

Car Body Shop

Business Opportunity Profile
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Introduction

Car body shops carry out external and structural repairs on cars, vans and other light commercial vehicles. These typically include SMART (Small, Medium Area Repair Technology) repairs, which cover alloy wheels, paintwork, minor chips and bumpers, and MET (Mechanical, Electrical and Trim) repairs, which include removing and refitting components before and after body repair work has been carried out.

This profile provides information about starting up and running a car body shop. It describes the training available, the current market trends and the key trading and legal issues.

Training and resources

Body shops are generally started up by mechanics or repair technicians who have previous training and experience carrying out SMART and MET repairs.

Training courses suitable for anyone starting up and running their own body shop are available from the Institute of the Motor Industry (IMI). Course topics include estimating costs, documentation, safe working practices, employment law, finance, social media, data protection and customer care.

The IMI also provides a range of qualifications and courses covering SMART and cosmetic repairs which may be useful for automotive technicians/mechanics to update their skills.

Go to <https://tide.theimi.org.uk/learn> for more information.

Apprenticeships

Many body shops take on apprentices as trainee repair technicians. The body shop is required to provide the apprentice with appropriate training and mentoring. Funding is available towards the cost of training, depending on the apprentice's age and where in the UK the body shop is based.

The IMI provides further information about taking on an apprentice at <https://tide.theimi.org.uk/apprenticeships-epa/provide-apprenticeship>.

Industry resources

There are various online resources and events to help technicians/mechanics develop their knowledge and skills. Examples include:

- 'Bodyshop' (www.bodyshopmag.com), which is a monthly online and print journal for the UK automotive accident repair industry.
- 'Professional Motor Mechanic' ('PMM', <https://pmmonline.co.uk>), which is a monthly online and print-based trade journal that includes industry news and technical updates.
- 'MotorPro' (<https://tide.theimi.org.uk/industry-latest/motorpro>), which is the IMI's monthly online and print-based membership journal.
- 'Motor Trader' (www.motortrader.com), which is a monthly online and print-based trade journal and online resource that includes industry news and market reports.
- Mechanex (<https://mechanex.info>), which is a two-day regional exhibition for professional mechanics that takes place at the Yorkshire Event Centre in Harrogate in May and Sandown Park in Surrey in November.
- UK AutoTalk (www.ukautotalk.com), which is an online network for independent body shops and garages that has five automotive forums.

Key market issues and trends

Current market issues affecting established and start-up body shops include the following:

- A survey carried out in 2024 by The Motor Ombudsman revealed that 53% of garages and body shops reported that customers were not carrying out routine car maintenance, such as servicing, to save money. The survey also found that 48% predicted that vehicle owners will do without ad hoc maintenance to cut costs (www.themotorombudsman.org/press-releases/hard-working-households-face-tough-decisions-on-running-a-car-in-2025).
- In 2024, body shop capacity returned to normal levels following three years of high demand and limited repair slots. According to Trend Tracker, repair demand is now returning to pre-Covid levels and has fallen to its lowest levels since 2021 (www.activate-group.com/news-insights/2024-in-motor-claims-and-projections-for-2025/).
- A report by AutoTrader has predicted that new Chinese car brands could make up a sixth of the UK's EV market by 2030. Activate Group has warned that consumers will expect the same level of aftercare they are used to from more mainstream manufacturers and that body shops will therefore need to gain knowledge and experience of repairing unfamiliar car brands (www.activate-group.com/news-insights/2024-in-motor-claims-and-projections-for-2025/).
- In 2024, wheel repairs increased by 10% due to the deteriorating state of UK roads. According to SMART repairer Revive!, wheel repair work has grown by 22% since 2021 due to the condition of UK roads, making up 27% of the company's workload in 2024 alone (www.bodyshopmag.com/2025/news/spike-in-alloy-wheel-repairs-driven-by-poor-road-quality/).
- The Association of British Insurers has reported that in 2024, motor insurance claims payouts reached a record £11.7 billion, with the average payout increasing by 13% to £4,900. The ABI

attributed the increase to higher vehicle repair costs (www.bodyshopmag.com/2025/news/motor-insurance-claims-payouts-hit-record-levels-in-2024/).

- Franchises provide both competition and opportunities for anyone starting up a body shop. Examples include ChipsAway (www.chipsaway.co.uk/franchise) and Revive! (<https://revivefranchise.com>), which require an initial investment of around £25,000 to £30,000 (excluding VAT).

Trading, commercial and legal issues

Start-up and established body shops face the following trading, commercial and legal issues:

Trade bodies

Membership of a trade body can provide a wide range of individual and business benefits. Relevant bodies include:

- The National Body Repair Association (NBRA, <https://nbra.org.uk>), which is a membership organisation representing body shops. Membership benefits include access to legal and business advice, health and safety guidance and networking opportunities. Details of membership fees are available on request from the NBRA.
- The Auto Body Professionals Club (ABP Club, www.abpclub.co.uk), which represents individuals working in the UK's vehicle accident repair industry. Membership benefits include a business listing in the 'Find a Bodyshop' directory, as well as legal and business advice and networking opportunities. Annual membership fees start from £250 (excluding VAT).
- The Independent Garage Association (IGA, <https://independentgarageassociation.co.uk>), a sub-group of the Retail Motor Industry Federation (RMI), which runs the Trust My Garage scheme. Membership benefits include access to legal advice, an arbitration service, industry updates and training. Details of membership fees are available on request from the IGA.
- The Hybrid and Electric Vehicle Repair Alliance (HEVRA, <https://hevra.org.uk>). Membership benefits include a listing in the 'Garages Near Me' directory, technical and marketing support and advice, and discounted or free tool hire. Annual membership for a body shop costs £775 (excluding VAT).

Environmental permits

Most paints, lacquers and under-seals used by body shops contain volatile organic compounds (VOCs) or isocyanate, which is a harmful semi-volatile organic compound. Body shops that use these compounds may need to hold a permit, depending on the scale of use.

In England, Wales and Northern Ireland, permits are issued by the local authority in the area where the body shop is located. In Scotland, permits are issued by the Scottish Environment Protection Agency. Go to www.sepa.org.uk/regulations/pollution-prevention-and-control/ppc-part-b-activities for more information.

The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) has published a guide to paint spraying, which provides examples of specialist equipment needed to carry out spraying safely, at www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/priced/hsg276.pdf.

Guidance for body shops on the use of 2-pack (or '2K') isocyanate-containing paints is also available at www.hse.gov.uk/mvr/bodyshop/isocyanates.htm.

Waste disposal

Waste produced when repairing vehicles is typically categorised into the following groups:

- **Hazardous/special waste:** This includes paints that contain solvents and resins. Go to www.gov.uk/how-to-classify-different-types-of-waste/vehicle-and-oily-wastes for more examples.
- **Liquid:** This includes hydraulic fluid and coolant.
- **Tyres and vehicle parts:** Metal parts should be collected for recycling by a licenced waste carrier. Tyres cannot be sent to landfill, except those with a diameter greater than 1.4 metres.

Body shops have a legal duty to ensure that all types of waste are properly and safely disposed of. Examples of specialist waste carriers include Business Waste (www.businesswaste.co.uk/sectors/waste-management-garages/), Divert (www.divert.co.uk/your-waste/automotive-waste) and Waste Managed (www.wastemanaged.co.uk/our-news/garage/garage-waste-collection-guide/).

Waste water produced by body shops (such as water contaminated by paint or fuel) is classed as trade effluent. Body shops should find out whether they need trade effluent consent by contacting their local water company.

Body shop equipment suppliers

Specialist suppliers of new, used and refurbished equipment used by body shops, such as vehicle lifts, wheel alignment machines, tyre changers, panel and wheel stands, spray guns, polishers and sanders, include:

- V-Tech Garage Equipment (www.garage-equipment.co.uk).
- Bodyshop 360 (www.bodyshop360.co.uk).
- PaintNuts Bodyshop Supplies (<https://paintnutsbodyshop.co.uk>).
- GEMCO (Garage Equipment & Maintenance Company, www.gemco.co.uk).
- Welding Supplies Direct (www.weldingsuppliesdirect.co.uk).
- Strongman Lifts (www.strongmanlifts.co.uk).

Vehicle finishing products and parts

Professional vehicle paints, varnishes, lacquers and other finishing products are available from specialist trade suppliers such as Autopaint St Helens (www.auto-paint.co.uk), CarPaint UK (www.carpaintuk.co.uk) and Paints4u.com (www.paints4u.com).

Vehicle parts are available from general automotive suppliers such as Euro Car Parts (www.eurocarparts.com), which has more than 250 outlets throughout the UK, and Halfords, which has around 385 UK stores and provides trade customers with a discount card (www.halfords.com/help-and-advice/orders-and-bookings/payment-and-savings/trade-card).

Examples of specialist trade-only suppliers include Born-Brands International (www.born-brands.co.uk) and TransTec (<https://transtec.com>).

Supplying number plates

Body shops that replace damaged number plates must be registered with the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency (DVLA) as a number plate supplier. Go to www.gov.uk/find-licences/register-as-number-plate-supplier/dvla for more information.

Management software

Most body shops use specialist software to manage and track customer bookings and vehicle details. Examples of specialist software include:

- Garage Data Systems' (GDS) Workshop Manager (www.gds.co.uk/products/workshop-manager).
- GARAGEBase Pro (GB Pro) Full Workshop Management System (www.garagebase.com/index.html).
- FIRSTPoint (www.firstpoint.info/index.html).

Authorised repairer schemes

Body shops can become authorised repairers of a particular vehicle manufacturer. Examples of manufacturers with authorised repairer schemes include:

- The Ford Certified Collision Network (www.fccn.co.uk/apply-today).
- Volkswagen authorised repairers (www.volkswagen.co.uk/en/need-help/company/authorised-repairer.html).

Repair networks

Body shops can join UK-wide repair networks, which provide repairs on behalf of insurance providers and fleet operators. Examples include:

- National Accident Repair Group (www.national-arg.co.uk/join-our-network/).
- Approved Garages (www.approvedgarages.co.uk/join-approved-garages).

Quality assurance schemes

Body shops can join a voluntary quality assurance scheme to demonstrate that they meet high standards of customer service and professionalism. Examples of suitable schemes include:

- The Good Garage Scheme (www.goodgaragescheme.com).
- Trust My Garage (<https://trustmygarage.co.uk/about-us/for-garages.php>), which is run by the Independent Garage Association (IGA).
- RAC Approved Garage Network (www.rac.co.uk/approvedgarages/join-agn).
- AA approved garages (www.theaa.com/car-care/book/start).
- BSI Kitemark for vehicle damage repair (BS 10125) (www.bsigroup.com/en-GB/products-and-services/assessment-and-certification/product-testing-certification/deliver-safe-and-compliant-vehicle-repairs-to-bs-10125/).
- The Motor Ombudsman's Service and Repair Code (www.themotorombudsman.org/consumers/our-codes-of-practice/service-repair-code).

Consumer and business protection legislation

Under the Consumer Rights Act 2015, vehicle repairs must be carried out with reasonable care and skill and for a reasonable charge, if this has not already been agreed in advance. Parts fitted to vehicles during repairs must be of satisfactory quality, as described and fit for purpose.

Under the Business Protection from Misleading Marketing Regulations 2008, it is an offence for a body shop to make unfair comparisons with other body shops, vehicle repair services or garages.

Workplace health and safety

According to the HSE, the most common workplace risks in the car service, maintenance and repair industry are slips, trips and falls and poor manual handling. The HSE has published guidance and information for the motor vehicle repair industry at www.hse.gov.uk/mvr/index.htm.

The HSE has also published guidance on working safety with electric and hybrid vehicles. Go to www.hse.gov.uk/mvr/topics/electric-hybrid.htm for more information.

Other health and safety issues applicable to body shops include:

- Health and safety measures when using isocyanate (www.hse.gov.uk/mvr/topics/general-coshh.htm).
- The safe use and maintenance of work equipment (www.hse.gov.uk/work-equipment-machinery/puwer.htm and www.hse.gov.uk/electricity/fag-portable-appliance-testing.htm).
- The use of personal protective equipment (PPE) (www.hse.gov.uk/ppe/index.htm).

- The safe use of lifting equipment such as vehicle lifts (www.hse.gov.uk/work-equipment-machinery/loler.htm and www.hse.gov.uk/foi/internalops/ocs/800-899/803_69).
- Fire safety (www.hse.gov.uk/mvr/topics/fire.htm).
- The safe use of acetylene gas to weld patch repairs (www.hse.gov.uk/fireandexplosion/acetylene.htm).

Insurance

Body shops require several types of insurance cover, including:

- Public and product liability insurance, which covers the body shop against claims for compensation from anyone injured or adversely affected as a result of its activities.
- Service indemnity insurance (also referred to as 'defective workmanship insurance'), which covers a body shop against claims for compensation as a result of faulty parts, or parts fitted incorrectly.
- Employers' liability insurance, which is mandatory as soon as the body shop employs anyone.
- Legal expenses insurance, which provides cover for defending disputes with customers, repair networks, regulators, local authorities, quality assurance schemes and suppliers, or to defend employment tribunal cases.
- Premises and equipment cover to protect the workshop and equipment against accidental damage or theft. Policies that cover customer vehicles and personal belongings are also available.

Specialist insurance for body shops is available from insurers and brokers such as ChoiceQuote (www.choicequote.co.uk/motor-trade-insurance/combined) and Gallagher (www.bollington.com/motor-trade-insurance/approved-repairer-bodyshop-insurance).

Legislation

This section provides an at-a-glance list of the key legislation that body shops must comply with.

Licensing

- The Environmental Permitting (England and Wales) Regulations 2016 govern the use of products containing volatile organic compounds (VOCs) and waste activities.
- The Pollution Prevention and Control (Scotland) Regulations 2012 govern the use of products containing VOCs in Scotland.
- The Pollution Prevention and Control (Industrial Emissions) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2013 cover the use of products containing VOCs in Northern Ireland.
- Under the Vehicles (Crime) Act 2001, anyone who supplies number plates in the course of their business must be registered with the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency (DVLA).

Waste disposal and trade effluent

- The Environmental Protection Act 1990 and the Waste and Contaminated Land (Northern Ireland) Order 1997 impose a legal duty on body shops to ensure that any trade waste they produce in the course of their business is properly and safely disposed of by a registered waste carrier.
- The Hazardous Waste (England and Wales) Regulations 2005 (as amended), the Special Waste Regulations 1996 in Scotland and the Hazardous Waste Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2005 cover the disposal of hazardous waste.
- Under the Water Industry Act 1991, which applies in England and Wales, the Sewerage (Scotland) Act 1968 and the Water and Sewerage Services (Northern Ireland) Order 2006, waste liquid produced by vehicle repair work carried out on a commercial basis is classed as 'trade effluent'.

Workplace health and safety

- The Acetylene Safety (England and Wales and Scotland) Regulations 2014 make provisions specifically in relation to the use of acetylene gas.
- The Control of Substances Hazardous to Health Regulations 2002 (COSHH) and the Control of Substances Hazardous to Health Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2003 require employers and the self-employed to reduce the risk posed to customers or employees by identifying potential health hazards.
- The Dangerous Substances and Explosive Atmospheres Regulations 2002 and equivalent legislation in Northern Ireland require employers to put controls in place where an explosive atmosphere may occur in a workplace.
- Under the Electricity at Work Regulations 1989 and equivalent legislation in Northern Ireland, employers and the self-employed are responsible for ensuring that electrical appliances, such as electric diagnostic equipment, are properly maintained.
- The Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974 and the Health and Safety at Work (Northern Ireland) Order 1978 place a general duty of care on employers and the self-employed to protect the health, safety and welfare of their employees and anyone else that may be affected by their business activities, such as suppliers, customers and members of the public.
- Under the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999 and equivalent legislation in Northern Ireland, all employers, and those who are self-employed, are required to identify and assess any workplace risks.
- The Personal Protective Equipment at Work Regulations 1992 (PPE) (as amended in 2022) and equivalent legislation in Northern Ireland set out requirements regarding the provision and use of personal protective equipment (PPE).
- The Provision and Use of Work Equipment Regulations 1998 (PUWER) and equivalent legislation in Northern Ireland regulate the use of workplace equipment. The Lifting Operations and Lifting

Equipment Regulations 1998 (LOLER) impose additional requirements in relation to certain lifting equipment, such as vehicle lifts.

- Under the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005 and equivalent legislation in Scotland and Northern Ireland, it is a legal requirement for body shops to carry out a fire risk assessment and install appropriate fire detection and prevention equipment on their premises.

Consumer and business protection

- The Business Protection from Misleading Marketing Regulations 2008 make it an offence for body shops to make unfair comparisons between their own business and other body shops, vehicle repair services or garages.
- Under the Consumer Rights Act 2015, vehicle repairs must be carried out with reasonable care and skill and for a reasonable charge, if this has not already been agreed in advance. Parts fitted to vehicles during servicing or repair must be of satisfactory quality, as described and fit for purpose.

Related factsheets

SEC041 Vehicle Maintenance and Repair - Sector Update

SYN026 Motor Vehicle Sales, Maintenance and Repair - Industry Snapshot

BOP030 Vehicle Recovery

BOP098 Garage/MOT Test Station

MBP241 Mobile Tyre Fitter

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Cobweb Information Ltd, YBN, 7 & 8 Delta Bank Road, Metro Riverside Park, Gateshead, NE11 9DJ.
Tel: 0191 461 8000 Website: www.cobwebinfo.com