

QUICK AND PAINITLESS

At about one-fourth the cost of traditional dent removal at a body shop, on-site paintless dent removal (PDR) puts a vehicle back into service quicker and ups a turnback vehicle's value in the auction lane.

BY ANNIE LUBINSKY

These days, car rental companies are doing everything they can to streamline spending, including keeping vehicles in their fleets for longer periods of time. It follows that the more rental cars are in use, the more likely they are to show signs of wear and tear, including creases, dents and dings. It's more of a challenge than ever for car rental companies to keep the cars looking new from the time they enter service until it's time for turnback or the auction lane. And that means repairs have to be cost effective and quick.

Paintless dent removal (PDR) saves car rental companies time and money. PDR is the process of removing dings or dents by massaging the metal, using tools made with

WHAT TO LOOK FOR IN A PDR COMPANY:

1. Garage keeper's insurance
2. A "no drilling" policy
3. Stringent selection and training of PDR technicians
4. Ongoing research and development of tools and techniques to provide effective repairs
5. Customer service program with a 100-percent satisfaction policy and competitive pricing
6. A name recognized by auto manufacturers



What Dent Wizard considers a typical ding takes about 10 minutes to remove and is about the size of a quarter. "The vehicle can be repaired on the lot and then be made available to rent that same day," says Mark Lipinski.

the vehicle structure in mind so that it's unnecessary to drill holes. PDR repairs dents in which the metal is not stretched too far and the paint is not cracked or chipped. Best of all, it keeps cars looking new and in service longer. When it's time for turnback, PDR can help car rental companies make cost effective repairs.

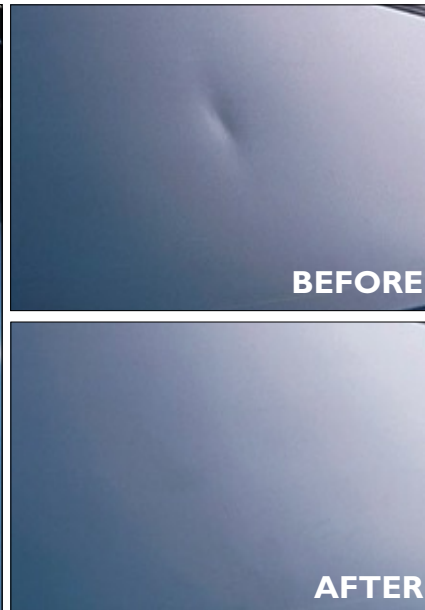
A Friend to Auto Rental

Dent Wizard International (Bridgeton, Mo.), a PDR company, has enjoyed a long-term relationship with the auto rental market and works with such companies as Enterprise, Hertz, Avis Budget, Dollar Thrifty and Advantage. "We're very in tune with the car rental industry's needs," says Shea Menchaca, Dent Wizard's director of na-

tional sales. "We understand customer service, turnback and auction policies as well as the needs of the manufacturer."

Mark Lipinski, director of maintenance and warranty at Dollar Thrifty Automotive Group, says that PDR allows the company to consistently provide a clean, well-maintained rental vehicle, which creates a positive customer experience and encourages repeat business. "We want to maintain our rental vehicles throughout their time in service and not just wait until a vehicle has come to term before providing any type of reconditioning," Lipinski says.

With car rental companies holding onto vehicles longer, PDR services are used more often than before. "A major airport location might have 2,000 PDRs per year," says Jer-



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ry Bernacki, vice president of vehicle maintenance and damage at Avis Budget Group. "Whenever a vehicle has objectionable damage, we fix it — not just at turnback or wholesale time."

PDR Rescues Revenue

PDR is worth the time and cost, say Lipinski and Bernacki. For example, Lipinski says, a three-hour dent repair job using conventional body shop methods and rates would include labor, refinish and materials, and it would cost about \$200. "You also have to consider shuttle cost to and from the body shop and vehicle downtime (on average, four days), so add another \$70 in daily vehicle cost — not to mention the potential lost revenue," he explains.

"PDR could be used instead and the vehicle can be repaired on the lot and then be made available to rent that same day," Lipinski says.

"PDR saves us millions," Bernacki says. "The cost of a PDR repair is about one-third the cost of actual body repair — absolutely worth it."

PDR is also a less invasive method of repair, a consideration that's very important to car rental companies. "Since there are no panel fillers and refinishing required, it's a more desirable repair. A conventional repair runs the risk of being deemed 'poor' at time of sale or off-lease return," explains Lipinski.

Dent Wizard pays close attention to manufacturer specifications and requirements. "Each vehicle is its own animal, and we work with the manufacturers to get a breakdown of the vehicle," Menchaca says. "We provide our technicians with detailed schematics showing the existing access points."

Dents Big and Small

PDR companies like Dent Wizard can work on an on-call or exclusive basis. In some areas, technicians establish a daily route, visiting several clients and taking care of that day's jobs. "We repair anything from a dime-sized ding to a caved-in bumper or panel, and it can take minutes or hours," Menchaca says. What Dent Wizard considers a typical ding takes about 10 minutes to remove and is about the size of a quarter.

Menchaca says that if PDR technicians cannot complete a repair, they can still save a car rental company time and money. "There are all different ways to reduce cost and time," she says. "For instance, in cases where you would use a body shop, Dent Wizard can do some of the work to reduce the body and paint time and cost."

Avis Budget uses PDR to reduce collision repair cost on vehicles that need actual body repair. "Before a vehicle goes to a body shop, we have a technician use PDR on the panels that can be fixed with PDR, and we have the body shop work on the panels that cannot

be fixed with PDR," says Bernacki. "We use PDR whenever it can be applied."

PDR can bring real savings at the time of sale: One estimate is that for every \$1 spent on PDR, \$1.50 to \$2 can be returned at auction. "There's a significant return on investment," Menchaca says.

Evolving to Meet New Needs

One of the best reasons to use PDR is that the companies know what's best for the car rental company as well as the auto manufacturer. "We are so engaged with the turnback process that we have trained our technicians to be a second pair of eyes," says Menchaca. "They assist car rental managers in making good remarketing repair decisions." The result is that at turnback, the car rental company pays a reasonable price for repairs, and the manufacturer receives a high-quality car back from the car rental company.

PDR is evolving, Lipinski says, and that is also good for car rental companies. In the past, he would call one vendor for the interior, a second for PDR, and a third to fix a bumper. But now, he says, "in a lot of the Dent Wizard markets, they're capable of doing more than PDR. It's one-stop shopping."

Dent Wizard technicians take their work seriously, Menchaca adds. "What we do helps — and what we don't receive the opportunity to do hurts — the bottom line. We like to say that we work for the car rental company, even though we wear the Dent Wizard shirt." ■