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Collision damage can be repaired properly

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If your vehicle has been damaged in a collision, you probably have heard this common misconception: Your vehicle will never be the same.

Chances are it wasn't your insurance company representative or an employee of a collision repair business who said this. That's because every day collision industry professionals return damaged vehicles to their previous condition, structurally and cosmetically.

So what does it take to repair your vehicle properly after an accident? Because of today's complex vehicles and high-quality paint finishes, technicians need to be properly trained in the entire repair process to achieve complete and safe repairs.

The repair process begins when a detailed estimate is prepared, indicating all of the repairs needed to restore your vehicle to proper function and appearance. In some cases, this damage assessment requires removing damaged body panels or other parts.

This results in the most accurate initial estimate possible. The parts listed on the estimate are then ordered.

The collision repair business and your insurance company should explain whether the replacement parts are new parts ordered from your vehicle's manufacturer, used parts ordered through an automobile recycler, or new parts manufactured by a company other than your vehicle's manufacturer. Your collision repair business and insurer can explain the pros and cons of using each of these types of parts.

If your vehicle was hit hard, the repair facility should use a measuring system that checks specific points of your vehicle structure against dimensions provided by the vehicle or equipment manufacturer.

The repair facility will need to measure your vehicle several times during the repair process to make sure it is within the recommended tolerances.

In most cases, this tolerance is as strict as 3 millimeters - the thickness of three dimes.

Some vehicles today require a tolerance no greater than 1 millimeter.

Whenever appropriate, original parts are repaired. Severely damaged parts need to be replaced.

A properly trained technician can repair sheet metal and plastic so that it can be difficult, if not impossible, to find any indication of damage. In some cases, parts not included on the estimate may need to be ordered during the repair process if "hidden" damage is found.

After repairs are complete, the vehicle is reassembled with all trim pieces, decals and stripes. If any new glass is needed, it is usually installed at this point.

The wheel alignment also will be checked if the collision damage was severe, if the vehicle spun, or if a tire, wheel or suspension parts were damaged in the collision. This helps to catch any potential problems with the steering and suspension parts.

Finally, your vehicle is taken to the detailing area for a thorough interior and exterior cleaning. Any minor imperfections in the new paint surface will be removed by polishing and buffing. A final inspection checks that all work meets the repair facility's standards, and the final paperwork is prepared for the vehicle owner and involved insurer.

Throughout the process, the repair business will be in contact with the insurance company handling the claim. The insurer may want to review the estimate and inspect the vehicle before or during the repair process.

In some cases, the repair facility may need to obtain insurer and vehicle owner approval before completing additional necessary repairs not included on the initial estimate.

Locating a collision repair business that will follow the above procedures is important for any vehicle owner. Insurers and collision repair business owners alike say the key is looking for evidence of properly trained technicians.

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