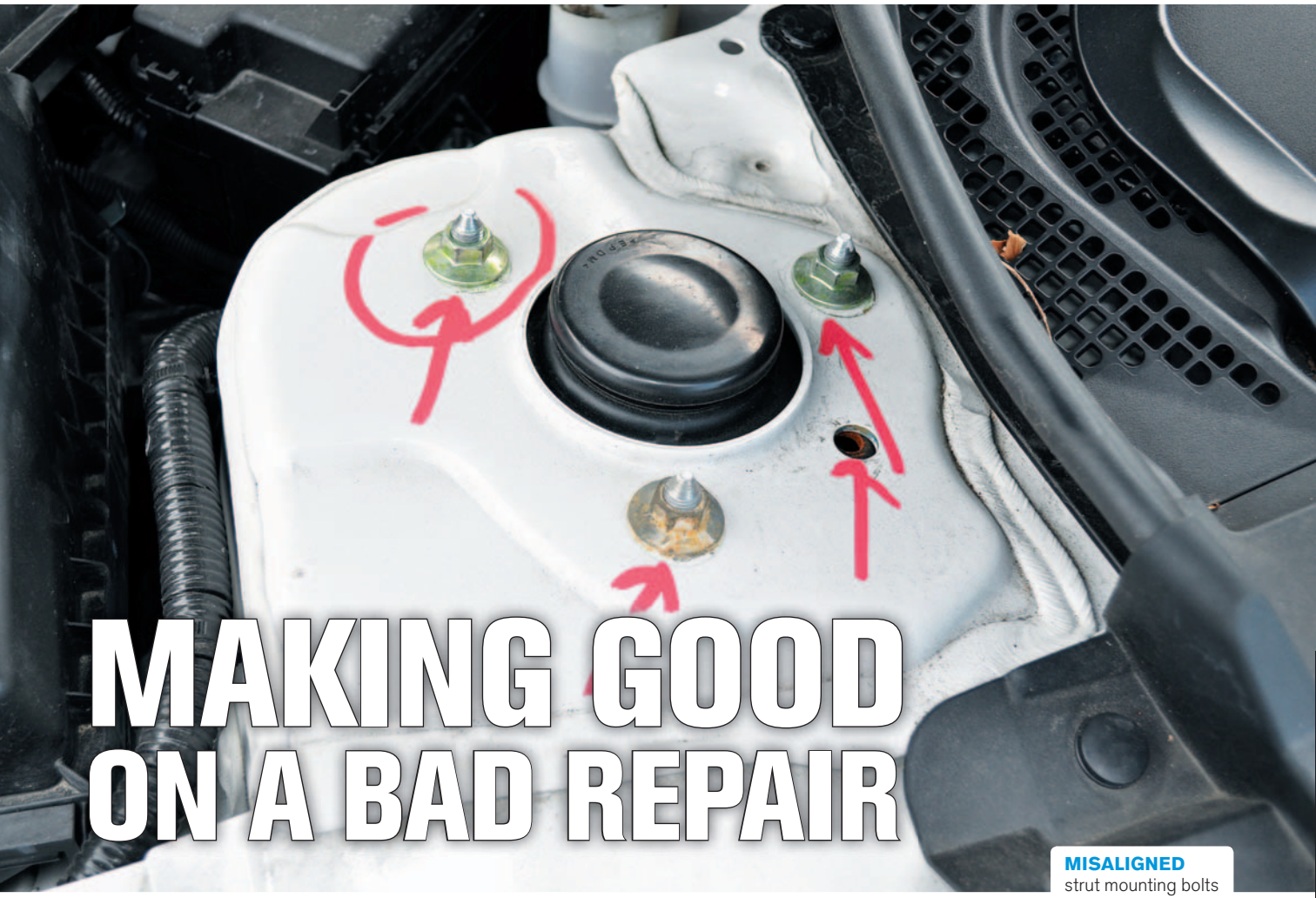


MAKING GOOD ON A BAD REPAIR

MISALIGNED strut mounting bolts

A LOOK AT POST REPAIR INSPECTIONS AND QUALITY OF REPAIR ASSESSMENTS

LARRY MONTANEZ // Technical Advisor

Post-Repair Inspection (PRI) has become a catchphrase in the collision repair industry over the past three to four years. Although PRIs have been around for decades, this term has gained prominence in recent times for a variety of reasons. For one, the advanced steels used in late-model vehicle construction are generally unrepairable, yet pressure from insurers, unrealistic cycle times, a lack of technician training, antiquated equipment and/or greed have led to these structural components being repaired. This has resulted in noticeable imperfections. And social media has added to the expansion and the drama along with it.

Almost all collision repair professionals have experienced a poorly repaired vehicle in their shop at least once. In some cases, they were horrified by what was done; in many cases, they were unsure of what to do about it or who was going to pay for it. (Note: We're not giving legal advice in this article. Please check with your lawyer regarding the laws in your state.)

Good and bad situations

When a car is poorly repaired by a direct repair program (DRP) facility, a good situation would be that the insurance company will cover the re-repairs and rectify things quickly for the vehicle owner. A bad situation is when a non-DRP shop (with no ties to an insurer) repairs the vehicle incorrectly. The insurer might say to the vehicle owner, "You chose the facility,

PHOTOS: LARRY MONTANEZ

and we will not cover the re-repairs." In this situation, the consumer most likely will need to hire a lawyer to sue the repair facility. This whole process could take months or even years. Even if the consumer wins the case, he or she might not get paid because the shop could go out of business, change names or ownership to avoid paying for the vehicle repairs or a replacement vehicle. You — as the shop trying to rectify a poor repair — must inform the vehicle owner up front what his or her situation is and what the choices are. We will break this discussion up into the following several categories.

Good — DRP facility repair

• First party is always good.

• Third party can be even better because there is no contractual agreement, but it must have been repaired at the insurer DRP shop.

Options for settlement:

• The vehicle is repairable and you can come to an agreement with the insurer.

• You and the insurer agree that the vehicle is a total loss.

• You come to an agreement directly with the shop that repaired the vehicle.

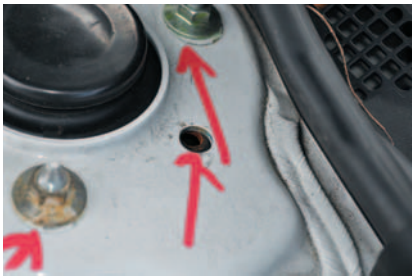
When the insurer and/or shop disagree:

• The insured can sue the original repair facility and insurer on first party. On third party, they would sue the insurer and the driver and/or owner of the negligent vehicle.

• Have the vehicle owner pay for the repairs and sign an Assignment of Proceeds (AOP), if allowed in that state, so that you (as the shop) can sue the insurer and repair facility.

Bad — Non-DRP facility repair

• A lawsuit against the repair facility is the only way to right the incorrect repairs. It may take a long time to get restitution, if ever. This is the worst-case scenario.



MISALIGNED strut mounting bolts

• This is true for insurer-pay or customer-pay repairs. You chose the shop and the insurer does not have to cover the re-repairs.

Inspection types

• Collision repair inspection (CRI) — This type of inspection is the most common and the least scientific. Generally, the vehicle owner will bring a repaired vehicle to a shop of his or her choice to review the repairs. This is usually from a low-speed cosmetic or minor collision event. In most

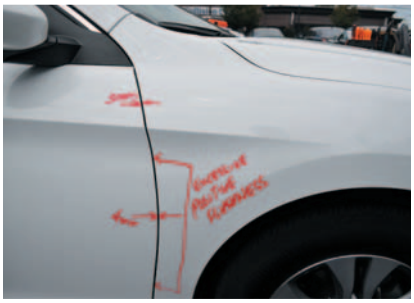
instances, the re-repair will need only slight adjustment, new clips, extra buffing and polishing or (at worst) a sand and refinish to name a few issues. This may be a free-of-charge service, a customer-paid job or (in some cases) the original repair facility will pay for the re-repairs. The insurance company is generally not involved in these types of cases.

• Post-repair inspection (PRI) — This type of inspection usually is due to noticeably incorrect repairs and/or drivability and operational issues with the vehicle. This is a very extensive inspection where the following generally will be required:

• Hundreds of photographs
• Three-dimensional measurements
• Paint film thickness measurements
• Some destructive testing (disassembly, sanding or grinding)
• Borescope inspection
• Visual weld inspection

Generally, these inspections will uncover enough evidence to suggest that extensive re-repairs are required. Many times the PRI expert will negotiate the re-repair for the consumer and repair facility. Generally the PRI expert can rectify the re-repairs in a few days or within two weeks, as they have been involved in numerous cases and know the players and the rules.

Quality of repair assessment (QRA) — What happens if the PRI expert discovers significant damage, significant safety issues or a complete abomination? Well, in some cases the PRI expert will need to get an expert, because this case is most likely going to court. Additionally, the client attorney might require an independent third party to assist in proving the issues uncovered. A QRA is a type of inspection that is the most scientific and requires extensive knowledge of vehicle repair protocols, vehicle design, metallurgy and engineering principles.



PANEL GAP ISSUES on vehicle with misaligned strut tower

QUARTER PANEL, WAVY PANEL backside with excessive burns and no corrosion protection applied

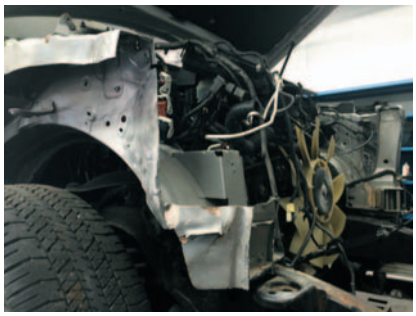
An engineer or collision damage analyst (CDA) generally performs QRAs. A CDA is usually a collision repair expert who possesses extensive training on OEM repair protocols and materials, engineering principles, metallurgy, vehicle design, applied collision impact forces cause and effect, welding, structural repair procedures, root cause of how the damage occurred and mathematics.

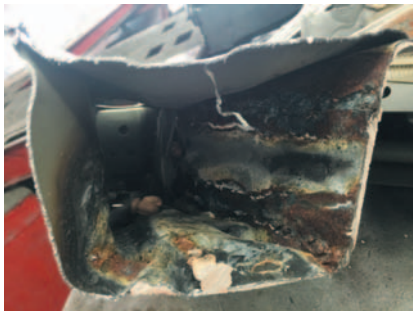
A QRA requires these types of experts because they will need to prove what is wrong, why it is wrong, how it is wrong and why these repairs are required. Oftentimes, the expert will be required to go through a Daubert or Frye hearing prior to the trial. In a body shop, you can easily explain what repairs must be done and why. In a court situation, you will be required to have scientific evidentiary proof of the facts you are presenting. These examinations will require extensive and in-depth evidence, including the following:

- OEM-specific repair protocols and procedures
- Hundreds of photographs (in specific numerical order and geographical location)
- Three-dimensional measurements (with calibration reports)
- Paint film thickness measurements (with calibration reports and measurement analysis)
- Visual weld inspection as well as measurement
- Destructive testing (disassembly, destructive strength tests of components' welds and bonding) and in some cases tensile strength and lap sheer strength, magnafluxing and X-raying.
- Macroscopic and microscopic paint material evaluation
- Borescope inspection

Training

To become successful at anything, you will need to train and practice (and obviously fail a few times). Your experience in collision repair is extremely helpful, but you will also need to build your résumé, professionally called a CV (Curriculum Vitae). Here is a list of training you will need to assist in your goal of being a PRI technician:





RIGHT APRON BAFFLE with excessive corrosion and body filler

- Experience as a technician
- Current and ongoing structural repair training/certification from multiple companies (Celette, Car-O-Liner, Chief, CarBench, Global-Jig)
- Current and ongoing welding certifications from companies like ISO and AWS
- Current and ongoing OEM training certifications
- Current and ongoing estimating system database usage and Procedural Pages (P-Pages) logic from Audatex, CCC, Mitchell
- Current and ongoing engineering education
- Current and ongoing professional association membership
- Peer-reviewed articles
- Speaking engagements
- Training engagements as the instructor

This will not happen overnight. It takes time to build your knowledge, experience and recognition in this field. One thing to remember is not to make such a big mistake that it ruins your career. Integrity is everything. Everyone makes a mistake or two, but don't be so off-base that it could prevent you from ever being hired again. Always remember that we are a small community and news travels fast.

If you want to get involved in becoming a PRI technician or rising up the ladder to a CDA, take it slow and study. Practice makes perfect. You will need to be proficient at photography, documentation, measuring (three dimensional, film thickness, tensile strength, etc.) and note-taking. All of these things will be used in the expert reports you will need to write.

PRIs will grow in prevalence as more and more vehicles with advanced high-strength steel (AHSS), aluminum or mixed material vehicles are produced. This is because many collision repairers are not investing in proper equipment and training, causing a rise in incorrectly repaired vehicles. PRIs are exposing the main issues in our industry, but they cannot address the solutions to ensure safe and proper repairs. Training, education and adhering to standard operating procedures (SOPs) are some places to start to ensure that proper repairs are being performed.

LARRY MONTANEZ is co-owner of P&L Consultants, which works with collision shops on estimating, production and proper repair procedures. He is also a certified technician for multiple OEM collision repair programs.
info@PnLEstimology.com