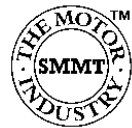


BE GARAGE WISE

*Don't get taken for a ride
when you take your car in for a service*



ENDORSED BY



CHOOSING A GARAGE

Whether you are new to driving or not, it's worth shopping around and getting quotes for parts and work on your car before choosing a garage. Ask your friends and relatives if they have any recommendations.

There are different types of garage – general servicing and mechanical repair, “fast-fit”, body repairs, engine specialists etc. – choose one which is best suited to your needs.

WHAT SHOULD YOU EXPECT FROM YOUR GARAGE?

A good garage should deal with you fairly. They will:

- ✿ have staff who know their customer service standards;
- ✿ only do what they are qualified to do;
- ✿ comply with a “code of practice” if they belong to a trade association;
- ✿ give clear details of repair options and costs if you phone them;
- ✿ agree any work with you and confirm it in writing;
- ✿ give fixed-price, written quotes (including VAT), or written estimates if quotes aren't possible;
- ✿ explain why any diagnostic work is needed to identify a problem and get your agreement to any follow-on work and costs;

- ⚙️ tell you in advance if they don't take certain types of payment (such as cheques, credit or debit cards) or if they charge for these;
- ⚙️ get your permission to go ahead if the cost is likely to exceed the estimate;
- ⚙️ explain why any replacement parts are needed;
- ⚙️ let you inspect any replaced parts or return them to you;
- ⚙️ use only new replacements unless you agree otherwise;
- ⚙️ provide full details of work done on invoices and receipts, including:
 - materials used
 - descriptions of any replacements used, if not new
 - labour charges
 - the total cost including VAT;
- ⚙️ comply with consumer protection legislation;
- ⚙️ tell you who will deal with any complaints.

If the garage won't provide this level of service, you might prefer to look elsewhere.

Remember:

the law says that any services you buy must be:

- ⚙️ ***carried out with reasonable care and skill;***
 - ⚙️ ***carried out within a reasonable time at a reasonable charge (if no charge is agreed in advance);***
- and that any goods supplied must be of satisfactory quality.***



MAKING COMPLAINTS

- ⚙️ **If you have a complaint**, raise it with the garage as soon as possible. It's only fair that they have a chance to deal with it.
- ⚙️ **Then, if you're still unhappy**, check to see if the garage belongs to a trade association. If so the garage might have failed to perform to a code of practice. You'll often find that trade associations can help in disputes.
- ⚙️ **And if that doesn't work**, a "small claims action" through the County Court may be your only option. Ask your local Citizens Advice Bureau or Trading Standards Office for advice on whether your complaint appears justified and how to proceed.

BEFORE YOUR VISIT

Does your car need a service?

Many modern cars only need a service once a year, but older cars one every six months. The manufacturer's service handbook will set what is best for your car. The type of service you need will also be affected by how you use your car. For example, lots of short journeys where the engine does not have a chance to warm up properly will probably mean more frequent oil and filter changes. A garage should be happy to discuss the particular needs of your car.

Make sure your car gets the service it needs and you want.

When speaking to a garage it is a good idea to have your vehicle details to hand and also to make a list of the work you wish to have carried out. This will help the garage decide whether it can take on the work and the list can be left with the garage as a record of what was agreed.

Routine Servicing

Ask the garage the following:

- ⚙ Will the service conform to the manufacturer's recommendations? If not, what will be different and will it affect your warranty?
- ⚙ What parts will be included in the cost of the service and what will not?

Tell the garage about any work carried out since the last service. The garage shouldn't replace any standard items not needed, though you might still wish them to be checked.

Running Faults and Repairs

Ask to speak to a mechanic or technician, such as a person qualified in car electrics, about the problem. They are most likely to be able to diagnose any faults.

Explain the problem in as much detail as you can. If you can, include when the problem occurs, for example, only when the engine is cold, or after the vehicle has been standing for a while. If it will help, ask if a mechanic can join you on a road test so you can show them what the problem is and when it happens. Make sure the faults are written down so that everyone can be sure of the work agreed to.

Confirm that:

- ⚙️ The cost includes VAT, all parts normally replaced in the service and any other parts agreed to. Confirm the details of any guarantee that comes with the work.
- ⚙️ You would like to see the replaced parts when the car is returned to you.
- ⚙️ If the garage thinks extra work or parts are needed, you must be contacted to agree to a price before it is done. Or instead, you might agree an upper level of extra costs before the garage need contact you. In this case confirm that the extra work or parts will be included on the invoice.
- ⚙️ The service details are to be recorded in you car's service book.

COLLECTING YOUR CAR

Ask to view the old replaced parts and check that:

- ⚙ The bill is for the amount agreed, or is not significantly more than any estimate you were given. Check that the work and parts are fully itemised (this will be proof of purchase if a problem occurs as a result of the work or a replaced part fails).
- ⚙ The details on any new MOT certificate are correct and that it has been correctly stamped.
- ⚙ The service record book has been stamped with the garage's stamp and that the relevant details of the service are correct.

Rather than replacing parts which are not fully worn out, a good garage will advise you when they will probably need replacing, based on the way you use your car.

CHARGES

In the end, it is for you to decide whether the charge a garage makes for parts and servicing is reasonable for you. It may also not pay in the end to go for the cheapest option. Try shopping around to see what different garages charge for the same work. When you choose a garage, be sure that charges are agreed in advance, preferably in writing.



HOW CAN YOU BE SURE IF WORK IS NEEDED?

If you don't know much about cars it can be hard to know if recommended work is really needed. A little knowledge of common problems can help.

Brakes

If replacement is recommended always insist on seeing the old pads or shoes to check the wear.

Most brake pads have an indicator – usually a line on one side. The pads should be replaced when worn down to the line. Discs are trickier but there's no need to replace them until they are worn to the manufacturer's recommended minimum width, unless they are damaged in another way.

Here are some common symptoms of brake problems.

- ◊ Unusual noise from the wheels when braking, such as squealing or grinding.
- ◊ Grinding noise from the



wheels when the brakes are **not** applied.

- ◊ Juddering when braking.
- ◊ Car pulling to one side when braking (though this can

also indicate uneven tyre pressures).

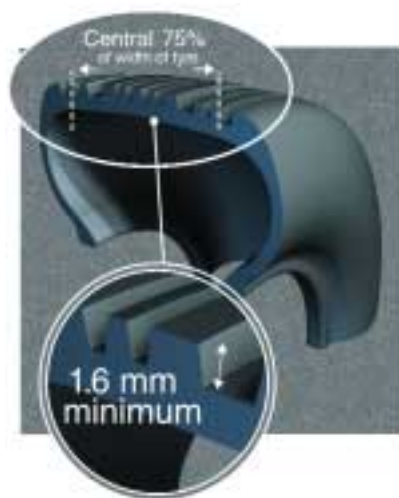
- ⦿ Less effective stopping under heavy braking or on a long downhill stretch.
- ⦿ A change in the feel of the brake pedal, such as harder or spongier.

Tyres

By law the grooves of a tyre tread must be at least 1.6mm deep in the middle three-quarters of the tyre, all the way round. 2mm is normally better for handling wet conditions.

Some car makers recommend a deeper tread for certain cars. Check your handbook to be sure.

Make sure you know what your tyre pressures should be (see your handbook) and check them fortnightly when the tyres are cold.



Types of tyre wear can mean different things:

Symptom	Possible Problem
Wear on the outer edges	Tyres under-inflated
Wear in the centre	Tyres over-inflated
Wear on one side	Wheels not properly aligned (power steering can also cause this)
Steering wobble	Wheels need balancing

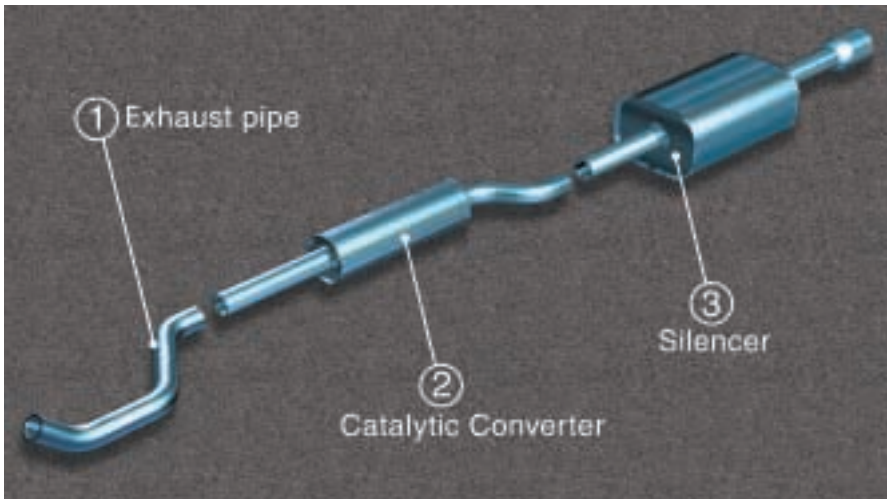
Exhaust

Exhaust problems are usually obvious from the noise made.

- ⬡ Loud roaring usually means a hole in one of the pipes.
- ⬡ Rattling can mean part of the system is loose (or that something else under the car is adrift and making contact with the pipes).

- ⬡ Tinkling or can-rattling type noise can mean a problem in the silencer.

If your exhaust isn't making any of these noises, **you should ask the garage if work really is needed**. If you're satisfied there's a problem, remember you will probably only need to replace part of the system, and not the whole exhaust.



Catalytic Converters

Unfortunately, these can be expensive and it's hard to tell if there's a problem. To be sure, it's best to get advice from an engine diagnostics specialist.

If your garage says there's a problem be sure that they are not just relying on the results of an emissions test.

Shock Absorbers

Shock absorbers reduce jolts and knocks and ensure the car can move and stop efficiently.



Here are some common symptoms of problems.

- ❖ Poor cornering and road holding.
- ❖ A rolling, uncomfortable ride on rough roads.
- ❖ Bad handling in side winds.
- ❖ Impaired braking.
- ❖ Steering vibration.

Car makers recommend that shock absorbers are replaced in pairs (front or back) to avoid uneven balance across the car.

A simple test is to push down on the corner of your car a few times then release quickly. If the corner bounces no more than one and a half times, your shock absorbers are probably fine.

WANT TO KNOW MORE?

More sources of consumer information and informative web-sites:

Department for Transport

Eland House
Bressenden Place
London SW1E 5DU
Tel: 020 7944 3000
Web: www.dft.gov.uk

Vehicle Inspectorate (VI) Headquarters and policy

Berkley House
Croydon Street
Bristol BS5 0DA
Tel: 0117 954 3200
Web: www.via.gov.uk

Office of Fair Trading

Fleetbank House
2-6 Salisbury Square
London EC4Y 8JX
Tel: 08457 22 44 99
Web: www.oft.gov.uk

Trading Standards

Trading Standards services are provided by your local authority. For contact details of your local department see your phone book or go to:
Web: www.tradingstandards.gov.uk

Which?

Tel: 08453 010 010
Web: www.which.net

The AA

www.theaa.com

The RAC

www.rac.co.uk

The Institute of the Motor Industry

Fanshaws
Brickendon
Hertford
SG13 9PQ
Tel: 01992 511521
Web: www.motor.org.uk

The Retail Motor Industry Federation Ltd

9 North Street
Rugby
Warwickshire CV21 2AB
Tel: 08457 58 53 50
Web: www.rmif.co.uk

