

Importance of Certifications When Selecting An Auto Mechanic

I get asked this question very often. Evidently, its a financial concern for many people who seem to be under the delusion that anyone who is clever and decently educated can fix a car. So why pay unnecessary money for a technician with the shingle? To find an answer, I would recommend that they look at the test lineup and mission statements of ASE (The Institute for Automotive Service Excellence) and I-CAR (Inter-Industry Conference on Auto Collision Repair). These are the two heavyweights as far as certifying auto service technicians through testing goes. But before you look at the lineup and mission statements, heres a brief synopsis on each organization, followed by their respective mission statements, and lastly, their test line-ups:

ASE (The Institute for Automotive Service Excellence)

Even 30-odd years ago, there was no way to tell whether an auto technician was competent. That is, there was no professional standard that auto technicians could adhere to. To fill in this vacuum, the autonomous, non-profit body known as National Institute for Automotive Service Excellence (ASE) was set up in 1972. As of today, nearly 420,000 professionals can boast that they possess current ASE certifications. They work in all areas of the automotive service industry such as vehicle dealerships, single garages, fleets, and service stations.

How does the ASE go about awarding a certification? All aspirants sign up for one or more of the ASEs 40-odd exams. The tests are classified under such specialty areas as automobile, medium/heavy truck, truck equipment, school bus, and collision repair technicians and engine machinists, alternate fuels technicians, parts specialists, and collision damage estimators. When an applicant has passed at least one exam and has supplied proof of at least two years of relevant job experience, he is officially ASE certified. However, he must take a re-test every five years in order to remain ASE certified. ACT, which runs several academic and occupational testing programs, oversees the tests, held twice a year at over 800 venues around the country. And just in case you thought everyone passes them with flying colors, think again, because roughly one out of three candidates fails the tests, which emphasize job-related skills.

Needless to say, a consumer stands to gain much from ASE certification. For one, it can become a measure of the knowledge and skills of a technician; second, it tells you a lot about a repair facility's quality if it displays the ASE Blue Seal of Excellence logo on its signs and advertisements.

ASEs mission: To improve the quality of automobile repair and service through the testing and certification of repair and service professionals in the automotive industry.

You can gain a better idea of the ASE certification and testing by studying the tests as outlined on www.ase.com:

Auto/Light Truck: A1 Engine Repair; A2 Automatic Transmission/Transaxle; A3 Manual Drive Train and Axles; A4 Suspension and Steering; A5 Brakes; A6 Electrical/Electronics Systems; A7 Heating and Air Conditioning; A8 Engine Performance

Alternate Fuels: F1 Light Vehicles-Compressed Natural Gas

Medium Heavy Duty Truck: T1 Gasoline Engines; T2 Diesel Engines; T3 Drive Train; T4 Brakes; T5 Suspension and Steering; T6 Electrical/Electronic Systems; T7 Heating, Ventilation, & A/C; T8 Preventive Maintenance Inspection

Parts Specialist: P1 Med/Hvy Truck Dealership Parts Specialist; P2 Automobile Parts Specialist; P3B Med/Hvy Truck Aftermarket Parts Specialist (Brakes); P3S Med/Hvy Truck Aftermarket Parts Specialist (Suspension and Steering); P4 General Motors Parts Consultant

Advanced Series: L1 Automobile Adv'd Engine Performance Specialist; L2 Truck Adv'd Elec. Diesel Engine Diagnosis

Collision Repair and Refinishing: B2 Painting and Refinishing; B3 Non-Structural Analysis and Damage Repair; B4 Structural Analysis and Damage Repair; B5 Mechanical and Electrical Components; B6 Damage Analysis and Estimating

School Bus: S1 Body Systems and Special Equipment; S2 Diesel Engines; S3 Drive Train; S4 Brakes; S5 Suspension and Steering; S6 Electrical/Electronic Systems; S7 Air Conditioning Systems and Controls

Engine Machinist: M1 Cylinder Head Specialist (Gas or Diesel); M2 Cylinder Block Specialist (Gas or Diesel); M3 Assembly Specialist (Gas or Diesel)

Truck Equipment: E1 Installation and Repair Specialist; E2 Electrical/Electronic Systems; E3 Auxiliary Power Systems

Now for I-CAR

Created in 1979, I-CAR (Inter-Industry Conference on Auto Collision Repair) is also an international, non-profit training organization dedicated to improving the standard, safety, and efficacy of auto collision repair.

To that end, I-CAR promotes the concept of Outward Vision, which is a concept that aims to define the Ideal State of the collision industry as far as technical training is concerned. In this regard, I-CAR's definition of the industry's Ideal State is:

That every person in the Collision Industry has the necessary technical knowledge and skills relevant to their position to ensure a complete and safe repair. I-CAR continues to develop and deliver technical training programs to professionals in all areas of the Collision Industry. Furthermore, I-CAR provides a communication forum for anyone interested in proper collision repair. Finally, that I-CAR's primary funding is derived from student tuition and services, insuring that I-CAR can remain unbiased in developing courses and services on an industry-wide basis.

The I-CAR Mission Statement:

To research, develop, and deliver quality technical educational programs related to collision repair; to raise the level of available knowledge and recognize professional achievement; thereby improving communication throughout the Collision Repair, Insurance, and related Industries for the ultimate benefit of the consumer.

These are some of the training courses offered through I-CAR for collision repair technicians:

Identification and Repair Decisions; Adhesive Repair; Welding Repair; Repair of Padded Dashes; Refinishing of Plastics; Analyzing Damage; Creating a Damage Report Manually; Creating a Computerized Damage Report; Safety & Environmental Practices

Understanding Automotive Finishes; Preparing the Surface for Refinishing; Preparing the Equipment, Paint Area & Refinish Materials; Tinting; Applying the Finish; Blending;

Solving Paint Application Problems; Finish Defects, Causes & Cures; Detailing; MIG (GMAW) Welding Cutting & Heating Processes Advanced Welding Methods; Damage Analysis; Straightening Structural Parts; Full & Partial Panel Replacement; Stationary Glass Replacement; Restoring Corrosion Protection; Preparation Panel Replacement and Alignment; Working with Trim and Hardware; Metal Straightening; Using Body Fillers; Door Skin & Intrusion Beam Replacement; Quarter Panel Placement; Moveable Glass and Hardware.

If, after all this, you still think it worthwhile to have an unskilled and unqualified amateur have a look at your car, just to save a few dollars in the short run, the call is yours. However, it is obvious that the importance of a certified and professional technician is immense when it comes to protecting and maintaining your precious vehicle. And what's more, such a technician will always keep himself updated on the latest happenings in the automotive industry, which means even the newest makes and models are safe in his hands. So do not leave your car vulnerable to undue risks. Consult a professionally certified technician today.

About the Author

Rand Stuck is a master technician with over 13 years experience repairing BMWs and currently manages the BMW parts department for an online parts retailer. You can find additional [Repair and Maintenance](#) information at [AutoWerks BMW Parts](#)