

Rise in motorists being misled with phantom repairs

Experts are warning of an alarming rise in garages recommending 'phantom' repair work to motorists.

Analysis of claims work submitted by customers of the industry's leading provider of direct consumer warranties, Warranty Direct, over the past six months shows the practice of inflating repair bills with additional work is increasing.

The practice is more common amongst franchised dealers. In one case, a customer was quoted for work that amounted to 2,200 percent more than the actual repairs necessary*.

"It's a sad state of affairs but some are simply trying it on," says Duncan McClure Fisher, managing director of Warranty Direct. "We're finding ourselves policing garages on behalf of our customers."

Warranty Direct uses independent inspectors to assess quoted work where its engineers have raised suspicions.

In the most extreme case, a Peugeot workshop claimed that a car's entire fuel system should be replaced at a cost of £2,895.76 after fuel contamination was reported. Following inspection by an independent engineer, it was discovered that only the fuel filter needed replacing at a cost of just £131.71.

The concern for Warranty Direct is simple: the general public do not necessarily have the mechanical knowledge to question quoted work, unless they have access to a qualified second opinion and the protection that a good extended warranty provides.

"Our claims engineers are highly trained and experienced garage workshop mechanics, which is why we're able to spot unrelated or unnecessary repairs. This won't be the case for the average owner taking a car in for regular service or a health check," warns McClure Fisher. "This is a worrying development and we are releasing our findings not only to protect the motorist but also to allow some unscrupulous garages to get their houses back in order in the interests of the industry as a whole."

Table showing examples of inflated bills after 'vehicle health inspections'

Vehicle	Peugeot 406	Volkswagen Golf	Mercedes E Class
Original fault	Fuel filter	Engine warning light staying on	Differential oil seal leaking
Cost	£131.71	£21.92	£305.93
Additional work suggested	Replacement of fuel system	Replacement of wishbone and anti-roll bar bushes	Replacement of lower ball joints
Cost	£2,764.05	£293.44	£138
Total bill	£2,895.76	£315.36	£443.93

Other examples highlighted include a Vauxhall garage which claimed that both front shock absorbers, road springs, track control arms and outer ball joints needed

replacing on a Signum 1.9TD, at a cost of £720.60. In fact, only the offside front road spring needed changing, costing £170.58 – less than a quarter of the original bill.

In another case, the replacement of wishbone and anti-roll bar bushes for a customer of a Volkswagen Golf cost £293.44 when the original failure was to investigate a faulty engine warning light. The real bill should have been just £21.92.

The owner of a Mercedes E Class saloon with a differential oil seal leak was informed he needed to replace the lower ball joints adding another £138 to the bill. Inspection proved this was unnecessary.

Last year, Warranty Direct research showed that garage labour rates have increased by 11.3 percent since the summer of 2006, with the most expensive franchised dealers now charging over £200 an hour for their mechanic's time.

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* £2895.76 is 2,200 percent of, or 22 times, the £131.71 required to repair fuel filter on the Peugeot referred to in the table above

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Editors Notes:

Launched in 1997, Warranty Direct was the first direct personal Warranty Company to operate in the UK. It is owned by Cardif Pinnacle, a trading style of Pinnacle Insurance plc and subsidiary of global banking house, BNP Paribas.