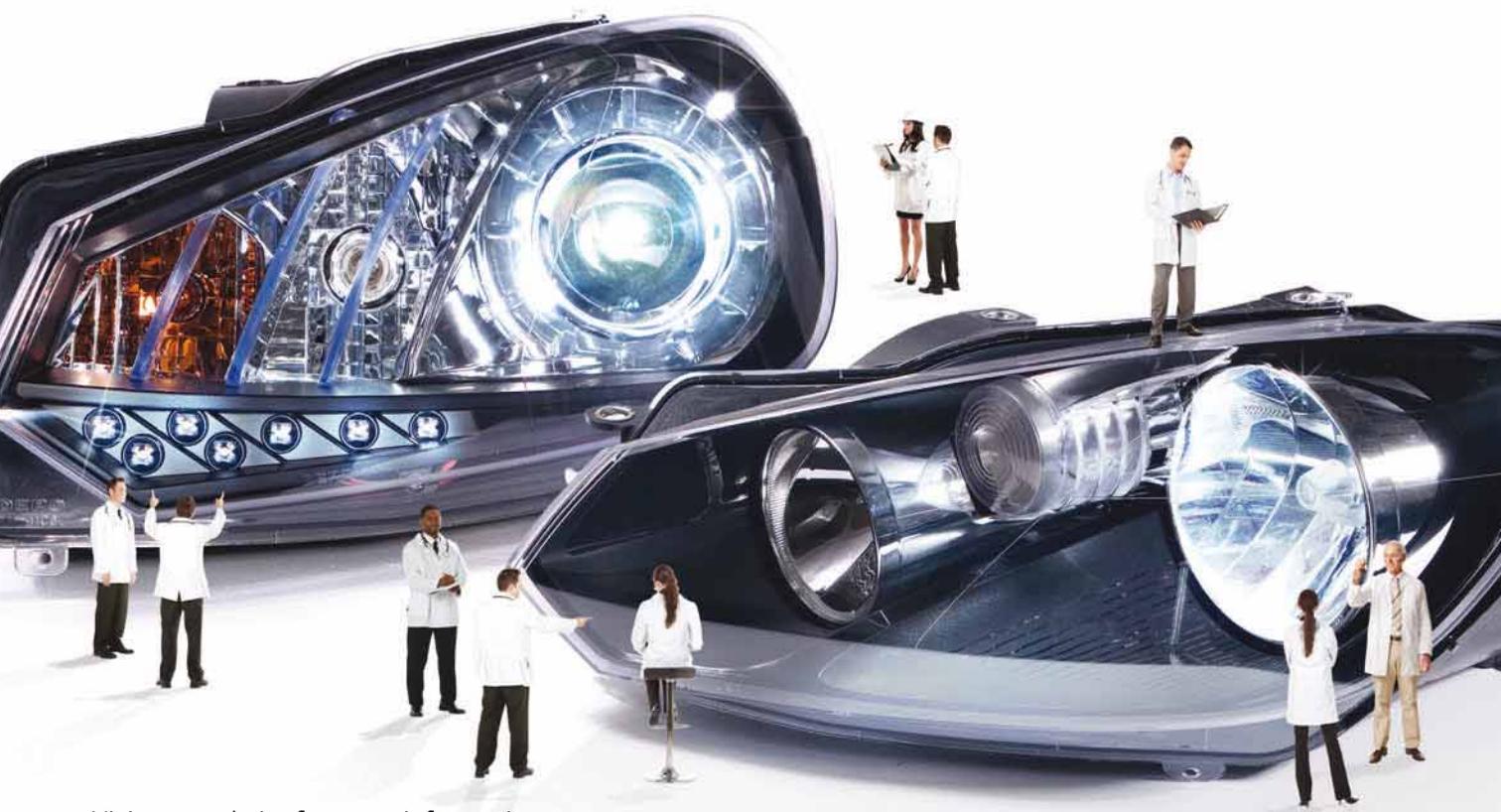
Let's examine how three of the most common of these paint repairs are conducted.

Scratches

When it comes to repairing scratches, deep scratches (those breaking the clear coat) must be turned over to your paint department. Fine scratches are ideal candidates for detail repairs, since most can be buffed out. An effective and attractive repair involves more than just some polish and a buffer, since fine scratches can be resistant to buffing. A better solution, especially for vehicles with a number of scratches, is removing a thin layer of the clear coat to thoroughly remove the scratches.



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Fine scratches, even when they cover large areas of a vehicle's finish, are excellent candidates for detailing repairs.



Water marks can wreak havoc on a finish. With the right products and techniques, they can be erased.



Oxidation damages like this can be removed and the fresh finish protected using the latest detailing products.

This can be daunting. The good news is the latest professional scratch repair systems allow this damage to be repaired quickly and easily, while producing a new-finish look. Most systems feature rubbing compound, abrasive pads, a scratch remover product and a polishing pad. All you need is a microfiber cloth, spray bottle with water, along with a buffer/polisher or, for some kits, a power drill.

Most kits utilize the same basic steps:

1. Prepare the scratch area(s) by cleaning and removing grit or dirt.

2. Sand the scratch area(s) by hand with the abrasive pad until the scratches are no longer visible.

3. Buff the sanded area with the rubbing compound to ensure all scratches are removed from the surface.

4. Pour the scratch-removing product on the black polishing pad and polish the entire area until it reaches the desired level of shine.

5. Complete the repair by applying a quality wax.

Water marks

Following scratches, water marks are the second most common type of paint damage your detailers can repair. These marks aren't caused by water itself, but by minerals in the water that remain after the water has evaporated.

There are two kinds of water marks: above-the-surface deposits and below-the-surface etchings. With the first type, the mineral binds with the finish, usually in a circular pattern. The second type involves a mineral that is caustic enough to eat through the paint.

You may not be able to tell one type of water mark from the other with a visual inspection. You'll distinguish the two types during the repair process.

Start by washing the vehicle using a high-quality car wash product to remove any loose contaminants and to erase any portion of the mineral deposit that hasn't bonded to the paint. Dry the vehicle thoroughly. This is particularly important since the first type of water mark often are produced by washing a vehicle without drying it properly.

Apply automotive surface clay to the water mark areas. Typically, you'll mix the clay with water and roll it into a pancake shape, then rub it into the affected area. Some clay products require an additional lubricating product between the clay and the finish.

The clay removes the water marks by breaking up the minerals on the surface of the finish, which then become lodged in the clay. Since the minerals are now lodged in the clay, make sure they aren't reapplied to the finish by folding the clay into itself and then rolling out another pancake shape. If you're using a lubricant such as a polisher with the clay, continually wipe it off with a microfiber cloth.

Stop claying once the finish appears clean and feels as smooth as a piece of glass. Any marks that remain — usually appearing as trace outlines in the finish — are below the surface etchings.

Remove these marks with a paint cleaner. Use either an applicator pad or, for larger jobs, a dual-action polisher. Apply the cleaner to the pad and polish the area(s) until all the trace outlines have completely disappeared.

Always complete this repair by applying a new coat of wax, since any existing wax will be removed by the claying.

Oxidation

Paint oxidation is the product both of sun-damaged paint and the dirt that collects on it. The most severe cases will require a new paint job. There's a chance your customers gave up trying to repair the paint themselves because they either applied rubbing compound (which can make the repair look even worse at first) or saw little improvement in the finish after their efforts to fix it.

Good detailers are better prepared to handle this work and they'll use the products and practices that will complete this work in the fastest manner.

The first step here is using a quality auto wash to scrub away the paint particles and dirt. The finish needs a thorough cleaning, one that could require several washings.

The next step is to clay the finish, using the same technique you use to remove water marks. Remember to continually fold the clay in on itself and reform it into a patty to avoid having removed particles damage the paint.

Next, polish the finish using a dual-action polisher and a cutting polish. This removes a thin layer of paint, allowing a fresh, shiny layer to reach the surface. Polish again using a dual-action polisher and a finishing polisher.

When the polishing is complete, the finish should appear like new, but your work isn't done. Oxidation happens when a finish isn't properly sealed and protected. Complete the job by applying a sealant product.

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Look again at the types of damage we've repaired here: scratches, water marks and oxidation. Most of this damage is caused by lack of quality preventative care for the finish. This damage occurs because many customers either don't know it's preventable or they simply don't have the time to perform this kind of vehicle care – something you do.

Therefore, no paint repair job or collision repair should be complete without an attempt to sell your customers on future detail work or products. Consider putting together detailing packages or similar marketing efforts. Some shops offer free car washes to get vehicles through the door. Do the same and throw in an inspection by your detailing department who can make service recommendations.

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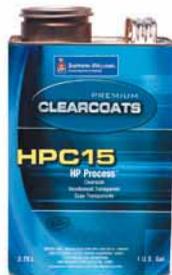
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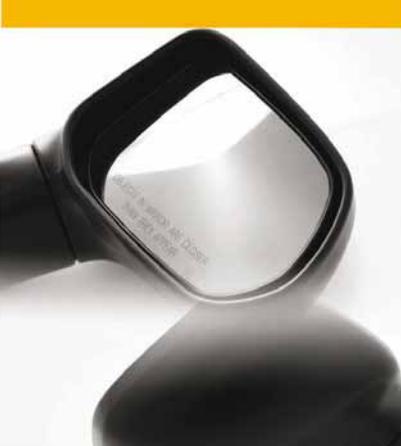


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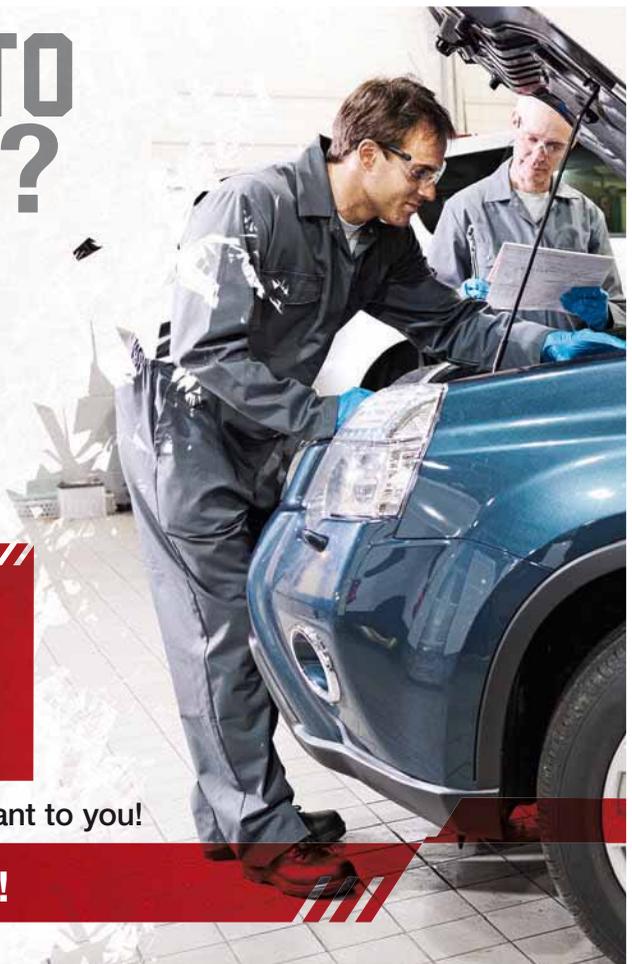
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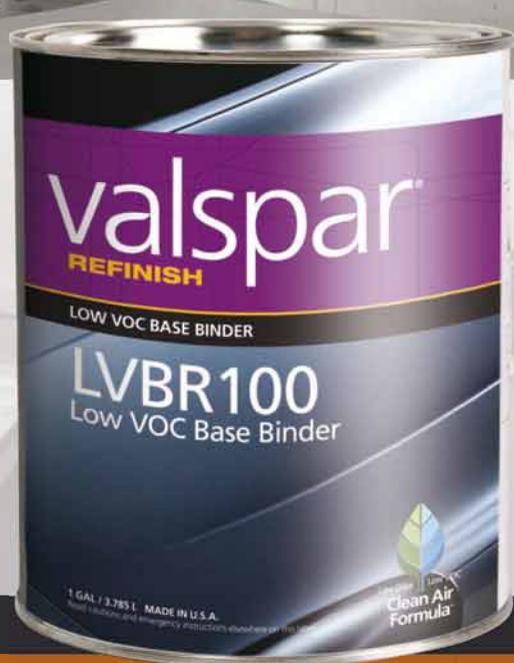
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THE LAST DETAIL 

I'm frankly amazed that shops still sometimes contend with insurers who seem to think that a two-wheel alignment is sufficient for a collision-damaged vehicle, or that the flat rate charged by a local tire shop is appropriate compensation for the far more complex process of aligning a vehicle post-repair.

I posed this issue to some of my friends in the industry who are knowledgeable about the technical and business sides of the equation, and thought that sharing their responses could help shops dealing with this on a day-to-day basis.

"General maintenance wheel alignments are nothing more than check the air pressure, set the toe and then let it go," said Larry Montanez, a long-time technical trainer in the industry whose credentials could fill the rest of this column. "But collision-damaged vehicles require an all-wheel alignment. The rear wheels or thrust angle are first set, then the front wheels are aligned off the rear wheels."

Montanez points out that alignment process can also require aligning back-up cameras or headlamps to the steering angle sensor, resetting or adjusting the automatic load-leveling air-ride suspension or the lane-departure or other anti-collision systems.

"Tire store alignments versus one that properly aligns a vehicle on which suspension parts have been replaced or changes have been made to the structural dimensions of the vehicle are just not the same animal," agreed Phil Mosley, general manager of DC Autocraft in Burbank, Calif., a shop with 11 automaker certifications. "Tire store alignments are not used to diagnose collision damage or confirm proper repairs. A post-collision alignment requires that the tech has an adequate understanding of suspension geometry and geometry analytics. He has to know his stuff and be able to think in an analytical way. He has to be more than a tire jockey."

"Most wheel alignment angles can be adjusted the equivalent of 1 to 3 millimeters or may have no adjustment or all, which means the vehicle structure must be correct," Montanez added. "During a collision event, the vehicle suffers a lot of flexing and movement, including to suspension components on the opposite end of the collision from the impact. These suspension components generally do not flex back to their original shape. This is why every collision-damaged vehicle that has been on a structural realignment apparatus should have an all-wheel alignment check. The drivability and stability of the vehicle depends on the wheel alignment. It is paramount that it is performed correctly."

“The driveability and stability of the vehicle depends on the wheel alignment. It is paramount that it is performed correctly.”

NOT JUST 'SET THE TOE AND LET IT GO'

Post-collision alignments are complex, critical; shops should be compensated accordingly

Barrett Smith of Auto Damage Experts in Dover, Fla., argues that the complexity and critical nature of post-collision alignments is one of the reasons collision shops should be equipped to do them in-house.

"This gives the repairer total control over the equipment calibration and accuracy," he said.

Everyone I heard from agreed that charges for post-collision alignments should be based on "book time" (or appropriate mark-up of a sublet charge), not based on what a tire shop charges for a simple alignment after throwing on some tires.

"Repairers should assess higher labor rates for the investment of equipment and technical ability required, just as a hospital assesses a higher fee for use of MRI-scan equipment over conventional X-ray equipment," Smith said. "Just as a hospital assesses a professional fee for the radiologist to read the results and provide a written narrative to the treating physician, a shop should assess a fee for their trained alignment tech to offer a professional diagnosis of the vehicle to the blueprinter or technician assigned to the vehicle."

"The database is the basis on which the estimate is calculated. The insurance company owes database time for alignments, which is designated as 'mechanical.' Not negotiable," Paul Spencer of Babbco Auto Collision in Lake Worth, Fla., told me. "The insurance company cannot make up its own dollar figure just to suit its own agenda. Except for my DRPs, I get paid database time at the mechanical rate for alignments."

"I argue: 'Are we using the estimating system data or are we not,'" Mosley agreed. "It's incongruous for the insurer to stick to 'the book' when it suits them and forget about 'the book' when it suits them. 'Do or do not,' to quote Yoda."

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Mike Anderson, a former shop owner, currently operates COLLISIONADVICE.COM, a training and consulting firm. He also acts as a facilitator for DuPont Performance Services' Business Council 20-groups.

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