



STRAIGHT TORQUE

With Melinda Leyshon of Production Automotive

Own a new car? What are your rights when it comes to choosing an independent mechanic to stamp your log book?

New car owners can be forgiven for assuming that in order to retain their vehicle warranty they need to return to the dealership to have it serviced. This is most certainly not the case. There are certainly a number of requirements when it comes to new car warranties, but an educated owner can most certainly save themselves a lot of money – as well as ensure top quality! - by choosing an independent mechanic to service their vehicle.

What types of warranties are there?

New cars are covered by a number of different types of warranties, including:

- **Statutory warranties** are implied by the Trade Practices Act and exist whether a consumer chooses to take their vehicle to an independent mechanic or to have it serviced by the dealer, and
- **Express warranties**, which are offered by vehicle manufacturers as a way of showing they stand by their vehicles. They do not override your statutory warranty but specify conditions (see further below).

Can an independent mechanic stamp your log book?

Yes! The car industry practices coercion by stealth when it comes to servicing and

warranties without overtly walking across the ACCC's anti-competitive line - car companies don't want you to know that it is perfectly okay to have your car serviced outside the authorised dealership. It is both anti-competitive and illegal to make having your car serviced at the dealership a condition of your warranty.

The requirements for your new-car warranty can be met by any qualified repairer, provided that the servicing:

- is carried out by qualified staff
- is undertaken according to the manufacturer's specifications, and
- utilises genuine or appropriate quality parts.

Let's look at these in a bit more detail.

Qualified staff

To legally stamp your log book, the service needs to be undertaken by 'qualified staff' – meaning a trade-qualified mechanic – and the workshop itself also needs to be an MVIRA-licensed premises.

Manufacturer's specifications

Your vehicle log book will list the manufacturer's specifications for your vehicle warranty. These vary between vehicles, but generally specify services to be carried out every 10,000 to 15,000km, and also list any additional tasks that need to be carried out (such as additional filter changes, flushes, etc) – not adhering to these requirements will void your warranty.

Genuine or quality parts

Dealerships use what are called 'genuine' parts. Many independent mechanics will use 'aftermarket' parts, some of which are interchangeable with genuine products and meet the same quality specifications as genuine. Engine oils are another area where certain specifications must be met – talk to your mechanic to ensure they are using quality parts that are not only fit or appropriate, but which also come with guarantees and meet required specifications to ensure your warranty remains intact.

What are the benefits of using an independent mechanic?

Independent mechanics have a number of things going for them, including:

- Service is their main game, so their business lives and dies on the quality of the service they provide (as opposed to dealerships where servicing is an ancillary add-on)
- You get consistency of service, and can discuss your car's condition with the mechanic working on it, rather than a customer officer relaying information, and
- Due to the wide availability of quality aftermarket parts and reduced labour costs, independent servicing is often far cheaper than dealership servicing.



So what do you need to ask your mechanic?

You are paying for a service, so it is vital you have the full facts:

- What is the warranty on labour?
- What are the brands of parts they are using – are they deemed suitable and do they come with guarantees?
- Who is working on your vehicle? Are apprentices buddied and all work supervised by a qualified mechanic?
- Are diagnostic machines available (if required) to look for fault codes and/or reset the service interval schedule?

Armed with the right information, you will be able to find a quality independent service without the dealership price tag!