

PARR AUTO BODY



www.parrautobody.com

Parr Auto Body in Saskatoon was founded by Ken Scissons in 1952. Today, under owner Tom Bissonette, it has expanded to employ 14 people, but it retains the helpful, positive attitude of the original owner. "I like helping people, solving people's problems," is how Bissonette sums up his reason for being in the business.

The government insurance challenge

In Saskatchewan, government insurance is the only show in town. While there are advantages to dealing with just one insurer, there are also challenges. Often when a damaged vehicle comes into a shop, technicians find additional hidden damage that is not recorded in the government insurance estimate. Technically this means that no work can be done until an insurance adjuster comes to recheck the vehicle. Shop manager Chelsea Stebner and Bissonette explain that under the SGI system, Parr Auto Body fell into the habit of loading up the shop with five vehicles every Monday, one for each of the technicians, and then rushing the vehicles out by Friday. "but then if they had to wait for supplementals by the insurance people, additional checking" says Bissonette, "then



"You can't stand still or you'll get run over!"

- Tom Bissonette, Owner
Parr Auto Body

we would take in another five vehicles to work on, and then maybe another five and then there'd be a rush to get them out Friday." This tends to cause a domino effect of work delays, shops taking in more vehicles to accommodate the delays, additional delays with the extra vehicles etc.

Under Saskatchewan Government Insurance (SGI) coverage there is a cost-saving pressure on shops to use aftermarket parts for repairs.

Taking it to the next level – going from a "push through" to a "throughput" system

In order to make sure that Parr Auto Body continues to flourish, Bissonette, Stebner, and Bert Dauvin made a trip to California to learn more about becoming a "lean and mean" shop using a "throughput" approach. "There's a need to control fixed costs, Stebner explains, "we have to fix it right the first time, do it faster and cheaper."

Technician Bert Dauvin is pleased with the shift in mindset brought about by the implementation of the throughput system. "It has made the whole repair cycle simpler. The volume of work is more consistent; it doesn't come in all at once. And we're keeping on hand only the tools we need, not extras."

In adjusting the workflow to a throughput focus, Parr Auto Body is managing to cut down on lull time of painters and body men waiting for work to be done, while continuing to increase their production hours to 250-300 a week. "It's more efficient this way," explains Stebner, and it's an evolution that is in synch with the way the younger techs have been trained. Stebner sees the transition to team-based pay as a natural outgrowth of this approach to work, "it's coming and it's a good thing".

For systemic change of the sort that Parr Auto Body is tackling to succeed, Stebner concludes "The key is not doing everything at once."



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When time is money

Being successful has not slowed down Parr Auto Body's quest to be better. The small, incremental adjustments that are evident throughout the shop add up overall to a very competitive shop. From the time a vehicle comes into the shop until it leaves, everything about the process is clearly ordered and documented.

- At intake, vehicles are detailed and photographed to establish exactly what needs doing. Findings not included in the original estimate are noted on the file.
- Particulars on the vehicles are posted in a production schedule, prominently for all to see.
- Bits and pieces that come off the vehicles are stored in bins on parts storage carts within easy reach. "If something breaks, we know where the pieces are and we know right away, and nothing gets lost," explains Stebner.
- "Everything has a home" says Chelsea Stebner. Everywhere you look in the freshly painted interior, the outlines of tools mark the exact spot where they belong.
- Having two licensed service technicians in the shop, one of them specializing in electrical systems cuts down on repair times as well as assuring customers of one-stop service.



Investing in the business

Rather than moving to specialize in some makes or models, Bissonette has chosen to invest in people and technology to ensure that Parr Auto Body is in a position to "fix your frame alignment, and wheels, and suspension, and alignment, and mechanical problems."

Parr Auto Body prides itself in being the first shop in Saskatchewan with a computerized frame measuring machine, that takes the guesswork out of frame alignments. The Car-O-Liner BenchRack system uses Bluetooth technology to track various points along the frame to facilitate restoration of the frame to its pre-accident state. Investing \$150,000 in frame and alignment equipment alone has meant that Bissonette, who doesn't like to shop out control of work to others, has attracted additional revenue for doing frame work from shops that don't have such equipment.

Maintaining an inventory of about \$30,000 in materials, purchased in bulk and tracked using QuickBooks, is another cost-control measure for Parr. "There are too many variables for just in time parts orders," explains Bissonette. "It would work only if dealerships held on to a lot of materials. Parts can arrive within a day. If they have to come from Toronto it takes four days; from the US, it can take 7-10 business days."



What's good about the industry

"If you love working on cars, this is for you" says Bert of working at Parr Auto Body in particular and the industry in general. "If you have computer skills, communication skills, team work skills, and you get the right training to understand the theory, you can be so many different things," says Bissonette. "You can be a body man, a sales rep, an appraiser, a painter, a trainer, an adjuster. You can work Monday to Friday and go home on weekends."

