# A Used Car Field Guide for Detecting Collision Repair

Stop Curbstoning

www.stopcurbstoning.com

It used to be fairly easy to spot the signs of a collision repair: overspray, bad color matching, and misaligned body panels. Now, with computers assisting with everything from frame straightening to color matching, it's a lot harder to tell if a vehicle has been in a collision, especially if the repair was done well.

That's great if you want your car fixed after an accident. But it makes things hard if you're looking for a good used car.

NOTE: We're not saying to avoid any car that's had bodywork. A vehicle that's been properly and professionally repaired after a minor fender-bender could be a terrific bargain. We are saying to watch for disparities between what a seller says and what his or her vehicle shows.

Of course, no one can catch all the bad cars. That's why an inspection by a trusted, experienced mechanic, along with a vehicle history report form a service like AutoCheck, are absolutely vital steps to take before paying money for any used car from a private party.

However, here are some quick, simple things you can watch for when you're out looking at cars.
One element on your side is simple greed: curbstoners want to maximize their profits. After all, they only need to fool a buyer long enough to collect the cash. So, curbstoned cars rarely get top-notch repair treatment.

## At A Glance

A walk around the vehicle in good light will often disclose whether or not a body panel has been replaced or repainted. Look at the car from several angles to make sure the color matches across all the body panels.

Look also at the reflections in the paint – factory paintwork is mirror-smooth, even when dirty or dinged up. Signs of repair often reveal themselves in a slightly rippled reflection, or a reflection that doesn't exactly line up across two body panels. Be sure to look at reflections from several angles.

If the car is so dirty that you can't see reflections, you might need to ask for the car to be washed. While you're sighting down the sides of the car, check to make sure the body panels all fit flush, and that the gaps between the panels are even from top-to-bottom and side-to-side.

**Good places to look for paint overspray or excess paint include:**

- ☑ Around electrical conduits in door jambs
- ☑ Near door, hood, and trunk hinges
- ☑ On window and door seals
- ☑ Around seals and fittings in the engine compartment firewall
- ☑ Along the trim pieces inside wheel wells

Sun damage typically affects large body surfaces like hoods and roofs. When you see small patches of peeling clear-coat, especially in corners and other hard-to-reach areas, they may indicate a poorly prepped paint job.

At the same time, beware of too-perfect paint. Even a garaged, well-cared-for used vehicle will have small paint chips and even minor dings. If the chin fascia beneath the front bumper is pristine, it may have been recently replaced or repainted.

## Hands-On

If the car passes your initial visual inspection, it's time to get hands-on.

Feel around the painted edges of the hood, trunk, and doors. It is very difficult – almost impossible, in fact – to repaint a body panel and get the edge as smooth as a factory-finish. You often can't see the difference, but a re-spray will have a very slight roughness on the very edges. Before you go shopping, try this on a car you know to never have been repainted so you know what a factory finish feels like.

Inside the car, carpets and accessory mats make it hard to tell anything visually. So pat down the floors of the passenger compartment and trunk or rear compartment. Feel along the sills too. There should be no stray bumps or bulges in the underlying surfaces or overlying trim pieces.

## Look Closer

A close look at areas where you suspect a repaint may reveal un-factory-like flaws, including tiny bits of dust or lint under or within the paint.

Also, look under the car – you don't have to look far underneath, because most collision damage affects the outside edges. A small hand mirror and a flashlight are useful things to bring with you car shopping.

Things to look for include weld seams across the bottom of the body, paint overspray, excess undercoating, misaligned components, or holes indicating missing bolts or parts. Look at the bumper mounts – if they look newer than the rest of the underbody components, that's a red flag. The same thing goes for engine mounts, although in some cars those are hard to see. This is also a good opportunity to eyeball the whole undercarriage for signs of leaking oil or other fluids.

## The Test Drive

Even a well-used car should track straight and smooth at all speeds if it's been reasonably well maintained. If it shudders or drifts to one side, it could need a simple wheel alignment, or it could need expensive suspension work – or, the very structure of the car could be bent.

## Not All of These Signs Indicate a Car You Should Walk Away From

As we said earlier, a vehicle that's been properly and professionally repaired after an accident could be a terrific bargain. And you are, after all, buying a used car. But it's only right for you to know what you're buying, and from whom you're buying it.

That's why the biggest red flag is a disparity between what the seller says and what the car shows. An owner knows his or her car's history. A curbstoner doesn't.

And that's also why it's smart to get a pre-purchase inspection from a trusted mechanic, and order a vehicle history report.

Because even a cheap used car is no bargain if it leads to more troubles down the road.

Please help us Stop Curbstoning!

### About Stop Curbstoning

Stop Curbstoning is a cause supported by a group of concerned corporations and organizations within the automotive industry. Its mission is to educate used car buyers, unite car dealers, and motivate municipalities to take action against this growing problem.

Stop Curbstoning was founded by AutoTec, LLC, a privately held company based in Birmingham, AL. AutoTec's flagship product, AuctionACCESS, is the automotive remarketing industry standard for managing dealer access to wholesale auto auctions.