

Dealership or Independent Shop?

What the Price, Speed, and Trust Data Actually Shows

Prepared by Freehome Service Center | Cumming, Georgia

Data Sources: J.D. Power U.S. Aftermarket Service Index (ASI) Study, 2026 | J.D. Power Customer Service Index Research | Consumer Reports Auto Repair Shop Survey (11,000 members) | Federal Magnuson-Moss Warranty Act of 1975 | Compiled national labor rate and repair cost data

95%+

first-time repair success rate independent shops have maintained for several consecutive years (J.D. Power)

~40%

more, on average, consumers report spending at dealerships compared to independent shops (Consumer Reports)

49-52%

of aftermarket service customers get same-day work done within an hour — vs. just 17% at dealerships (J.D. Power 2026)

1975

the year a federal law made clear you don't have to use the dealer to protect your new-car warranty

BOTTOM LINE

The choice between a dealership and an independent repair shop is often framed as a tradeoff between trust and price — pay more at the dealer for peace of mind, or save money at an independent and hope for the best. The actual data doesn't support that framing. J.D. Power's own research shows independent and aftermarket shops have maintained a first-time repair success rate above 95% for several consecutive years, while Consumer Reports' survey of nearly 11,000 members found independent shops earned the highest satisfaction scores for price, while dealerships scored the lowest. Independent shops are also, by J.D. Power's most recent data, considerably faster for same-day service. The dealership's real advantage isn't trust or quality — it's brand-specific factory training and OEM parts access for the specific repairs that genuinely require them.

Executive Summary

Every vehicle owner eventually faces the same decision: take a repair to the dealership, or find a trusted independent shop. Marketing from dealerships and a general, often unexamined assumption lead many drivers to believe the dealership is inherently the safer, more reliable choice — worth the higher price for the peace of mind. Published research from J.D. Power and Consumer Reports, two of the most credible independent sources tracking automotive service quality, tells a more specific and more useful story than that general assumption.

This report walks through what that research actually shows: how independent shops perform on getting repairs right the first time, the real, well-documented price gap between dealerships and independents, a 2026 finding on service speed that runs counter to conventional wisdom, and a federal law that debunks one of the most persistent myths in auto repair — that using an independent shop voids a new car's warranty. It closes with what this data means for deciding where a specific repair should actually go.

Finding 1 | Independent Shops Fix It Right the First Time, at a Rate That Rivals Dealerships

The most direct answer to "can I trust an independent shop with a real repair" comes from J.D. Power's own tracked data: aftermarket

J.D. Power: aftermarket shops have maintained a 95%+ first-

providers have maintained first-time repair success rates above 95% for several consecutive years. This finding is particularly notable because it comes from the same research firm whose broader studies also find that consumer trust perception still favors dealerships — meaning the data shows independent shops are already performing at a very high level on the metric that arguably matters most (did the repair actually get fixed correctly), even in years where public perception hadn't fully caught up to that performance.

time repair success rate for several years running

J.D. Power's research attributes dealerships' continued trust advantage to factory-trained technicians, brand familiarity, and direct manufacturer support — real factors, but distinct from actual repair success rate, which the data shows independent and aftermarket shops matching closely.

Finding 2 | The Price Gap Is Real, Well-Documented, and Consistent Across Sources

Consumer Reports' survey of nearly 11,000 members found independent shops received the highest scores for satisfaction with price of any service option, an area where dealerships consistently scored lowest — and separately found that, on average, consumers report spending nearly 40% more at dealerships than at independent shops for comparable service. That price gap traces directly back to labor rates: compiled 2026 industry data places typical dealership labor rates between \$150 and \$250 per hour (with luxury brands at the top of that range), compared to \$90 to \$150 per hour at most independent shops. J.D. Power's own Canada-market Customer Service Index research, a useful directional proxy, found the average cost of a dealership visit was \$465 (up from \$432 the year before) compared to \$273 at an independent shop (up from \$262) — meaning the dealership visit ran roughly 70% higher in that specific dataset.

Consumer Reports: consumers spend nearly 40% more at dealerships, on average, than at independent shops

Real repair examples illustrate how quickly this labor-rate gap compounds on a single job: a brake pad replacement quoted at \$650 by a dealership and \$380 by an independent shop for the identical repair; a transmission repair running roughly \$3,000 at a dealership versus \$600 to \$900 at an independent shop for comparable work. Labor-intensive jobs — the kind requiring several hours of work — see the widest dollar gap, since the hourly rate difference compounds across more billed hours.

Typical Labor Rates and Visit Costs: Dealership vs. Independent Shop

Independent shop labor rate (typical range)		\$90- \$150/hr
Dealership labor rate (typical range)		\$150- \$250/hr
Avg. independent shop visit cost (J.D. Power, Canada)		\$273
Avg. dealership visit cost (J.D. Power, Canada)		\$465

Source: Compiled national labor rate data (Pulscar, QuoteChecker, WickedFile, 2026); J.D. Power 2024 Canada Customer Service Index-Long-Term (CSI-LT) Study, cited as a directional proxy for the dealership/independent cost relationship. U.S.-specific average visit cost data was not independently available from a single primary source at time of writing.

Finding 3 | Independent Shops Are Also Faster for Same-Day Service

J.D. Power's 2026 U.S. Aftermarket Service Index (ASI) Study found aftermarket providers are increasingly viewed as more convenient than dealerships, particularly on speed. Among customers who visited a dealership the same day for service, fewer than one in five — 17% — had their work completed within an hour. By comparison, 52% of tire

Just 17% of same-day dealer visits were completed within an hour, vs. 49-52% at aftermarket providers

replacement customers and 49% of full-service maintenance and repair customers at aftermarket providers reported their service was completed within an hour on the same visit. This is a genuinely counterintuitive finding for anyone who assumes a dealership's larger service department translates into faster turnaround — the 2026 data shows the opposite pattern for same-day, in-and-out service.

J.D. Power's framing of this trend is direct: cost is becoming a bigger factor in where consumers choose to have their vehicle serviced, and aftermarket providers are winning on both price and — per this most recent data — speed, even as dealerships continue to hold an edge in overall trust perception.

Finding 4 | The Warranty Myth: You Don't Have to Use the Dealer

One of the most persistent and consequential myths in auto repair is the belief that using an independent shop, or using aftermarket parts, automatically voids a new vehicle's manufacturer warranty. This is not true, and hasn't been true since 1975. The federal Magnuson-Moss Warranty Act prohibits a manufacturer from voiding a new-vehicle warranty solely because a vehicle was serviced at an independent shop or because aftermarket parts were used — unless the manufacturer can specifically prove that the independent service or the aftermarket part directly caused the failure being claimed. In practice, this means routine maintenance like oil changes, brake service, and most repairs can be performed at a qualified independent shop without any risk to warranty coverage, as long as the work is done correctly and to specification.

The Magnuson-Moss Warranty Act of 1975 makes it federal law: independent service doesn't void your warranty

This legal reality directly undercuts one of the main reasons drivers default to dealership service even when it costs more and, per Finding 3, may take longer for same-day work — the belief that skipping the dealer puts their warranty at risk. For most routine and moderate repairs, that specific risk simply doesn't exist under federal law.

Finding 5 | What Consumer Reports' Own Members Say

Consumer Reports' member survey, one of the largest independent consumer satisfaction datasets in the automotive service space, found that when members described their independent repair shop, they consistently highlighted trustworthiness, reasonable prices, knowledgeable mechanics, and good reputation. Chains, by contrast, were noted primarily for convenience — a different value proposition entirely. Consumer Reports' own chief mechanic, John Ibbotson, specifically recommends building a relationship with a trusted independent shop by using it for routine maintenance first, which naturally establishes trust before a larger, more complex repair is ever needed.

None of this means a dealership is never the right choice — J.D. Power and other sources consistently note that warranty-covered work, safety recalls, and highly complex brand-specific diagnostic issues are scenarios where dealership access to proprietary tools and factory-specific training genuinely matters. But for the large majority of routine and moderate repair work most vehicle owners need most often, the data across price, speed, first-time repair success, and member-reported trust points in a consistent direction.

What This Means for Cumming and Forsyth County Drivers

1 Don't assume a higher price means a more reliable repair.

Given J.D. Power's own data showing independent and aftermarket shops maintaining a 95%+ first-time repair success rate, the price premium at a dealership isn't, by this data, buying a meaningfully higher chance of getting the repair right the first time.

2 Build a relationship with an independent shop before you need a major repair.

Following Consumer Reports' own recommendation, using a trusted independent shop for routine maintenance first establishes a track record and a relationship that makes a larger repair decision easier and better-informed when it eventually comes up.

3 Know that your warranty is protected under federal law, not just dealership policy.

Given the Magnuson-Moss Warranty Act's explicit protections, choosing an independent shop for routine maintenance and most repairs on a newer vehicle doesn't carry the warranty risk many drivers assume it does.

4 Reserve the dealership for the specific situations where it's genuinely the better choice.

Warranty-covered repairs, active safety recalls, and highly specific brand-proprietary diagnostic issues remain scenarios where dealership access to specialized tools and training has real value — the goal is matching the repair to the right resource, not avoiding dealerships altogether.

The Data: Dealership vs. Independent Shop Reference

Data Point	Figure	Source
Independent/aftermarket shop first-time repair success rate	95%+ (maintained for several years)	J.D. Power
Consumer Reports members: independent shops rated highest for price satisfaction	Highest of all shop types surveyed	Consumer Reports member survey (~11,000 members)
Average amount spent more at dealerships vs. independents	~40% more	Consumer Reports member survey
Independent shop labor rate, typical range	\$90-\$150/hour	Compiled national labor rate data, 2026
Dealership labor rate, typical range	\$150-\$250/hour	Compiled national labor rate data, 2026
Average independent shop visit cost (Canada, directional proxy)	\$273 (up from \$262)	J.D. Power 2024 Canada CSI-LT Study
Average dealership visit cost (Canada, directional proxy)	\$465 (up from \$432)	J.D. Power 2024 Canada CSI-LT Study
Example: brake pad replacement, dealer vs. independent	\$650 vs. \$380	Compiled repair cost comparison examples
Example: transmission repair, dealer vs. independent	~\$3,000 vs. \$600-\$900	Compiled repair cost comparison examples
Same-day dealer visits completed within an hour	17%	J.D. Power 2026 U.S. Aftermarket Service Index (ASI) Study
Same-day tire replacement completed within an hour (aftermarket)	52%	J.D. Power 2026 U.S. Aftermarket Service Index (ASI) Study
Same-day full-service maintenance/repair within an hour (aftermarket)	49%	J.D. Power 2026 U.S. Aftermarket Service Index (ASI) Study
Federal law protecting independent-shop warranty service	Magnuson-Moss Warranty Act, 1975	Federal law

Price and cost figures reflect compiled national and (where noted) Canadian data used as directional context; actual costs vary by specific shop, region, vehicle, and repair. This report does not constitute legal advice regarding warranty coverage; vehicle owners with specific warranty questions should consult their vehicle's warranty documentation or a qualified professional.

About Freehome Service Center

Freehome Service Center is an ASE-certified, independently owned auto repair and maintenance facility serving Forsyth County and Cherokee County from Cumming, Georgia. As an independent shop, we keep complete service histories for every vehicle we service and provide the kind of relationship-based service the data in this report shows independent shops consistently deliver — without the dealership price premium, and without any risk to your manufacturer warranty on routine and moderate repairs.

Methodology, Limitations & Sources

This report synthesizes published research from J.D. Power (including the 2026 U.S. Aftermarket Service Index Study and the 2024 Canada Customer Service Index-Long-Term Study, the latter used as a directional proxy given limited availability of a single comparable U.S.-specific average-visit-cost figure), Consumer Reports' member survey research (approximately 11,000 members), compiled national labor rate data from multiple 2026 industry sources, and the text of the federal Magnuson-Moss Warranty Act of 1975. Price and labor rate figures vary by region, vehicle type, and specific shop; the ranges presented here reflect typical national patterns rather than a guarantee for any individual repair. This report does not constitute legal advice; vehicle owners with specific warranty concerns should consult their vehicle's warranty documentation directly.

J.D. Power. "J.D. Power Says Dealerships Win On Trust, Lose On Price As Car Owners Head Elsewhere." First-time repair success rate data (95%+). Reported via Yahoo Autos, May 2026.

J.D. Power. 2026 U.S. Aftermarket Service Index (ASI) Study. Same-day service completion rates, dealership vs. aftermarket comparison. Reported via Dealership Guy, May 2026.

J.D. Power. 2024 Canada Customer Service Index-Long-Term (CSI-LT) Study. Average dealership vs. independent shop visit cost data. Businesswire, September 2024.

Consumer Reports. "Car Owners Favor Independent Repair Shops" and "New Consumer Reports Survey: Americans Prefer Independent Shops When Seeking Repairs." Member survey of ~11,000 respondents; price satisfaction and spending comparison data. [consumerreports.org](https://www.consumerreports.org)

U.S. Federal Trade Commission. Magnuson-Moss Warranty Act of 1975. Warranty protection for independent-shop service and aftermarket parts.

Compiled national labor rate and repair cost sources (Pulscar, QuoteChecker, WickedFile, AutoBlast, BestRepairShop, 2026). Dealership and independent labor rate ranges, repair cost comparison examples.