



Special feature – services to fleets

Keep your Rolodex current

FOR MOST FLEETS, THE thought of service and repair falls into the “thank the Lord we use a lease company to deal with this”, because the reality of the situation is that servicing and repair work takes time to organise and a considerable amount of effort.

Of course, if you happen to run a fleet of new or near-new vehicles, you're off the hook anyway, and as long as you replace all your vehicles after two or three years, just before the bulk of the manufacturer warranties run out, that makes your job much easier.

But then, not every fleet has the luxury of regular vehicle turnover.

So what does the fleet that keeps its vehicles over the warranty period do?

Well, there's actually quite a lot that can be done and, just like painting, a little preparatory work can save you time, money and energy.

How do you prepare for something like repairs?

Servicing is relatively easy and we'll cover that in due course, but a repair generally comes about through an unforeseen situation, so to cover repairs, a fleet manager should have a plan in place to deal with a crisis before the crisis hits.

This basically means that you – as a fleet manager – should be keeping an eye on service and repair companies touting their services and maybe doing a little research on those companies

For instance, one of your drivers has a stone hit the windscreen and starbursts it.

Do you A: go to your franchise dealer and be told that the car windscreen is a new shape and a new replacement screen has to be flown in and you'll need to leave the car with them, or

B: do you think back to an annoying little radio ad that inspires you to 'show us your crack'? Or remember the two most common names (reputedly) in the phone book and call them for a quote?

What about punctures on the side of the road in larger vehicles such as light commercial vans?

Anyone remember who the company was that first alerted us to the 'wobbly thing'? Here, hit yourself with this blunt axe to remember the company name. It was Beaufreaires, by the way.

The point here is not to remember the coolest advertising jingle in the world, but to alert you to the fact that there are a number of companies out there who can take away a lot of stress when the crunch happens. It's just a question of remembering who they are and

adding their cards and/or details into your Rolodex, mental or physical.

One such company is Crash Brokers – a company name you should remember for when the worst-case scenario happens and you need panel repairs quickly.

Crash Brokers launched just six months ago, and the company operates a network of top quality repairers across Auckland.

The call-centre provides instant response to 0800 callers and courtesy cars are delivered to the door, ensuring clients need never leave their home or office.

The entire repair process and communications are managed so that busy clients are free to focus on their business.

Crash Brokers' success is due to the strength of the relationships it has developed across the sector including key strategic alliances with Lease Car Ltd, the Real Estate Institute of New Zealand and many of the new car dealerships within the Greater Auckland area.

Director Karen Knight, who owned and operated one of the largest collision repair shops in New Zealand for almost 20 years, claims that levels of both quality and service within the industry are still highly variable, ranging from five-star to no-star. The sector is largely unregulated and it has been very difficult for those with time pressure, limited expertise, and little influence with service providers to achieve a quality service experience.

Initially Crash Brokers targeted the general public, however, the business sector was quick to identify the unique value that Crash Brokers provides and SME's now constitute the majority of business received.

Knight suggests that this is due to the nature of small business, which often has limited resources and in-house expertise in fleet operations.

In response to demand from 7-day/wk businesses and the REINZ, the service was recently enhanced even further and 24/7 coverage is now provided. Crash Brokers service is unique and has literally become a one-call solution for collision repairs.

Crash Brokers has already gathered an impressive collection of testimonials from a delighted business sector, and is happy to provide these on request.

In addition, a recent bulletin to REINZ members stated "Crash Brokers already has many very satisfied customers within the real estate industry and provides an excellent service. If you want to save time, stress and money, REINZ highly recommends Crash Brokers to you." It sounds like the onerous task of sourcing quality collision repairs is a thing of the past...

There are times when a franchised dealer is actually the best way to go – these are especially when the vehicle has some catastrophic engine-related failure.

Why should you use a franchised dealer service centre?

In the first place, they'll have the expertise to deal with your particular car. They'll know what parts to use and what consumables are required. They also have the technical bulletins that apply to your vehicle.

There are ancillary reasons too. Franchised dealer service centres often have courtesy vehicles to eliminate vehicle downtime.

On the other hand, if your vehicle is a little older or you run a

multi-make fleet, it may make more sense to find a good independent repairer. The advantages here are basically cost savings when it comes to parts sourcing.

Aftermarket parts can be cheaper and in some cases are actually used by the OE manufacturers themselves.

It is worth being a little cautious though.

We have heard some horror stories, particularly regarding consumable items such as oil filters, so if you think you might use aftermarket parts, you should keep a close watch on your vehicle's performance before and after fitting.

And now that we've got your attention drawn to paying attention, it's time to look at those all-important service schedules.

These are very useful tools when it comes to negotiating cost savings.

A service generally includes a percentage of consumable items, oil, cleaners, pads, filters, et cetera.

These are often expensive items and often unnecessarily so. The oil used is more often than not, the best your money can buy, and oddly, you seem to be buying an awful lot of it.

Spark plugs can be another high cost area and these can be changed a lot earlier than they need. The same thing applies to filters.

With a service schedule, you should be following manufacturer's recommendations. After the vehicle goes outside the scheduled service period, you can start looking at the bills and the items required and seeing where you can save some pennies.

And one of the easiest services to fleets to remember is actually the one service that is least utilised – keeping your fleet clean and presentable.

We've covered this before, that a sign written or corporately identified vehicle, does your business no end of damage when it presents an untidy appearance to the world. But you could find your fleet users spending a fortune at car washes when they refuel and those car washes aren't all that gentle on your investment either. So, who 'ya gonna call?

Try Car Care NZ which has mobile car valet operators Auckland wide and in Hamilton, Bay of Plenty and Hawkes Bay. All their vans are fully set up with professional equipment and products including their own water supply and power generator. If too much moisture in the car park is a problem, there is a 'No Water' option where water usage is restricted.

Using a mobile unit means convenience and security of your vehicles and availability immediately on finishing.

Car Care NZ services range from regular 'Wash and Vac' to a full detail, including pre-lease returns and sale vehicles.

The company also specialises in vehicle launches/displays: cut and polish; over spray removal; paint, leather and fabric protection; interior valet (including truck cabs).

Operators are fully trained, wear uniforms to avoid any security problems and their vans are easily identifiable.

There are service providers for just about every aspect of automotive use. Your task – find them and remember who they are and you'll find your day is a lot less stressful.