

BUSINESS STANDARDS

A man with short dark hair, wearing a black leather jacket over a blue and white striped shirt, stands with his arms crossed in a car body shop. The background shows various metal parts and tools of a repair shop.

Raising their game:

QUENTIN WILLSON ON THE BODY
SHOP REPAIR INDUSTRY AND THE
NEW THATCHAM BSI KITEMARK®

FORWARD THINKING

Business continuity management
tops the boardroom agenda

CAT AND MOUSE GAME

Do you know what your kids are
doing online?

TOP MARKS

Recent research proves
Kitemark® remains a solid brand

The complexities involved in crash repair and changing manufacturing practices are putting even more pressure on vehicle body repair companies to raise their game. The new Thatcham BSI Kitemark® scheme aims to help. **John Coutts** reports.

> BEYOND REPAIR



Driving is a risky business. On average, there's a crash every six seconds on Britain's roads and five million cars are involved in accidents every year. Statistics for the UK in 2005 (released in September 2006 by The Department for Transport) paint an equally stark picture: 3,201 fatalities on Britain's roads, 28,954 people seriously injured and 271,017 total casualties.

This parallels a significant economic impact: in 2005, insurance companies paid out £5bn to mend damaged vehicles. And the burden of making sure that cars and light commercial

vehicles are restored to the highest standards of safety and roadworthiness falls on the shoulders of the country's accident repair body shops – to date, a largely unregulated part of the auto industry, with no recognized way to demonstrate that they're living up to those standards.

At the same time, repair methods for vehicles change with each technological advance. New manufacturing techniques and materials, coupled with skills shortages and varied compliance criteria imposed by supply chain partners and trade bodies, make the job more difficult from year to year.

In effect, the industry has reached a tipping point. There is a clear need for a robust cross industry standard to ensure the efficient, effective and safe repair of motor vehicles as a platform for business improvement.

The Thatcham BSI Kitemark® scheme for vehicle body repair aims to redress the balance and give consumers, insurance companies and businesses a clear sign that these companies are doing the right thing in the right way.

This groundbreaking scheme is backed by Britain's top motor insurers and is the result of a unique collaboration between BSI and motor

> THATCHAM IN BRIEF

The Motor Insurance Repair Research Centre – now better known as Thatcham – was formed by British insurers in 1969. It is independently run and carries out research targeted at containing or reducing the cost of motor insurance claims while maintaining safety standards. This includes research and training in collision repair. Best known for its crash test facilities, Thatcham provides vital expertise, products and services to insurers, motor manufacturers, equipment manufacturers and suppliers.

>ALL CHANGE

Mild steel, the raw ingredient of car production for more than a century, is being supplemented by high-strength steels, aluminium and man-made composites. These present major challenges for body repair shops: welding aluminium and high-strength steels, for example, demands specialist equipment and facilities. Repairing a modern vehicle in such a shop requires increasingly specialized skills, tools, jigs and materials. The scope of the Thatcham BSI Kitemark® recognizes three classifications or types of repair. These are: "Cosmetic"; "Structural – steel" and "Structural – aluminium and composite". (Most of the body shops used by insurers are likely to come within the middle category.) As such, PAS 125 will form a vital benchmark for the industry as it accommodates the changes in material technology.

insurance repair research leaders Thatcham.

Underpinning the scheme is a new BSI British Standards' Publicly Available Specification – PAS 125 – which sets out technical requirements for vehicle body repair, the first specification of its kind.

"We called on BSI as a professional standards body to develop this with us and it's been a joint project," says Jason Moseley, Thatcham's director of quality and business systems. "We also wanted independent certification for the scheme. Thatcham is well known within the industry but we're not as well known as BSI's Kitemark®. By working together, we've played to each other's strengths."

A universal industry standard for vehicle body repair has been long overdue. Until now, the industry had been subject to a bewildering array of approval schemes and guidance, with a number of organizations setting their own different controls for the industry.

"The problem is that each of them had their own standards," says Moseley. "There were question marks on how well they were audited and how technically well written they were. There was also the need to reduce the cost of paying for multiple audits and, in terms of time, of having several audits a year. The industry wanted one standard."

The need to provide a common agreed standard with cross-industry support and third-party certification was seen as increasingly urgent for another reason: corporate liability and the associated risk of litigation. If a repair is carried out

wrongly and it results in subsequent loss or injury, it's not just the workshop that's liable – it's anybody who had a say in choosing that workshop in the first place.

When a private car is involved in an accident, it's usually the insurance company rather than the motorist that decides where the repair work is carried out – and that could put insurers in the firing line if something goes wrong later. In the case of company cars, the decision on where a vehicle is repaired might be influenced not just by insurers but by other work providers too, including fleet managers, vehicle leasing companies and even employers themselves. All could face negligence claims if unsafe repairs are carried out.

"Insurers have a responsibility to ensure that their policyholders' vehicles are put back on the road in as safe a condition as they were before the accident" says Mike Pearson, new product development manager with BSI Product Services, the product testing and certification division of BSI Group. "Every employer who gives a company car to a staff member is under a duty of care and so is every vehicle leasing company and fleet car operator. The business community is at risk if the repairs are not done to set standards."

THE RIGHT ROAD

To earn the Thatcham BSI Kitemark®, vehicle body repair shops must prove that they conform to tough new standards set down in PAS 125. These include strict requirements that focus on skills, repair methods, equipment and materials. In addition, workshops must

demonstrate that they have repair

process management controls

in place to monitor repair

activities. All these elements

are assessed by independent BSI

inspectors and must meet stringent benchmarks if the valuable

Kitemark® is to be

awarded by BSI.

"This is not us saying

body repairers don't know

what they're doing," says

Moseley. "The majority of them do a very good job. PAS 125 provides a framework for independent Kitemark® certification, so they can prove they're doing the right thing. And if there are any unscrupulous traders, they will be excluded from the industry."

No business or individual is immune from the process of law, of course, but a vehicle body repair shop that has earned the Thatcham BSI Kitemark® will already have proved its ongoing commitment to quality and its ability to conform to rigorous technical and managerial standards agreed by the industry.





> "IT'S A POSITIVE MESSAGE THAT IS GOING TO CHANGE THE INDUSTRY FOR THE BETTER – AND FOR THE SAFETY OF CONSUMERS"

That in itself reduces the risk of unsafe work being carried out.

And although the scheme is in its early stages, it is hoped that workshops holding the Kitemark® may pay lower public liability insurance premiums.

For work providers, such as insurance companies and fleet managers, directing damaged vehicles to Kitemark® body shops offers the reassurance that work will be carried out in accordance with an industry-wide standard, with technical processes that have been assessed by a trusted third party. This also fits in with due diligence strategies intended to limit corporate risk in the event of litigation.

PAS 125 will be subject to review after 12 months and thereafter every two years – or sooner if new needs emerge. The ability to incorporate the “breaking news” of new technical developments within the specification is seen as increasingly important by body repairers, trade associations and insurers because it's not just legal changes that are shaping the body repair industry, it's the rapid evolution of cars themselves [see “All change” box on previous page].

REACHING THE STANDARD

Reaching consensus within any industry is a time-consuming business, but PAS 125 was achieved in record time – from the commencement of the project to finally printing the specification took just under nine months.

“There was a will and a desire by the group to work together in order to get a good solid standard out there that could be used by the entire marketplace,” says Quincy Lissaur, senior business consultant with BSI Professional Services, the team within BSI British Standards that brought the stakeholders together. “We were originally afraid that because there are a number of trade bodies and associations that all compete heavily within this particular industry, we might run into some consensus building problems. But they were all willing to work together in order to discuss the technical content of the PAS.”

Promoting the new standard – and making sure it is adopted as widely and as swiftly as possible – is the role of both Thatcham and BSI.

“It's about educating the market place and bringing standards up,” says Scott Hanney,

BSI's key account sales manager for the Thatcham BSI Kitemark®.

“We've got a number of the large insurance companies now making it a requirement for their own body repair shops and we've got all the big companies on board. There's a huge amount of interest in this from insurers, work providers, fleet companies and manufacturers right the way down to single-site independents,” he adds.

For body repair shops capable of meeting the rigorous conformity tests associated with PAS 125 – which include site inspections and process auditing – obtaining Kitemark® certification is likely to take between four and six weeks. With insurers demanding Kitemark® conformity from their repair networks, it's a challenge bodyshops can't afford to ignore.

“It's a positive message that is going to change the industry for the better – and for the safety of consumers and the motoring public at large,” says Pearson of BSI Product Services. “It costs less than £2,500 in the first year. For a typical bodyshop, it's about £1 a repair job in terms of showing you're serious about safety. It's all it costs to save lives.”

For more information visit www.bsi-global.com/feb07thatcham



>Driving standards

Automotive authority **Quentin Willson** on the need for higher standards in the UK's vehicle body shop repair industry.

PAS 125 sets out technical requirements for vehicle body shop repair – what's been your experience with this industry?

Body shop repair standards are variable at best. I've used small operators who take hours tinting paint and polishing out production marks and sinkage, but also had experience of bigger firms whose colour matching on panels ends

up looking like a pair of harlequin's trousers. Filling, rubbing down and spraying is an art – shame more body specialists don't take more pride.

New cars often mean new materials: what changes in car manufacture are making things more challenging for body repair shops?

New materials, especially aluminium, are a huge challenge. Cars like the Audi A2 and A8 require specialist skills. Same thing with new Jaguars with their unique aluminium bonding processes. But these new materials can bring higher standards and better training, which has to be good for the industry as a whole.

Why did you decide to help launch this new PAS?

Anything that improves standards in the vehicle repair sector has to be good for consumers. I'm proud to be associated with an initiative that will raise the performance of the body repair industry and deliver better value, standards and service. Everybody knows that it's an industry that needs to raise its game.

How do UK drivers and body repair shops compare to other countries?

British drivers are some of the best in the world. I've done 35 series of *Worst Driver* in places as diverse as Belgium and Canada, so I've seen it all – the French are some of the worst.

UK body shops are pretty good too. I had a Jensen Interceptor re-sprayed in Spain. My eight-year-old could have done better.

This industry is often seen as being overrun by cowboy operators – what should the industry do to improve its image?

All body shops should operate to a prescribed set of given standards and aim to offer genuinely "invisible repairs". Some of the work I see is scandalously bad. Insurance companies should help promote a licensing scheme to weed out those cowboys who persistently tuck up consumers.

If your car were damaged in an accident, how would you get it repaired?

I'm lucky enough to have a bloke in a shed who can lead load, tint by eye and always gets the colour match spot on. And he doesn't charge £300 just to open the tin!

Quentin Willson

(www.quentinwillson.co.uk)

is one of Britain's best-known motoring authorities. He spent over a decade presenting BBC's Top Gear alongside Jeremy Clarkson. He is a regular face on television, and is the creator and owner of the Britain's Worst format. He is also a columnist for The Sunday Mirror.

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