

Dent Repair Is a Hail of a Job

When hail hits hard, Dent Wizard sends in its “swat team”

By Steve Finlay

When a hail storm hits, Dent Wizard International Corp. sends in its so-called “swat team” of technicians to fix banged-up vehicles.

Members of the “Catastrophic Services” division arrive armed with tools for paintless dent removal, known in the industry as PDR. They establish bases of operation at places such as local dealerships.

“Our hail guys are in a league of their own,” says Steve Rynar, Dent Wizard’s director of elite service drive operations. “They often put in 14-20 hour days.”

Hail storms are ill-tempered spring and summer weather quirks that form concentric layers of ice into hard balls in the upper atmosphere and then drop them down to earth.

By the time they arrive, they’ve picked up enough speed to inflict serious harm to car surfaces. And they come in the millions, often causing widespread damage. Dent Wizard dispatched 60 technicians to Columbus, OH, after a hail storm there last October.

Fixes can cost as much as \$5,000-\$10,000, depending on the car and the extent of damage, Rynar says.

The force of hail on a wind-driven diagonal course hitting a car speeding down a freeway can be the damage equivalent of hundreds of teed-up golf balls being drilled at the vehicle.

“In a bad hail storm, there can be 200 dents in one section of a vehicle alone, like the hood or roof,” says Rynar.

But Dent Wizard’s every-day repair work is less extensive and the reasons for it are more mundane.

Many dings on cars are caused by people who haven’t mastered the art of opening a car door without whacking it into an adjacent parked vehicle.



Dent Wizard technician Dave Saunders works on vehicle.

Then there’s the damage from runaway supermarket shopping carts seemingly equipped with vehicle-seeking guidance systems.

Dent Wizard employs about 1,400 technicians nationwide working at various places, including dealerships by appointment and auto auction reconditioning centers.

It costs \$25,000 to fully train a technician, and there’s a 40% drop-out rate because of the rigorous 6-month classes, Rynar says.

Dent Wizard is the largest practitioner of PDR, a process that restores finishes without drilling, sanding, filling or repainting. It’s a multi-billion-dollar business.

The technicians use various tools such as soft-head mallets and flat-end metal rods that are slipped into existing holes in the body of a vehicle. In severe cases, damaged panels are removed for repairs.

Dent Wizard lately has touted a protection plan for dealership finance and insurance managers to sell to car buyers.

“F&I has moved away from products such as anti-theft windshield etchings and towards services that enhance and preserve vehicle appearances,” says Lindsey Bird, Dent Wizard’s vice president-F&I. “The F&I industry is placing greater emphasis on tangible value-added products.”

Dent Wizard offers 36-, 48- and 60-month Ding Shield programs. They particularly appeal to high-line vehicle owners with a pride of ownership, Bird says.

The plan also attracts people who lease vehicles, because it shelters them from paying car-body reconditioning penalties when they turn in vehicles at the end of the leases, Bird says.

He adds that, because many lease customers decline to purchase extended warranties, F&I managers can offset that by selling a dent-protection plan instead. ■