

## Authorised Service Centre vs General Workshop: Consumers' Preference of Car Maintenance

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Car-TOON

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There are more issues surrounding general workshops (GWs) compared to authorised service centres (SCs) especially concerning consumerism. Regardless, GWs still hold equal market share and have sustained their businesses. This article discusses car users' preference of maintenance involving SCs and GWs. Additionally, current government initiatives and the future of automotive workshops in Malaysia are also discussed.

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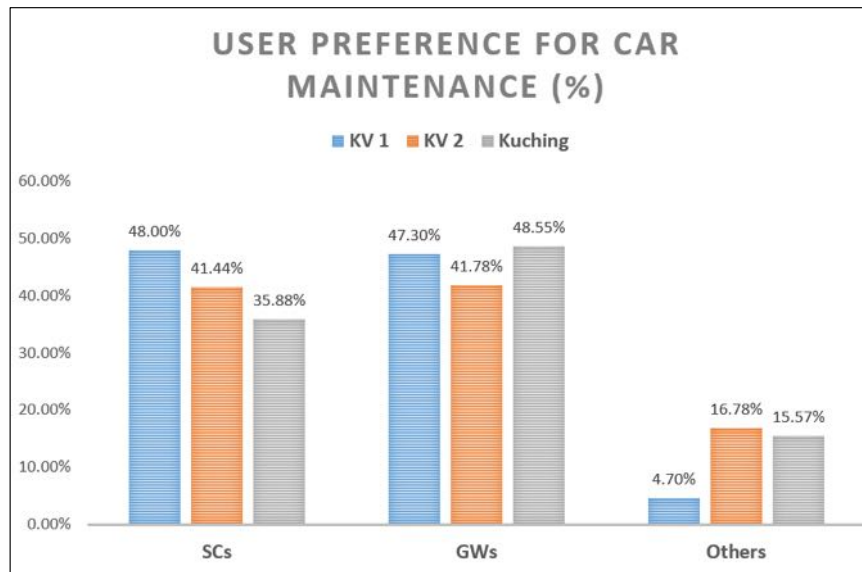
The automobile has become a basic necessity for Malaysians to commute from one place to another, and its contribution to the country's socio-economy can never be denied. Hence, there has been a growing number of car workshops or garages across the country – it is estimated that there are 35,000 automotive workshops were established throughout Malaysia (Mohamad, 2018). Nevertheless, many complaints have been lodged to the Ministry of Domestic Trade, Cooperatives and Consumerism (MDTCC/KPDNKK) and National Consumer Complaints Centre (NCCC) concerning automotive workshops which include issues ranging from counterfeit spare parts, failure to describe repairs done and absence of price tags (Abdul Wahab et al., 2017).

Proper maintenance is crucial to ensure a car's roadworthiness in terms of safety and it being environmental friendly. Basically, car users have several options as regards car maintenance; which can be carried out either by authorised service centres (SCs), general workshops (GWs), or through self-maintenance; or a mix of the three choices (Mohd Jawi et al., 2017; Abdul Wahab et al., 2017). For the sake of brevity, this paper put more focus on SCs and GWs with regard to car maintenance. This paper will therefore argue in terms of safety, quality, cost, and service delivery offered either by SCs or GWs. Despite all the arguments, both SCs and GWs have remained relevant in the market and competed with each other by offering better packages or promotions to lure consumers. In the end, this article will answer several questions, namely: *“What are the advantages and disadvantages of SCs and GWs in the eyes of consumers?”* *“How do consumers make the selection between SCs and GWs for their car maintenance?”* *“What kind of maintenance work do consumers frequently perform at SCs and GWs?”*

### *Preference on Car Maintenance*

By comparing the findings from the current study in Klang Valley and from the automotive ecosystem study by the Malaysian Institute of Road Safety Research (MIROS) (Mohd Jawi et al., 2017), it is shown that the percentage of car users sending their cars at SCs and GWs is quite similar either in Klang Valley or in Kuching, Sarawak (Figure 1). The current study is based on 298 respondents in Klang Valley (KV1), while previous MIROS' studies were based on 500 respondents in the Klang Valley (KV2), and 300 respondents in Kuching (Kuching) (Abdul Wahab et al., 2017). Nevertheless, more consumers in Kuching chose GWs. In addition, customers who did not go to either SCs or GWs and chose to self-maintain, send to a family member or friends are categorized as “Others”, with their number significantly smaller.

Clearly, car brand owners are finding it difficult to persuade their customers to return for aftersales service at their SCs. In order to persuade customers for aftersales service, Proton, for an example, has reduced up to 30% of the charges and maintenance cost by Proton SCs starting 1st June 2017 (Abg Gyl, 2017; Samsuri, 2017). Moreover, to compete with GWs, many car brand owners or representatives strive to improve their users' experience of aftersales service through additional services and facilities such as offering courtesy car, pick-up services, reducing waiting time, providing Internet service, comfortable waiting area, free food and beverages and so on (e.g. Alias, 2017; Ridzuan, 2018).



**Figure 1:** Comparison of findings on users' preference for car maintenance

#### *Reason of Preference & Maintenance Done According to Users' Preference*

The survey involving 298 car users in the Klang Valley (KV1; led by the first author of this paper) shows the main reason customers send their car to SCs is to retain the car warranty (86.71%), though only 23.78% agreed that the cost of maintenance at SCs is affordable (Figure 2). On the other hand, 81.94% car users agreed that the cost of maintenance at GWs and "Others" (GWO) is affordable and 63.23% car users sent their car for maintenance at GWO since their car warranty had expired. The most interesting fact is that while 69.93% car users preferred SCs to avoid being duped, only 17.42% car users chose GWO thinking that is the case. This obviously shows that most car users expected to be cheated or duped by GWO, but they still went to GWO because it was affordable. However, while the percentage was lower for GWO, the outcome is not so good for SCs either, because this indirectly shows that more than 30% car users are being short-changed by SCs. Overall, out of 13 reasons for car users' preference, only 3 reasons recorded more than 50% for GWO, while 8 reasons were for SCs. This disparity is showing the unreliability of GWO towards car maintenance.

In terms of types of car maintenance according to users' preference, Figure 3 indicates similarity in terms of percentage except for the item 'change tire, rim or valve'. In terms of percentage, 76.77% respondents said they visited GWO to 'change tire, rim or valve'; but only 28.67% visited SCs for the same reason. Moreover, 96.5% respondents who visit SCs said they have done periodical maintenance based on the service manuals; the difference in terms of percentage is not significant compared to respondents who visit GWO which was 72.26%. Thus, it is important to ensure that GWO perform car maintenance correctly with proper equipment and tools for safety reasons.



SERVICE CENTRE, N = 143		GENERAL W/SHOP & OTHERS, N = 155	
86.71%	Maintain Warranty	Affordable costs	81.94%
81.12%	Assurance of quality & authenticity of replacement parts	Warranty ended/forfeited	63.23%
76.92%	Maintenance is recorded and easy to refer	Easy to discuss and get advisory services	56.13%
69.93%	Avoid scam/fraud	Highly skilled & knowledgeable workers	30.97%
57.34%	Cozy facilities and professional services	Assurance of quality & authenticity of replacement parts	23.87%
55.94%	Maintenance is given a warranty/additional warranty	Maintenance is recorded and easy to refer	22.58%
55.24%	Avoid additional/secondary damage	Cozy facilities and professional services	18.71%
53.15%	Free Service Benefits / Spend Vouchers	Maintenance is given a warranty/additional warranty	18.06%
48.95%	Highly skilled & knowledgeable workers	Avoid scam/fraud	17.42%
46.85%	Safe and eco-friendly maintenance	Safe and eco-friendly maintenance	15.48%
41.26%	Easy to discuss and get advisory services	Free Service Benefits / Spend Vouchers	14.84%
33.57%	Exclusive services / not offered elsewhere (courtesy car, door to door service, etc)	Avoid additional/secondary damage	14.19%
23.78%	Affordable costs	Exclusive services / not offered elsewhere (courtesy car, door to door service, etc)	10.32%

**Figure 2:** Reason of car users' preference towards car maintenance

SERVICE CENTRE, N = 143		GENERAL W/SHOP & OTHERS, N = 155	
96.50%	Periodical Maintenance based on Service Manuals	Change Tire, Rim or Valve	76.77%
74.13%	Fluids (Coolant, Brake Oil, Steering Oil etc)	Fluids (Coolant, Brake Oil, Steering Oil etc)	74.19%
65.03%	Brake System	Brake System	74.19%
53.15%	Cooling System for Engine & Transmission (Radiator etc)	Periodical Maintenance based on Service Manuals	72.26%
52.45%	Air Conditioning System	Tyre Alignment & Balancing	68.39%
46.85%	Tyre Alignment & Balancing	Air Conditioning System	61.94%
40.56%	Suspension System	Car wash	52.26%
34.97%	Overhaul Engine & Transmission	Cooling System for Engine & Transmission (Radiator etc)	50.97%
28.67%	Change Tire, Rim or Valve	Suspension System	48.39%
28.67%	Repair after Accident	Bulb/LED Module Lamp	44.52%
27.27%	Bulb/LED Module Lamp	Install Accessories	37.42%
25.17%	Wiring	Overhaul Engine & Transmission	35.48%
22.38%	Car wash	Wiring	31.61%
17.48%	Audio, Multimedia & Navigation (GPS) Systems	Audio, Multimedia & Navigation (GPS) Systems	29.03%
13.99%	Install Accessories	Repair after Accident	23.23%

**Figure 3:** Maintenance done according to car users' preference

### *Moving Forward*

Until now, legislations in Malaysia have not clearly stated the responsibility of car owners on checking and maintaining of their car. Moreover, there is weakness in the current system to identify and prevent not-properly-maintained private cars on the road. To make it worse, according to Road Transport Act 1987, private cars in Malaysia are not required to undergo periodical technical inspection by PUSPAKOM (computerised vehicle inspection centre conducting technical vehicle inspection on behalf of the Malaysian authority) (Solah et al., 2017). In order to overcome such weakness in the system, we should refer to other country's legislation on car inspection and maintenance as a benchmark.

For example, looking at Japan's legislation, 'Article 47 of the Road Vehicles Act' clearly underlines the responsibility of car users to maintain their car in conformity with the safety regulations through performing checks and carrying out necessary maintenance (JASIC, 2017). Moreover, according to the same article, private car users in Japan at appropriate time are required to check a minimum of 15 fixed items on their car which include: inside the engine compartment – quantity of windscreen-washer fluid, brake fluid, battery fluid, cooling water, and engine oil; and from the outside – tyre pressure, cracks, damages or excessive wear of tyres, tyre groove depth, lighting and flashing of lamps, and stains and damages on the lens; from the driver seat – clearance between brake pedal and floor when pedal is fully depressed and braking performance, parking brake lever allowance when pulled, jets of windscreen-washer fluid, windscreen wiper condition, start of engine and sound from the engine, and state of engine when revolving at high rate and low rate.

In addition, if any abnormalities occur during the last driving, the car also needs to be inspected. Other than daily check and maintenance, according to 'Article 48 of Japan's Road Vehicles Act', car users in Japan are also responsible to perform periodic checks and maintenance performed by designated garage, approved garage or self-check; and they must also present their car together with records of periodical check, maintenance and repairs, aside from other necessary documents to the nearest authorities periodically.

Several initiatives have been taken by the Malaysian government to control and enhance the automotive service and repair industry. Some of these initiatives include registering and modernising the automotive workshop. As of June 2018, to ensure smooth implementation of the Road Transport Act 1987 (regarding construction and use of motor vehicle), the Road Transports Department of Malaysia (RTD/JPJ) has set certain standards for automotive workshop and registered a total of 1,287 workshops comprising of 840 shops for collision repair works, 371 shops for building new body and modification for commercial vehicles, and 76 shops for NGV installation. Moreover, KPDNKK as one of the main ministries for automotive has taken steps to modernise and transform the fragmented automotive service and repair industry involving 764 workshops under the Automotive Workshop Modernisation Programme (ATOM) (KPDNKK, 2013). However, the current initiatives still seem insufficient to safeguard automotive consumer rights.

In addition to the current initiatives, there is a strong need for the government to tighten control as regards automotive maintenance and repair services (Abdul Wahab et al., 2017); aside from enforcing the Lemon Law in Malaysia (Mohd Jawi et al., 2017). The Government should introduce an act to ensure all automotive workshops employ only certified automotive mechanics or technicians, and report periodically to the authority on their activities. Moreover, this act may also deal with any technical issues which require recall, conducting of certain

mandatory check and maintenance on vehicle in timely manner, using only law compliance, approved or authentic replacement parts, lubrication and liquids, performing proper maintenance or repairs according to correct procedure or in accordance to manufacturer guidelines, using proper tools and equipment for each maintenance or repair activities, upholding the best practices in terms of safety and being environmental friendly during maintenance and repair, as well as any other relevant items to improve automotive maintenance and repair services. Such an act can potentially enhance and raise professionalism of workshop operators which would then ensure the high standards of the industry. The act will also increase consumers' confident in vehicle maintenance and repair works, and eventually reduce automotive consumerism issues in Malaysia.

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