

The Importance of Collision Photography

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We know that anyone can go out and purchase an Instamatic camera at any convenience store that takes good photos, but that does not make you a professional photographer. This article is *not* intended to make you a professional photographer, but it will give you some insight into the basic procedures you will need to ensure good, clear photos, which will show the condition of the vehicle prior to, during and after repairs. As you will learn, some of these photos will be very important to protect your liability.

I am going to go out on a limb and assume you have a digital camera. If you don't, you should get one. I would suggest getting something simple that could withstand the shop environment. The first step to "collision photography" is to check with your state DMV/DOI laws as to what photos must be taken of the vehicle. Generally, the photos required are as follows: four corners, mileage, federal label, VIN tag, license plate and the damaged area(s). However, to ensure you protect yourself against liability and have proper documentation, we are going to offer a guideline to follow.

When a vehicle first shows up at the shop, the first thing you want to do is to take photos of:

- Interior (Seats, Carpet, Dash, Headliner, etc.)
- Inside the trunk (Do not forget the spare)
- Any unrelated damages
- Any MIL (Malfunction Indicator Lamps)
- Emblems (This will be important later when replacing them)
- Personal effects

These photos will help you later on when the customer tells you something was there that is now missing, or something is damaged that was not before. If applicable, the next set of photos to take would be the required photos as per your DRP agreement. This will differ from agreement to agreement with the insurer.

We recommend that you purchase a Keelson Pocket Rod measuring tape for taking photos with a scale reference in them (Fig. 1). If there is a question about the damages and/or the reported incident statement, the photos can be examined to determine height measurements in relation to the statement reports. These types of photos can sometimes become very impor-



Fig. 1

tant, especially if the claim is under investigation due to injuries, or even death from the collision. These types of rulers are inexpensive, but can be a real asset to an investigation. To take photos with a Pocket Rod, there are two basic rules to remember:

■ **Rule 1:** If you angle up or down, you can change the perception of the photo, so this means you will need to crouch down into a baseball catcher's type position to obtain the optimum angle (Fig. 2 shows an angle looking down).



Fig. 2

■ **Rule 2:** You need to take one overall photo to show the Rod on the floor. This will prove that the measurements are true (Fig. 3)



Fig. 3

The next photo will be a close-up of the damage area with the measurements next to that area (Fig. 4). These



Fig. 4

photos can be used by an investigator to compare the damage heights of the target vehicle in relation to the bullet vehicle. After all the damage photos with measurements are taken, the vehicle will now need to be disassembled (torn down, blue-printed for triage), and photos will need to be taken of all the removed parts and the vehicle structure. If necessary, take some more Rod photos of the exposed damages of the structure. Some additional photos during disassembly will be those of wire harness connections and how they are run, engine bay components, trunk computer arrangements, full frame components and engine drive belt routing. These photos will save a lot of time later on during reassembly.

The next set of photos to take is very important to DRP shops and/or shops that need to add additional labor time to a repaired area or procedure. Have you ever taken a photo of a damaged area, and almost no damage shows up in the photo?



To assist you in the proof of the amount of labor time required to repair that area, take photos of the sanded area with bare metal showing and/or dent removal pins attached. This will assist in showing the extent of damage and sometimes the amount of work that went into the repair (Fig. 5). Photos of vehicles masked off in the spray booth are another important set of photos, which will show evidence of what was painted and blended.

The single most important photo you can take will be of the completed repaired area. The reason behind these photos is not for before-and-after comparisons, but as documented proof of bodylines and panel gaps.

Here is a story to prove the importance of these final photos: About a year ago, I saw a good friend who happens

to be an insurance DRP supervisor. He asked me if I would mind looking at something that was just assigned to him. He showed me photos of a Ford Freestyle that had been repaired at one of his company's DRP shops, and the following were discovered:

- Wide rear hatch gap on the left side and a tight gap on the right side
- Poor body/feature lines on the quarter panel
- Color mismatch
- The vehicle was measured on the frame machine and the measurements were out of specifications.

After discussion with my friend, he informed me the vehicle was repaired two months and 3,000 miles ago. My friend expressed his feelings that the vehicle owner is lying and believes the vehicle was involved in another incident and improperly repaired, and was now blaming the DRP shop. Now, this is where it gets tricky: My friend called the original shop and asked for a copy of all documentation from the file, paper and electronic. After receiving the file, there

were almost no photos of the repairs, no three-dimensional measuring printout before or after and no photos of the completed vehicle.

Upon discussion with his company counterpart in charge of that shop, the decision was made to total the vehicle out due to lack of evidence. I later found out that a very good friend of mine owns the original repair shop. I know the shop and know there could be no way the vehicle would have left in this condition, but it does not matter what I or anyone else thinks; it is what can - or can't - be *proven*.

I explained to the shop that I needed to view the vehicle to make a determination of the damages and the repairs. My friend from the insurance company agreed to let me view the vehicle, which we set up for the following day. Unfortunately, the insurance bosses from the original shop area decided to have the vehicle picked up by the salvage company. I was never able to view the vehicle, and the original repair shop contacted me a year later to tell me the insurance company wanted them to pay for it.

As you can see, photographs are an important part of documentation. Pro-

HEADLINERS

MITCHELL INTERNATIONAL PARTNERS WITH THATCHAM

Mitchell International, Inc. has announced a partnership with Thatcham, a leading authority in collision repair research for European and Asian nameplates. This partnership marks the first time Thatcham's fully researched, proprietary repair methodologies will be offered in the North American collision repair market.

Each model year, vehicle manufacturers add sophisticated technology to improve structural strength. While these advancements result in improved vehicle safety, cars have consequently become much more difficult to return to pre-accident condition, posing unique repair challenges. Thatcham's online solution, ThatchamNet, works in concert with and complements Mitchell Information Center's OEM repair data to provide technicians with the critical collision repair information they need to keep up with the industry's increasing demands.

Thatcham's collision experts' methodology includes tearing down the latest vehicles in their U.K.-based technical research center to completely understand vehicle construction and de-

vised pragmatic repair techniques that replicate the strength and integrity of the original construction. Thatcham's research team works very closely with both vehicle manufacturers to "design in" repairability and the collision repair industry to enable shops to repair high-tech vehicles with complete confidence.

"Mitchell's partnership with Thatcham brings our customers unprecedented coverage of collision repair content, especially for complex, difficult to repair European and Asian market models," said Marc Brungger, executive vice president of auto physical damage for Mitchell International. "At the touch of a finger, our customers will be able to go online to the Mitchell Information Center and instantly identify the critical information they need to be able to safely and efficiently restore vehicles to pre-accident condition. With this new partnership, we will be the first to introduce the North American market to repair procedures that are both independently researched and OEM backed, and we are very pleased to have Thatcham's world-class research experts on our team."

protect yourself against liability while making the repair process more efficient. Feel free to contact us at anytime if you have any questions that we could help with.



Larry Montanez is a former I-CAR Instructor, and is co-owner of P&L Consultants with Peter Pratti Jr. P&L Consultants work with collision repair shops on estimating, production and proper repair procedures. P&L conducts repair workshops on MIG & resistance welding, measuring for estimating, and advanced estimating skills. P&L also conducts investigations for insurers and repair shops for improper repairs. P&L can be reached by contacting Larry at (718) 891 - 4018 or larry-goju@aol.com.

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Peter Roberts, Thatcham's chief executive, says, "Repairers have frequently asked us to bring our collision methodologies to North America. However, it was important for us to partner with an established marketplace leader that is well respected throughout the industry, with a solid track record for bringing innovative solutions to the marketplace. Having worked closely with Mitchell International for over a year, the Thatcham Team is confident that we have found the best solution provider to bring ThatchamNet to the North American market."

Collision repairers are encouraged to visit www.mitchellinformationcenter.com or contact Mitchell International at (800) 238-9111 for more information and a free trial of this new data module complete with European and Asian repair data.



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