

JOURNAL



Car repairers forced to cheat, insurer claims

by LOUISE ALMOND

AN independent insurance assessor has gone in to bat for Dandenong panel-beater John Pennant, who claims insurance companies are forcing him to do sub-standard work.

Mr Pennant alleges one company told him to do a cover-up repair job on a vehicle, a claim about which the company says it has no knowledge.

While he says he is doubtful the company would have made such a request, Bernie McKenzie, managing director of Bemak Assessing and Investigations, maintains that many repairers are being forced to cheat and do sub-standard work because of the pressure put on them by insurance companies.

He said: "They are being forced to cheat by some insurance companies because that is the only way they can make any money. A lot of repairers do sub-standard work because otherwise they can't make a profit."

Mr McKenzie explained that although it cost \$49 per hour to run a panel shop, insurance companies were only paying repairers \$21 an hour, forcing them to employ other tactics to make money.

The claims have been refuted by RACV claims manager Vernon Speldewinde, who says repairers tell companies the job will take twice the time it will so they can be paid double the hourly rate.

The controversial use of non-genuine parts in smash repair is another issue on which Messrs McKenzie and Speldewinde do not agree.

Mr McKenzie says: "There is a big argument whether these parts should

ever be used. They are not quality parts, they do not meet Australian design standards and come from either Mexico, Taiwan, South Korea or Italy."

Mr Speldewinde says secondhand and approved non-genuine parts are accepted in the industry. However, he said 98 per cent of parts used by the RACV were new or secondhand, with the remaining two per cent being approved non-genuine parts. He said the RACV would not use non-genuine parts on a car less than three years old.

Mr McKenzie claimed that because Mr Pennant was standing up for his rights and the rights of his customers he was considered to be "rocking the boat" and was therefore not given any work by insurance companies.

But Speldewinde said Mr Pennant had been refused work because his quotations were not competitive. Mr Speldewinde said: "The RACV has to be competitive, we have got to keep our premiums down. Consumers want that, but they can't have it both ways."

"We must get into areas where we can make big savings. Provided the finished product is as good as the original, then it is acceptable."

Soccer attack

A SOCCER player received a fractured temple after being punched in what police believe was an unprovoked attack at the Springvale Indoor Soccer Complex.

The man was involved in a game about 8.30pm when he was approached from behind by another player who punched him in the face.