

HOW TO AVOID BEING A VICTIM OF AUTO REPAIR AND SERVICE STATION GIMMICKS

While most car mechanics are honest, there are some unscrupulous service station mechanics and attendants who use gimmicks and fraudulent tricks to con their customers into paying for unnecessary auto parts or labor.

Some unscrupulous mechanics use fear tactics in selling such parts as tires, radiator hoses, and shock absorbers. Beware of attendants who tell you that you need such parts replaced immediately or else you will have a serious accident. They want to arouse enough fear so that you will make a quick decision to purchase based on an emotional reaction rather than on sound reasoning. Simply remember to have your car serviced regularly and checked by your mechanic before any major trips.

Unfortunately, it is almost impossible for the average car owner to be aware of all of the gimmicks being used, but the cautious customer can protect himself or herself against such tricks. Here are a few basic guidelines to remember:

- First, deal with a local service station or mechanic whom you know from experience that you can trust. Gimmicks are more likely to be used on customers who are passers-by rather than regulars who live in the area.
- Second, do not leave your car while the attendant is servicing it.
- Third, motor vehicle repair shops must register with the Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services under Florida Statute 559.904. Verify that the shop you are dealing with is registered. Some counties also require registration, check with your county consumer agency.
- Fourth, be aware of the Florida Motor Vehicle Repair Act, Florida statutes 559.901 through 599.9221. This act requires that a written estimate of the cost of a repair be given to you if your repair will exceed \$100.00. Always get a written estimate for any work done on your car and demand additional written estimates if the repairs are to exceed the original figure. You may also demand to be contacted by the attendant or mechanic for your authorization if there is going to be an expense over and above that which is stated in the estimate. You can ask that old parts replaced during the repair be returned to you. The repair facility must tell you whether or not new or used parts are to be used in the repair. All work and parts are required to be itemized on an invoice so you can know the reason for all charges. This law was designed to protect the consumer, so make use of it.

If you ever feel that you have been victimized by a service station gimmick, first complain to the service station or garage where your car was serviced. If you are not satisfied with the station's remedy or explanation, then contact the Division of Consumer Services at 1-800-435-7352 and make a formal complaint. Ask the Division to send you a free pamphlet on the Florida Motor Vehicle Repair Act, or read this act at your local library.

- You can also contact your local consumer agency.

If you believe you need legal advice, call your attorney. If you do not have an attorney, call The Florida Bar Lawyer Referral Service at 1-800-342-8011, or the local lawyer referral service or legal aid office listed in the yellow pages of your telephone book.