



MARKET RESEARCH · AUTO REPAIR

WHAT DRIVERS ASK, SEARCH AND PAY FOR, AND HOW SHOPS **WIN.**

A deep dive into car owners who take their cars to repair shops: their questions, where they look for answers, who wins those searches today, and the gaps an independent shop can build on.

4,066

auto repair keywords measured

30.4M

US Google searches a month

640

Google FAQ questions collected

81,327

Reddit posts classified

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

NOBODY OWNS THE CAR OWNER'S TRUST.

Car owners search for a shop near them, then go to Reddit to find out whether the quote is fair. Chains own speed and convenience, and dealers are losing service customers. Nobody owns the price and trust questions, and an honest independent shop can.

12.8 YRS

average age of a US light vehicle, a record (S&P Global Mobility, 2025)

2 IN 3

drivers don't trust repair shops in general (AAA survey, 2016)

54%

of owners of 0-2 year old cars go back to the selling dealer, down from 72% (Cox, 2025)

\$110.2M

a month in Google click value across auto repair searches

Seven things the data says

1. **Price and trust are the questions people actually ask.** Pricing is the biggest topic in Google's "People also ask" box (136 of 640 unique questions). On Reddit, 1,018 posts are straight price checks ("is this quote fair?"). The most repeated Google question is "What is the \$3,000 rule for car repairs?", on 23 of 84 result pages.
2. **Reddit wins Google, not shops.** Reddit is in the top 10 on 79% of auto repair result pages and ranks #1 on 33 of 84. Forums and owner posts hold about a third of all visibility. Chains hold 12.5% and dealers 7.1%.
3. **Google's AI answers lean on YouTube.** 76% of these searches show an AI answer, and 39 of the 64 AI answers cite a YouTube video, more than any other site. Working-mechanic channels win the top spots.
4. **"Near me" is where the money is.** Finding a shop is 4.5M searches a month at \$5.28 a click with a median difficulty of 7. "brake repair near me" costs \$7.26 a click at difficulty 9, and "transmission shop near me" \$7.50 at difficulty 0.
5. **Dealers are losing service work.** Dealers handle 12% fewer service visits than in 2018, and 45% of owners are unhappy with dealer service, mostly over surprise costs and poor communication (Cox, 2025). On Reddit, independent shops score +63 net sentiment and dealers +5.
6. **Independents win on ratings but lose on convenience.** Across 1,102 Google Maps listings, the median independent shop rates 4.7 and the median chain 4.5. But 80% of chain listings take online bookings, against 15% of independents. 39% of chains are open Sunday, against 12% of independents.
7. **The cars are old and the bills are big.** The median dollar figure in a Reddit post is \$1,080, and \$2,000 in transmission posts. "Is it worth fixing?" is one of the most-asked questions. More than half of owners facing a major repair would consider trading in (Cox).

The play in one line: Be the shop that shows its prices and its reasoning. Publish real price ranges and a written approval policy. Answer the price and trust questions better than Reddit, on video and in text. Make booking as easy as a chain does, and turn one-off repairs into a maintenance relationship.

WHO THE AUTO REPAIR CUSTOMER IS

289M

light vehicles on US roads,
up 3M in a year (S&P, 2025)

45%

of owners dissatisfied with
dealer service (Cox, 2025)

55%

say comparing repair costs
online is very important
(Cox)

\$275

average bill at general
repair shops, vs \$261 at
dealers (Cox)

CORE • BIGGEST BILLS

THE HIGH-MILEAGE KEEPER

The average car is now 12.8 years old. 5,705 Reddit posts name 100k–200k+ miles. Faces engine, transmission and AC bills and asks if the car is worth fixing. **Needs:** an honest fix-or-sell answer, a price range before coming in, and the repairs ranked by urgency.

UP FOR GRABS

THE NEWER-CAR OWNER LEAVING THE DEALER

Under warranty or just past it. Only 54% of owners of 0–2 year old cars go back to the selling dealer. 4,428 posts name a new or under-warranty car. Asks if an independent shop voids the warranty; Reddit answers that today. **Needs:** proof that records keep the warranty safe, recall checks, dealer-level care at a fair price.

ANXIOUS

THE FIRST-TIME OWNER

Doesn't know what's normal. Only 55% of Millennials have a shop they trust (AAA). Asks "am I being ripped off?" and "does my car need this?" 759 posts come from first-time owners. **Needs:** plain-English quotes, photos of the worn part, and an explanation without a sales pitch.

VOLUME

THE CONVENIENCE SHOPPER

Wants oil, tires or a battery done fast. "tire shop near me" gets 2.24M searches a month and "oil change near me" 1.5M. Chains capture this customer with online booking (80% of chain listings) and Sunday hours. **Needs:** a bookable time slot, a posted price, and a quick in and out.

Where they research

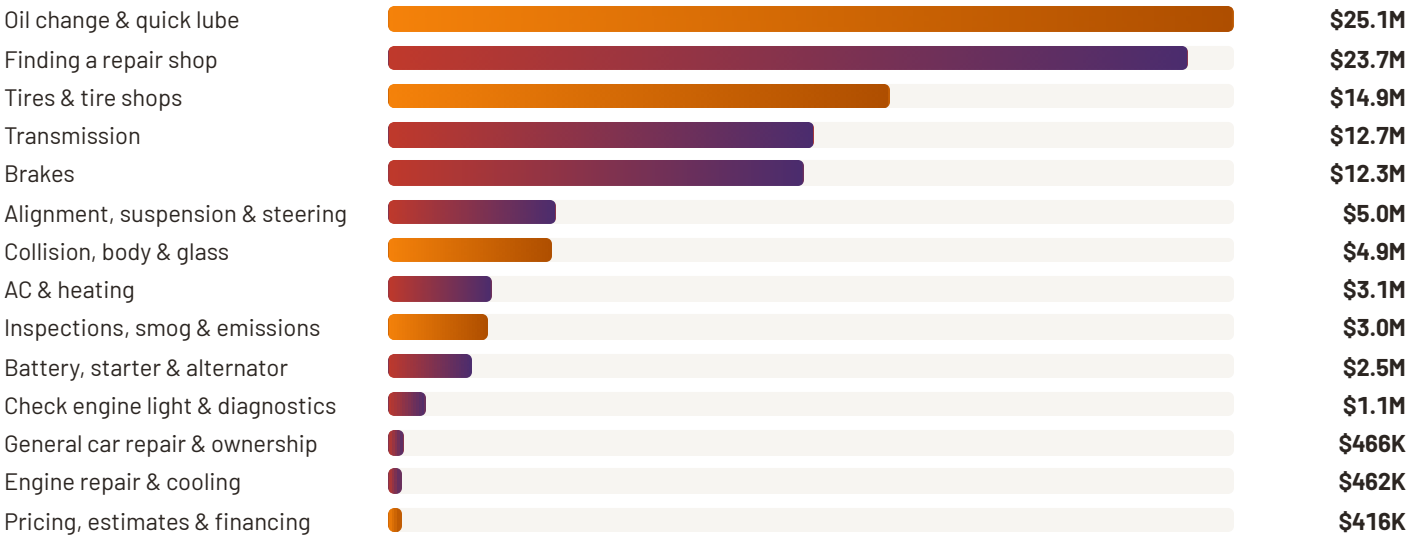
CHANNEL	WHAT IT'S USED FOR	EVIDENCE
Google	Shop near me, prices, symptoms	30.4M in-scope searches a month; a map listing on every "near me" result page
Reddit	Is this quote fair? Second opinions, diagnosis	In the top 10 on 79% of 84 result pages and #1 on 33; named 1,539 times in posts and comments
YouTube	How it works, DIY, "what mechanics won't tell you"	Cited in 39 of 64 Google AI answers; named 885 times in posts
Google reviews	Choosing the shop	Median Maps listing: 4.7 stars, 118 reviews (1,102 listings, 11 metros)
Parts stores	Free check-engine scan before paying a shop	AutoZone ranks in 17 result pages and is cited in 20 AI answers; parts-store scans named 214 times
AI assistants	Checking a diagnosis or a quote	ChatGPT or AI named 282 times in posts and comments

Sources: S&P Global Mobility (May 2025); Cox Automotive Service Industry Study (Nov 2025, 1,974 owners); AAA (Dec 2016); Reddit, Google and Maps data pulled for this report.

WHERE THE SEARCHES AND THE MONEY ARE

4,066 US keywords, grouped into 692 distinct searches so close variants aren't counted twice. Total: about 30.4M searches a month, worth about \$110.2M a month in ad clicks. Click value is volume times cost per click. It ranks where advertisers spend; it isn't a revenue forecast. Mobile mechanic searches are left out (a separate report covers them).

Monthly click value by category (top 14)



Purple bars are repair work a general repair shop does every day. Orange bars are where the chains, quick lubes, tire shops and body shops compete hardest.

Where the clicks cost the most

\$13.15

"financing for auto repair"
(6.6K a month)

\$8.98

"ase certified mechanic"
(9.9K)

\$7.54

"transmission repair" (165K,
difficulty 0)

\$7.26

"brake repair near me" (74K,
difficulty 9)

By stage

STAGE	SEARCHES / MO	CLICK VALUE / MO	AVG CPC
Repair (brakes, transmission, AC, battery)	10.6M	\$41.1M	\$3.87
Maintain (oil, tires)	13.1M	\$40.1M	\$3.05
Find a shop (near me, mechanic, dealer)	4.5M	\$23.7M	\$5.28
Inspections, smog, emissions	860K	\$3.0M	\$3.49
Diagnose (check engine, symptoms)	606K	\$1.6M	\$2.61
Price, estimates, financing	97K	\$416K	\$4.28
Parts stores and DIY	635K	\$387K	\$0.61

THE EASIEST MONEY ON THE TABLE

These searches have high value and low competition: keyword difficulty 20 or under (out of 100), buyer intent, no brand or shop names. 247 searches pass these filters; these are the top 15, at most two per category.

#	KEYWORD	SEARCHES / MO	CPC	DIFFICULTY	CLICK VALUE / MO	CATEGORY
1	tire shop near me	2,240,000	\$3.29	20	\$7,369,600	Tires & tire shops
2	transmission control unit	201,000	\$8.65	13	\$1,738,650	Transmission
3	transmission shop near me	201,000	\$7.50	0	\$1,507,500	Transmission
4	brake repair	165,000	\$7.44	14	\$1,227,600	Brakes
5	auto body shop near me	201,000	\$5.15	13	\$1,035,150	Collision, body & glass
6	oil change service	368,000	\$2.79	14	\$1,026,720	Oil change & quick lube
7	auto repair shop	165,000	\$5.56	7	\$917,400	Finding a repair shop
8	alignment car near me	165,000	\$5.28	0	\$871,200	Alignment, suspension & steering
9	auto repair shop near me	135,000	\$5.98	15	\$807,300	Finding a repair shop
10	alignment near me	135,000	\$5.92	0	\$799,200	Alignment, suspension & steering
11	car battery replace	165,000	\$4.10	20	\$676,500	Battery, starter & alternator
12	auto body shop	110,000	\$6.13	18	\$674,300	Collision, body & glass
13	brake repair near me	74,000	\$7.26	9	\$537,240	Brakes
14	coupon oil change	110,000	\$4.72	13	\$519,200	Oil change & quick lube
15	alternator car repair	110,000	\$4.55	0	\$500,500	Battery, starter & alternator

"transmission control unit" is mostly a parts search; the rest are jobs a shop does.

Rising fast (up 50% or more on last year)

QUICK LUBE BY NAME

"jiffy oil change" is up 644% to 301K a month. "full synthetic oil change" and "oil change speedee" are each up 173%, and "vioc oil change prices" is up 123%. People search the chain and the price together.

BRAKES AND THE SHOP ITSELF

"brake repair" is up 123% to 165K a month at \$7.44 a click. "auto repair shop" is up 82% to 165K at \$5.56. "bent brake rotor" is up 50% to 40.5K.

LIGHTS AND INSPECTIONS

"check engine light on" is up 174%, and "check engine light came on" is up 50%. "pre buy car inspection" is up 50% to 12.1K at \$4.82, and "auto battery shop near me" is up 236%.

Most categories are down on last year: AC and heating -30%, battery -28%, transmission and alignment -13.5%, brakes -11%. The trend compares one month with the same month a year earlier on Google Ads buckets, so treat single-keyword swings as directional. 44 searches rose 50% or more, and 122 fell 40% or more.

THE REPAIR YEAR: WHEN TO PUSH WHAT

Each cell shows that month's search volume against the category's own average. Darker means busier. Auto repair is steadier than most trades: overall demand swings only 1.28x from the slowest month to the busiest. The swings sit inside the categories. Plan content 6–8 weeks before each peak.

CATEGORY	JAN	FEB	MAR	APR	MAY	JUN	JUL	AUG	SEP	OCT	NOV	DEC
AC & heating	.6	.5	1.1	.9	1.3	1.5	1.7	1.2	1.0	.9	.7	.6
Battery, starter & alternator	1.3	1.0	1.0	.8	.8	.7	.8	.8	1.1	1.2	1.2	1.3
Engine repair & cooling	1.2	1.1	1.2	.9	.9	.5	.5	.7	1.2	1.3	1.2	1.2
Check engine light & diagnostics	1.0	.8	1.0	.9	.9	.8	.9	.9	1.1	1.4	1.1	1.1
Brakes	1.0	.9	1.1	1.0	.9	.8	.8	.8	1.2	1.3	1.1	1.0
Transmission	1.0	1.0	1.2	1.0	.9	.8	.8	.9	1.2	1.2	1.1	1.0
Alignment, suspension & steering	1.0	.9	1.2	.9	1.0	.8	.8	.8	1.1	1.2	1.1	1.0
Finding a repair shop	1.1	.8	1.0	.8	.8	.9	.9	.9	1.1	1.3	1.2	1.1
Tires & tire shops	1.0	.8	1.0	.9	1.0	1.0	1.1	1.1	1.1	1.0	1.0	.9
Inspections, smog & emissions	.9	.9	1.1	1.0	1.1	1.0	1.1	1.0	1.0	1.0	.9	.9
Collision, body & glass	.9	.9	1.1	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.1	1.1	1.0	.9
Oil change & quick lube	1.0	.9	1.0	.9	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.1	1.0	1.0
Parts stores & DIY	.9	.9	1.1	.9	1.1	1.1	1.2	1.1	.9	1.0	1.1	.9
Exhaust, muffler & catalytic converter	1.0	1.1	1.1	1.1	.8	.6	.7	.9	1.0	1.2	1.1	1.4
All auto repair demand	1.02	0.90	1.06	0.93	0.95	0.92	0.96	0.96	1.09	1.15	1.07	1.01

JAN - MAR

Cold-weather batteries peak in January (1.31x). Engine and cooling run high. Transmission and alignment rise in March as roads thaw.

APR - JUN

AC searches climb from May (1.27x). Inspections run steady through spring. A good window to publish AC and pre-summer checkup content.

JUL - AUG

AC peaks in July (1.70x, 3.5x its low month), along with tires (1.15x). Parts stores and DIY peak too.

SEP - DEC

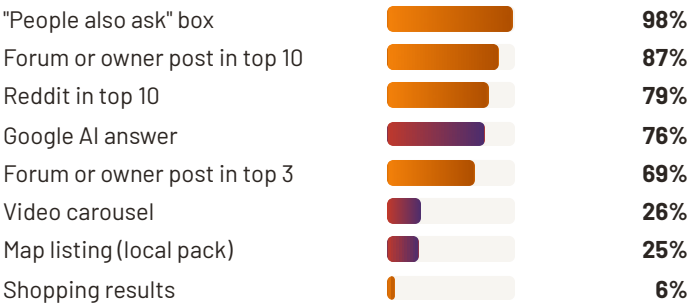
The busiest stretch for repair shops: shop searches (1.27x), brakes (1.27x), check engine (1.37x) and transmission (1.21x) all peak in Sep–Oct, and batteries climb again through December.

The 12 months run from September 2025 to August 2026, so the October and November figures come from 2025.

WHO WINS AUTO REPAIR ANSWERS ON GOOGLE TODAY

We ran 86 auto repair searches, from "mechanic near me" to "is it worth fixing my car" and "mechanic damaged my car". 84 returned results, and we recorded everything on each results page. The winners are Reddit and owner forums, not shops.

What shows up on the page (share of 84 result pages)



By topic: map listings show on every chain and "near me" search but almost never on price or symptom questions. Video carousels show on 78% of check-engine searches and 67% of suspension searches. AI answers show on every dealer, warranty and rights search.

Share of visibility (weighted by rank)

SITE	SHARE	#1 SPOTS	AI ANSWER CITES
reddit.com	19.3%	33	26
facebook.com (groups)	5.1%	1	28
autozone.com (parts store)	3.8%	5	20
yelp.com	3.2%	4	0
quora.com	2.7%	0	12
midas.com	2.3%	3	0
pepboys.com	1.9%	2	1
aaa.com	1.9%	1	7
justanswer.com	1.7%	1	3
jiffylube.com	1.4%	0	10
repairpal.com	1.2%	0	0
youtube.com	0.6%	0	39

By type of site: forums and owner posts 32.8%, local shop sites and blogs 28.9%, chains 12.5%, directories and publishers 11.9%, dealers 7.1%, parts stores 4.3%.

What this means: Google no longer shows classic featured snippets on these searches (0 of 84). Of 738 "People also ask" answers, Google's AI wrote 711. You now get quoted by being a source the AI trusts, and here that means YouTube, Reddit, Facebook and AutoZone. A shop page that reads like a real technician explaining a real price can join that list. A generic "10 signs you need brakes" post won't.

Where forums hold the top spots and no shop has a good answer yet

On 68 of 84 result pages, forums hold 2 or more top-10 spots, a top-3 spot, or a "discussions and forums" box. Those pages carry 533 questions. The worst are "check engine light on" (8 forum spots in the top 10), "does using an independent mechanic void warranty" (8), "is jiffy lube good" (7), "car heater not working" (7), "diagnostic fee mechanic" (6) and "how much does it cost to replace brake pads and rotors" (6).

The price and rights questions are wide open. "average auto repair labor rate", "how long can a mechanic keep your car" and "mechanic damaged my car" are answered by Reddit, Quora, law firms and state agencies, not by shops.

THE QUESTIONS CAR OWNERS ASK MOST

On Google ("People also ask")

Number of result pages (out of 84) where each question appeared.

QUESTION	PAGES
What is the \$3000 rule for car repairs?	23
What is the 30-60-90 rule for cars?	9
What is the most neglected car maintenance?	6
How to find a mechanic that won't rip you off?	5
Can you go 2 years without changing oil?	4
How to spot a dishonest mechanic?	4
Is 150 an hour expensive for a mechanic?	4
What does a \$99 brake special include?	4
What not to say to your mechanic?	4
Why do mechanics say don't change transmission fluid?	4
Can I just replace brake pads and not rotors?	4
How much should 4 brake pads cost?	3
Is 100,000 miles too late to change transmission fluid?	3
Is it safe to drive 700 miles past my oil change?	3
What is the most expensive part of a car to repair?	3
At what point is a car not worth fixing?	3
Can a cop pull me over for no inspection sticker?	2
Can you get your money back if a mechanic doesn't fix your car?	2
Can you really drive 10,000 miles with synthetic oil?	2
Can you really go 20,000 miles without an oil change?	2

640 unique questions in total. By topic: pricing and labor 136, oil and maintenance 83, engine and cooling 48, check engine 37, trust and scams 36, tires 34, brakes 31, choosing a shop 30.

On Reddit (81,327 posts, 7 subreddits)

Number of question posts that match each question. Ranked by a demand score that combines Reddit (75%) and Google autocomplete (25%).

QUESTION	POSTS
Brakes: pads, rotors, squeal and price	2,958
Transmission problems: fix, rebuild or replace?	2,302
Battery, alternator or starter?	2,518
Why is my check engine light on (and can I drive with it)?	1,448
What is this noise?	2,798
Tires: replace, repair, rotate	2,713
Suspension and steering: struts, bearings, clunks	2,529
Which maintenance is real (fluid flushes, 30/60/90 services)?	2,019
Engine trouble: head gasket, timing, oil burning	1,332
Exhaust and catalytic converter	1,282
Pre-purchase inspection before buying a used car	1,048
Is it worth fixing, or should I sell or junk it?	241
AC blowing warm: recharge or bigger repair?	710
Why is my car shaking or vibrating?	724
What is that smell or smoke?	686
Is this quote fair, or am I being ripped off?	680
Why is my car overheating?	606
What does this warning light mean?	671
State inspection or emissions failed: what now?	609
Why won't my car start?	379

Of the 81,327 posts, 61% are questions and 1,018 are straight price checks. Where the post says: 5,705 high-mileage owners, 4,428 newer-car owners, 778 used-car shoppers, 759 first-time owners.

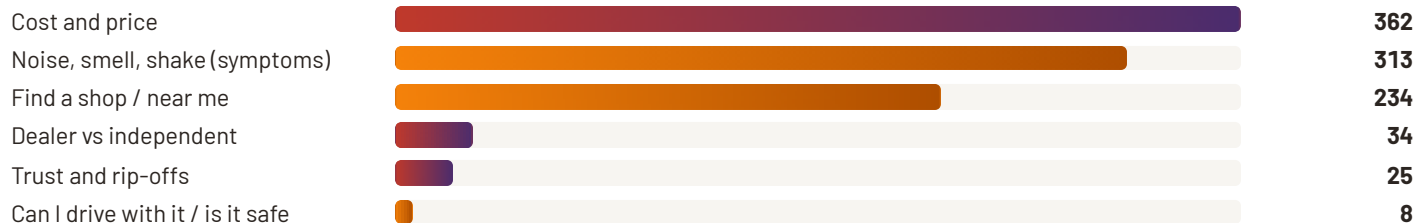
Top questions on Google by search volume

How long does a car battery last (49.5K a month) · How do you jump a car battery (33.1K) · How much is an oil change (33.1K) · How long does an alignment take (22.2K) · What is a CVT transmission (22.2K) · How much does an alignment cost (18.1K) · How to reset a check engine light (12.1K) · What does a blinking check engine light mean (8.1K).

WHAT PEOPLE TYPE INTO GOOGLE

We collected 3,682 unique Google autocomplete suggestions for 28 car-repair phrases, from "why is my car" and "how much to fix" to "mechanic ripped me off". 3,101 of them are about cars. They show the exact words people type before they see a single result.

What the suggestions are about (unique car-related suggestions)



Some suggestions fall under more than one theme. The free Google endpoint blocked us after 15 of 40 planned phrases, so 13 more came from DataForSEO. Those local suggestions lean toward the provider's default location (Oklahoma and Kansas) and are left out of the examples below.

MONEY

EVERY PRICE QUESTION

how much to fix car ac · how much to fix alternator · how much does it cost to replace head gasket · brakes and rotors replacement cost · is it worth fixing blown head gasket · oil change valvoline price · car repair estimate calculator · car diagnostic cost

SYMPTOMS

"WHY IS MY CAR..."

why is my car shaking when i stop · why does my car have a burning smell · why is my car not starting but clicking · why does my car keep overheating · brakes squeaking while driving · check engine light is on and car is shaking

SAFETY

"CAN I DRIVE WITH..."

can i drive with check engine light on · can i drive with a bad wheel bearing · can i drive with a bad alternator · can i drive with a bad catalytic converter · can i drive with low tire pressure · can i drive with a nail in my tire

TRUST

RIP-OFFS AND REDDIT

how to find a good honest mechanic · ripped off by mechanic · what can i do · what to do if a car mechanic rips you off · how to find a good mechanic reddit · should i fix my car or buy a new one reddit

CHOICE

DEALER OR INDEPENDENT

dealer vs independent mechanic · dealership vs independent mechanic reddit · dealer or independent service · dealership service vs mechanic · how to find a good independent mechanic · bmw dealer vs independent

TOOLS

ESTIMATING BEFORE CALLING

car repair estimate calculator · car repair estimate online free · car repair estimate app · car diagnostic near me free · car diagnostic tool autozone · car diagnostic test near me

What this adds to the plan: people type the price before anything else, so every service page should show a real range and what pushes it up. "Can I drive with..." questions are safety questions, and a clear yes or no from a shop answers them better than a forum. A dozen of the suggestions add "reddit" to the search, which shows how little people trust the first page of Google. An estimate calculator and a free scan are what people go looking for before they call.

WHAT HURTS CAR OWNERS MOST

We ranked 25 pain points by how often they come up and how upset people are (anger is scored 1–5). Sources: 81,327 Reddit posts and 10,990 top comments. The big bills (engine, transmission, AC) come up most often. The angriest posts are about waiting weeks for an appointment, shops holding cars, and denied warranty claims.

#	PAIN POINT	POSTS	COMMENTS	ANGER	TYPICAL \$	IN THEIR WORDS (PARAPHRASED)
1	Engine failure (head gasket, timing, blown motor)	1,481	74	1.5	\$2,500	Paid \$3,400 for a replacement engine, and at pickup the car only cranked.
2	AC quits in summer, costly compressor job	1,065	8	1.4	\$1,000	Quoted \$5,000 for an AC compressor on a 156k-mile hybrid when the part lists online for \$1,500 or less.
3	Quote feels too high / labor rates	764	33	1.8	\$1,000	A \$10,116 quote on a three-year-old Corolla with 30k miles, more than half of what the car is worth.
4	Transmission failure and the bill that follows	807	9	1.6	\$2,000	Shop wants \$250 to change 'contaminated' transmission fluid on a 28k-mile car the maker says needs no change.
5	Car came back damaged or with new problems	706	14	1.4	\$1,800	Went in for an oil change, agreed to a differential service, and the axle failed within the hour.
6	Shop didn't fix it / same problem came back	553	5	1.7	\$1,150	Three shops, the dealer included, can't find why the car stalls once it's warm.
7	Paid a diagnostic fee and still no answer	358	4	1.6	\$449	Should a shop charge to find the problem and then charge again to fix it?
8	Dealer service is expensive or pushy	339	5	1.6	\$1,200	Dealer stripped the oil pan threads, glued the plug in with sealant, and now wants \$453 to fix it.
9	Check engine light keeps coming back	338	0	1.6	\$900	Turbo replaced for \$2,300; a week later the same code is back.
10	Repair costs more than the car is worth	326	14	1.4	\$2,000	The repair list on a 2000 Camry costs twice what the car is worth, even though the shop says it's solid.
11	Pushed to buy unneeded work (upsell)	170	9	1.9	\$1,200	Came in for brakes; the mechanic said to replace the whole car and offered one off his lot.
12	Catalytic converter stolen or failed	121	1	1.6	\$1,400	Converter stolen off a Prius with liability-only insurance; the shop says up to \$3,000.

SHOP HORROR THEMES

Parts thrown at a problem until something sticks. Several shops, the dealer included, unable to find an intermittent stall. Quick lubes overfilling oil or stripping drain plugs. Dealers charging to fix damage they caused. Extra work done without a call. Diagnostic fees with no diagnosis. Cars held for days waiting on parts. Warranty claims pushed back over owner maintenance.

WHAT OWNERS TRUST

Net sentiment on Reddit: independent and local shops +63, dealers +5, Firestone –50. Jiffy Lube and Pep Boys lean negative, but fewer than 10 mentions took a side. OBD2 code readers score +85: owners like checking the code themselves before they pay anyone. YouTube is named 770 times at +52. Owners trust evidence (codes, photos, video) more than a service advisor.

Lessons owners share: get a second opinion on any big quote. Photograph the car before you leave it. Check the lug nuts after any tire job. "No codes" doesn't mean "no problem". Get it on video. Where they look: Reddit (1,539 mentions), Google (1,086), YouTube (885), Facebook (468), ChatGPT and AI (282), parts-store code scans (214).

Pain counts come from keyword rules, so they are relative, not exact. MechanicAdvice and AskMechanics posts cover June to October 2026 (newest 30K and 15K), which tilts the sample toward summer problems such as AC.

WHAT OWNERS TALK ABOUT, AND WHO WINS VIDEO

Most-mentioned shops, tools and brands on Reddit

Net sentiment is positive mentions minus negative, as a share of those that took a side. "n/a" means fewer than 10 took a side.

NAME	MENTIONS	NET
Dealership service	4,380	+5
Independent / local shop	797	+63
OBD2 scanner / code reader	758	+85
AutoZone	740	+3
YouTube (named in posts)	770	+52
RockAuto	379	+53
Body shop (generic)	403	+36
ChatGPT / AI	204	+29
Walmart Auto Care	199	+50
Valvoline Instant Oil Change	158	+14
Firestone	142	-50
O'Reilly	152	n/a
Extended warranty (any)	138	n/a
Costco Tire Center	96	n/a
Jiffy Lube	82	n/a
Pep Boys	69	n/a

Dealers are the most-mentioned kind of shop, and owners are split on them. Firestone is the one chain with a clear negative score; Jiffy Lube and Pep Boys lean negative on small numbers. Code readers, RockAuto and YouTube are the tools owners use to check a shop's work.

Who wins car repair YouTube searches

1,007 videos from 16 YouTube searches. "Top-3" counts how often a channel ranked in the first three results.

CHANNEL	TOP-3	RESULTS
Scotty Kilmer	3	49
ChrisFix	3	22
Budget Mechanic	3	20
Royalty Auto Service	3	12
Top 5 Auto Repairs	1	16
The Car Care Nut	1	12
Honest Mechanic Colorado	1	8
Pump That Pedal	1	6
Car Care University	1	5

Working mechanics beat brands. The chains barely show: O'Reilly has one top-3 result, and Firestone, Jiffy Lube, Valvoline, Midas and Pep Boys don't appear in any of the 1,007 results. Shop owners (Royalty Auto Service, The Car Care Nut, Honest Mechanic Colorado) rank alongside the big DIY channels. Old videos keep ranking: 36% of results are five or more years old. A shop filming real jobs and real quotes can win here without a celebrity budget.

THE COMPANIES CAR OWNERS MEET

COMPANY	WHAT THEY SELL	HOW THEY GET CUSTOMERS	STRENGTH	WEAK SPOT
Dealer service departments \$156B+ service and parts revenue, 270M+ repair orders (2024)	OEM repair, warranty and recall work	The car sale, warranty and recall letters	OEM training and parts; warranty work	Visits down 12% since 2018; 45% of owners dissatisfied; Reddit net +5
Take 5 Oil Change (Driven Brands) 1,342 locations; \$1.2B revenue (FY2025)	Stay-in-your-car oil change	Speed and coupons; 1.0M searches a month	22 straight quarters of same-store growth	Narrow menu; quick-lube upsell complaints
Valvoline Instant Oil Change 2,180 stores; \$3.5B system sales (FY2025)	Oil change plus add-on services	Brand and coupons ("vioc oil change coupons" 550K a month)	19 straight years of same-store growth	Same quick-lube trust problem
Firestone Complete Auto Care about 1,830 US locations (store-locator count)	Tires plus general repair	Tires, national ads, app	Scale; tire-led traffic	Reddit net -50
Mavis (with Midas since 2025) 3,500+ US and Canada stores	Tires, brakes, repair	Roll-up of regional brands	Footprint; ranks on brake and price searches	Little owner love either way
Christian Brothers Automotive about 340 locations (third-party count)	Full-service franchise built on trust	Comfort and brand; ranks on 5 result pages	The closest thing to a trust brand	Small footprint
Parts stores (AutoZone, O'Reilly, Advance, NAPA)	Parts, free code scans, loaner tools	"autozone" 9.1M searches a month	Cited in 20 AI answers	Don't do the repair
RepairPal 3,000+ certified shops (company, 2022)	Price estimator plus a certified-shop network	Partner referrals; shops pay a monthly fee	Price data	Top 10 on 14 pages, never #1, no AI cites

The listing gap: what Google Maps shows

4.7 VS 4.5

median rating,
independents vs chains
(1,102 listings, 11 metros)

15% VS 80%

listings that take online
bookings, independents vs
chains

12% VS 39%

open on Sunday,
independents vs chains

225 VS 109

median reviews, top-3
results vs results ranked 21+

Sources: Cox Automotive (Nov 2025); Driven Brands FY2025 10-K; Valvoline FY2025 results; Mavis (2025); xmap.ai, ScrapeHero and IFA store counts (marked); RepairPal (2022). Maps: "auto repair shop", top 100 in each of 11 metros. Monroe: Q4 FY2026 release.

WHITE SPACE NOBODY OWNS



1. A LOCAL SHOP THAT PUBLISHES ITS PRICES

Price is the first thing people type and the biggest question topic on Google. The price pages that rank now are Reddit threads, Facebook posts and RepairPal. 55% of owners say comparing costs online is very important, but almost no shop shows a range.

2. APPROVAL AND PROOF AS A PRODUCT

The top reasons for distrust are unneeded work (76%) and overcharging (73%). Make written estimates, a call before any extra work, and photos or video of the worn part the standard, and say so on the site and the listing.

3. AN HONEST FIX-OR-SELL ANSWER

"Is it worth fixing?" is one of the most-asked questions, and the \$3,000 rule shows on 23 result pages. More than half of owners facing a big repair would consider trading in. Nobody local answers it with the car's value next to the repair cost.

4. THE WARRANTY-SAFE INDEPENDENT

"Does using an independent mechanic void warranty" has 8 forum spots in the top 10. Dealers are losing newer-car owners (54%, down from 72%). A shop that keeps warranty-proof records and runs recall checks can win them.

5. CHAIN-LEVEL CONVENIENCE FROM AN INDEPENDENT

Only 15% of independent listings take online bookings, against 80% of chains, and only 12% open Sunday. Independents already win on ratings. Convenience is the gap.

6. ANSWERS THAT BEAT REDDIT

533 questions sit on result pages where forums hold the top spots. A technician's answer with the real price range and a short video can take the spot and the AI citation.

7. A REAL SHOP ON YOUTUBE

YouTube is cited in 39 of 64 AI answers. The chains barely show in YouTube results, and a few shop-owner channels already rank top 3 against the big DIY creators.

8. HYBRIDS AND EVS

EV and hybrid posts carry the highest median dollar figure (\$3,000), and "who can fix it" is a recurring Reddit question. Few independents say clearly what they will and won't work on.

WHAT THIS MEANS FOR A REPAIR SHOP

One ladder from the first search to a customer for life. Every rung below is tied to the demand and gaps in this report. Prices and plans are proposals to test, not findings.

FREE · REACH ANSWER EVERYTHING • Price-range pages for the top 20 jobs • Answer hub built from the 640 FAQs, with FAQ markup • Short tech videos on each page • Fix-or-sell and "fair quote" guides	ENTRY · \$ BOOK A FIX • Online booking with the next open slot • Free check-engine scan or courtesy inspection with photos • Written estimates approved by text • Saturday hours, and Sunday if possible	RECURRING · \$\$ MAINTENANCE PLAN • Mileage-based reminders • Oil, rotation and inspection bundle • Priority booking • Records kept to protect warranty	PARTNERS · REFERRAL FEES PAY FOR IT • Repair financing (\$13.15 clicks) • Towing partner for no-starts • Plain advice on extended warranties • Tire and glass partners	RELATIONSHIP · \$\$\$ KEEP THE CAR GOING • Pre-purchase inspections (rising) • Fix-or-sell reviews with the car's value • Fleet and family accounts • Hybrid and EV service, where ready
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90-day plan

WHEN	BUILD	WHY NOW
Weeks 1–3	Google Business Profile: every service category, real hours, an online booking link, shop and technician photos, and a steady review ask after each job.	Map listings show on every "near me" result page. Top-3 listings have a median of 225 reviews against 109 deeper down, and only 18% of listings take online bookings.
Weeks 1–4	Service pages with real price ranges: brakes, alignment, transmission, AC, battery, check engine, diagnostics.	Low difficulty and rich clicks: "transmission shop near me" (difficulty 0, \$7.50), "alignment near me" (0, \$5.92), "brake repair near me" (9, \$7.26).
Weeks 2–8	Answer hub, starting with the forum-held pages: labor rates, diagnostic fees, coolant flush cost, pads vs rotors, the \$3,000 rule, the 30-60-90 rule, warranty and independent shops.	68 of 84 result pages are forum-held, carrying 533 questions. Pricing is the biggest question topic.
Weeks 2–12	Two short videos a week: "check these first", "what a fair quote for X looks like", "can I drive with this?". Embed each on its matching page.	YouTube is cited in 39 of 64 AI answers, and shop-owner channels already rank top 3.
Weeks 4–8	A written trust policy: estimate before work, a call before extras, photos of worn parts, old parts returned, warranty on labor. Put it on the site and the listing.	Unneeded work (76%) and overcharging (73%) drive distrust (AAA), and 45% of dealer customers are unhappy over surprise costs and poor communication (Cox).
Weeks 6–10	Maintenance-plan pilot with reminders, plus a repair-financing partner.	Dealers are losing newer-car owners (54%, down from 72%), and "financing for auto repair" costs \$13.15 a click.
Weeks 8–12	Fall and winter push: brakes, check engine and batteries, with content and ads live before the peaks.	Shop searches peak in October (1.27x), check engine 1.37x, brakes 1.27x; batteries peak in January (1.31x).

APPENDIX

HOW THIS WAS BUILT

WORKSTREAM	WHAT WAS PULLED	COST
Google demand	13 DataForSEO Labs keyword-suggestion pulls (300–500 rows each, ordered by volume), filtered to 4,066 relevant US keywords in 692 groups, with volume, cost per click, difficulty, intent and 12 months of trend. Plus one keyword-overview pull for 69 chain and service terms.	\$0.75
Google results pages	86 seed searches (84 returned; 2 failed with a Google error), desktop, 20–30 results deep, with "People also ask" expanded and AI answers loaded. That gave 738 question slots and 640 unique questions.	\$0.53
Autocomplete	Free Google and YouTube suggestions for 15 phrases × a–z before Google returned 403, plus 13 DataForSEO autocomplete lookups. 3,682 unique suggestions, 3,101 about cars.	\$0.03
YouTube and Maps	16 YouTube searches (1,007 videos; one search was pulled twice). Google Maps "auto repair shop", 100 results in each of 11 metros (1,102 listings; Kansas City failed).	\$0.10 + \$0.02
Reddit	81,327 public posts from MechanicAdvice, Cartalk, AskMechanics, autorepair, askcarguys, cars and Autos (the last three filtered to repair topics), via the Arctic Shift archive and Reddit's top-posts feeds, plus 10,990 top comments from 1,499 question threads. Classified by keyword rules. No usernames or personal data were stored.	Free public data
Market and competitors	SEC filings and company releases (Driven Brands, Valvoline, Monroe), Cox Automotive, S&P Global Mobility, BLS, AAA, store-locator counts, and Apple's public app search.	Free
Total DataForSEO spend (sum of each response's cost field)		\$1.43

Caveats

- Brand names live inside their service ("take 5 oil change", 1.0M a month, is in oil change); brand-only searches such as "autozone" (9.1M) are not in the totals. Search volumes are Google Ads estimates rounded into buckets. "Click value" ranks where advertisers spend; it isn't a revenue forecast. The keyword pull was budget-capped, so long-tail symptom and car-model searches are under-counted.
- Topic labels were assigned by keyword rules, so a small share are filed under the wrong topic. Mobile mechanic searches are counted separately and left out of the totals.
- Share of visibility is weighted by rank position, not by search volume. Map listings reflect one sample location per search; the Maps profile covers 11 metros.
- Reddit posts were classified by keyword rules, not read one by one, so treat the counts as relative. The two biggest subreddits are covered only for June to October 2026 because of the per-subreddit cap.
- The AAA trust figures are from 2016. They are taken from coverage of AAA's release because the original PDF is an image. Some store counts come from third-party store locators and are marked.



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