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Car owners continue to be more satisfied with independent repair shops than with dealerships for maintenance and repair, our latest survey shows.

The survey, conducted in spring 2009 by the Consumer Reports National Research Center, was based on subscribers' experiences with more than 159,000 vehicle repairs over 12 months.

For maintenance, based on more than 373,000 experiences, 84 percent of owners said they were very satisfied with independents, only slightly higher than the 78 percent who were very satisfied with dealerships. But if repairs were involved, 74 percent were very satisfied with independents, but only 59 percent said they were very satisfied with dealerships.

It is not surprising that satisfaction with repairs was lower than it was with routine maintenance, given the greater cost, inconvenience, aggravation, and time normally involved with repairs. But the greater drop in satisfaction with dealer repairs might be because those factors are less of an issue at smaller, independent shops.

It might be unrelated, but brands that normally earn good marks for car reliability generally scored higher in dealership satisfaction, and those brands also generally had smaller differences in satisfaction scores between dealerships and independents.

Lexus, closely followed by Acura, again topped the list for dealers; 72 percent of owners said they were very satisfied with dealer repairs, and 85 percent said they were very satisfied with dealership maintenance service. But even Lexus drivers were more satisfied with independent shops; 79 percent were satisfied with repair work performed there.

Among domestic brands, Buick fared better than most on repairs; two-thirds of owners were satisfied with dealership work. Buick also did well in satisfaction with independents' work.

Volkswagen dealers ranked at the bottom. Just 47 percent were very satisfied with dealer repairs, and 69 percent were very satisfied with maintenance work. The numbers were much better for independents; 73 percent of VW owners were very satisfied with repair work, and 84 percent were very satisfied with maintenance. The difference in maintenance owner-satisfaction scores between dealerships and independents was vast. Only Kia had a difference as great as Volkswagen's on satisfaction with repairs; 26 points separated dealerships and independents.