

This article is the archived version of a report that appeared in the [June 2009 Consumer Reports magazine](#).

People who took their car to an independent mechanic for maintenance were generally more satisfied than those who went to a dealership, according to our survey involving 349,000 vehicles.

Eighty-four percent of owners reported being very satisfied with maintenance performed at independent shops compared with 77 percent at dealerships. But they were more satisfied with the dealer service of some car brands than of others.

Among the highest-scoring dealerships were Lexus, Buick, and Acura. On the other end of the scale, Volkswagen, Suzuki, Jeep, and Nissan owners were far less satisfied with dealer service. Overall, four domestic-car dealers—Buick, Saturn, Mercury, and Cadillac—scored relatively high.

Volkswagen owners were among the least satisfied with their dealership maintenance. Still, 82 percent said they were very satisfied with maintenance performed by their independent mechanic.

Andrew Epstein, an assistant professor in New Haven, Conn., who took the survey, says the independent shop that services his 1990 Volkswagen is "very thorough and thoughtful, and always gives me a good sense of how important something is to fix."

Among owners whose cars needed repairs and maintenance, the difference in satisfaction with dealers and independent shops was even more pronounced: 75 percent were very satisfied with independents vs. just 57 percent with dealerships. Lexus, Acura, and Buick service departments came out on top, while Volkswagen and Jeep dealers rated among the lowest.

Never skip these 6 service items

Service item	Consequences of skipping service	Potential cost
Changing engine oil	Impurities and the breakdown of additives will allow sludge buildup and shorten engine life.	Up to \$4,000 for a new engine.
Rotating tires	Tires won't last as long.	Up to \$1,000 a set.
Replacing engine coolant	Radiator can corrode, which could cause engine to overheat.	\$200-\$500 for a radiator. Up to \$4,000 for an engine.
Changing air, oil, and fuel filters	Grit can get past air and oil filters and scour the inside of your engine. A clogged fuel filter will leave you stranded.	Up to \$4,000 for a new engine.
Inspecting belts and hoses	Failed hoses can cause the car to overheat. Failed belts can strand you.	Up to \$4,000 for a new engine.
Washing and inspection	Premature body rust could develop if it's not detected early.	Hundreds to thousands.

Source: National Institute for Automotive Service Excellence (ASE).