



MOTORIST ASSURANCE PROGRAM

STANDARDS FOR AUTOMOTIVE REPAIR

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How to Get Satisfaction from an Auto Repair Shop

You climb into your car with a sense of relief and elation after the repair shop says, "Here are the keys...you're all set." Half way out of the driveway you realize something's not right. "Hey, it's still making that funny noise! What's going on here?"

Of course, most shops do good work, but now and then you run into a problem. What do you do?

"Most people get so mad, they want to call their mayor, their state attorney general, and their member of Congress to somehow stick it to the shop," observed Lawrence Hecker, president of the non-profit Motorist Assurance Program (MAP). "Unfortunately, those are all the wrong people to talk with, at least at first."

The first place to complain: the shop itself. "If you have a problem or you're not satisfied, first go back and talk with the shop technician," advised Hecker. "If that doesn't resolve the situation, talk with the manager. He or she can resolve most problems."

For situations that remain unresolved after a conversation with shop personnel, Hecker suggests going to

the regional manager (or similar position) of the company, assuming it's a national or regional firm. Most have toll-free numbers to facilitate customer contacts. They're available at the store, or on your receipt.

"Solving the complaint within the company is the quickest, easiest route," Hecker explained. "Ultimately, it's the company who has to make good on the deal, so if a consumer goes outside to complain initially, the company doesn't have a full opportunity to use its own (usually effective) system for resolving customer complaints. They don't want to lose a customer's business, and they do want to be alerted to problems at a shop that could affect other consumers."

All of that makes sense, but what if Murphy's Law strikes and the company ignores you or otherwise really bungles things? "Worst case, go to the Better Business Bureau (BBB) or the consumer affairs department of your local government," advised Hecker. "The BBB has a consumer mediation and arbitration process that usually succeeds in bringing both sides together for a happy ending."

Also, check to see if the shop is accredited by the Motorist Assurance Program. MAP-accredited shops are generally less likely to have serious disputes, thanks to their use of MAP's *Uniform Inspection & Communication Standards*. In addition, in the event a consumer continues to be dissatisfied with the company's efforts to resolve a complaint, MAP-accredited shops are bound through their accreditation agreement to abide by the decision of a third-party arbitrator like the BBB. (You can locate MAP-accredited shops via the Internet at <http://www.motorist.org>.)

What about taking your complaint to the media? "Not a helpful idea," Hecker counseled. "It may feel good to vent your spleen via the airwaves, but our experience has shown that such cases often could have been much more easily solved by working with the company, or in very serious cases the local BBB or authorities."

When working with a shop to reach satisfaction, stay calm, level-headed, and clear about the problem. Speak to the person with the know-how to solve your problem...or the authority to see that it is resolved expeditiously. Don't become irate or unreasonably demanding, despite the frustration of the moment, since doing so will often prevent constructive communication and make the situation all the more difficult to resolve. Try to stay focused on reaching a solution, and make clear to the shop that you expect the same focus in return.

"Most auto repair shops really are honest and want to do right by consumers," said Hecker. "Savvy consumers know they're in the driver's seat and work with the company to get their needs met whenever possible."

Consumers can order a free copy of MAP's brochure entitled *How to Find Your Way Under the Hood and Around Your Car* by sending a self-addressed, stamped envelope to MAP, 7101 Wisconsin Avenue, Suite 1200, Bethesda, MD 20814, or via MAP's web site at <http://www.motorist.org>.