

SA's pre-owned car sector sees significant growth, boosting independent workshops

In light of TransUnion's recent Vehicle Pricing Index (VPI) results, Dewald Ranft, chairman of the Motor Industry Workshop Association (MIWA), a key component of the Retail Motor Industry Organisation (RMI), expresses optimism about the growth in sales of used cars, considering it as positive news for independent workshops.



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Ranft says with so many more second-hand options now available, it is encouraging to see that used vehicle prices have experienced, on average, a more significant increase than new cars in South Africa, with the report recording a price increase of 8% in Q3 2023 (3% above inflation).

Notably, the report also showed that older cars (>three years old) showed an even more significant price increase – with prices rising between 15.7% and 19.4%.

"These are all vehicles which typically are out of warranty and can be serviced at any one of the many accredited independent workshops nationally," says Ranft. He says in line with the findings, MIWA is also identifying a trend where, due to economic constraints and rising vehicle prices, more consumers in the used vehicle market are moving to reliable, yet older cars to meet their needs.

Pre-owned sector takes off

Data from used-car platform AutoTrader shows that almost 100,000 more vehicles were listed for sale between January and June 2023 compared to the same period in 2020. So while consumers are spoilt for choice when it comes to the purchasing of these pre-owned vehicles, Ranft says there are two areas consumers need to take note of.

The first is to carefully get the car assessed before purchase as a concerning number of vehicles severely damaged in accidents often end up being repaired and returned to the road. To the untrained eye these cars may look perfectly acceptable but, upon closer inspection, one may be shocked at the quality of the repairs and the severity of the previous damage incurred. This is the main reason the South African Motor Body Repairers' Association (SAMBRA) have been campaigning so hard for an open and transparent Vehicle Salvage Database (VSD).

Once you are confident the vehicle is in good condition, the second issue to focus on is maintenance. Motorists should not fall into the trap of saving money on maintenance. "You don't have to be a mechanical expert to take care of your car. You just need to be aware of what you should be keeping an eye on and keep a regular maintenance schedule if you want to prolong its lifespan and reliability," he says.

Ranft provides the following simple basic car care tips to ensure your car stays on the road longer and that you pick up smaller repairs before they become big ticket items.

- **Read the car's manual and schedule maintenance accordingly.** Don't let your manual sit neglected in your car's glove compartment. Keeping up with your car's recommended maintenance schedule can help avoid costly problems with your cooling system, drivetrain, suspension and other components, and equally important, preserve much of the car's resale value at the point you want to dispose of it again. Following the recommended schedule religiously and only use quality oil, fluids and parts.
- **Battery check.** Like other car parts that have been made to last longer, most car batteries are maintenance-free and can last more than three years. The first sign that may indicate you need a new battery is if you have trouble starting the engine.
- **Good visibility.** One of the most neglected basic car care tips is taking care of your windshield wipers. You should change your wipers every 12 months or if the rubber becomes worn. You will also want to check the wiper fluid reservoir and keep it full.
- **Use online forums.** You want to learn about potential problems before they happen so that you can prevent them -- or fix them immediately. Find an owners' forum online and get on the wavelength of what the potential problems could be as your car gets older.
- **Check the fluids.** You should check the level of your car's antifreeze, oil, transmission fluid, power steering fluid, and brake fluid, very regularly. We advise you to check every time you fill your car with fuel. Even if your car doesn't leak fluids, it can develop a leak and quickly have a dangerously low level of fluids. It's also important to change the oil regularly. This will improve your mileage and protect your car's engine.

It is also important to change the oil filter as well - there is no sense in putting clean oil through a dirty filter, and filters are relatively cheap and available at any parts store or franchised car dealer. Please check your service manual or contact an MIWA-accredited workshop for your car's specific needs.

- **Brake pads.** Monitor your car's brake pad thickness and don't let the pads wear down to metal. This will cause damage to your brake rotors (discs) at least and possibly the callipers as well. Rotors and callipers are much more expensive to

replace than pads.

- **Rotate the tyres.** Changing tyre position is very important and reduces uneven wear and tear on the tread, thus extending the life of the tyres. Generally, they should be rotated every 8,000 kilometres and it is recommended to follow the advice of an accredited tyre and fitment centre specialist. You also need to check your car's tyre pressure regularly.

Proper tyre inflation will help the tyres perform better and last longer, and it will help you get the most out of a tank of fuel. It's also a good idea to have your tyres checked for wear regularly.

- **Use your hand brake.** Even if you are driving a car with an automatic transmission, use your hand brake regularly, especially if you're parked on an incline. It helps keep the brakes adjusted in the rear of the car and makes them last longer.

- **Don't ignore small problems.** Pay close attention to unfamiliar noises in or on your vehicle and also to its warning lights and even cosmetic things, like a piece of rubber trim that's loose. Ignoring a problem only allows it to get worse and parts for aging vehicles get harder to find.

Ranft says these tips are all valid irrespective of whether you own a new or used vehicle and stresses again the importance of regular maintenance which is the key to extending the life of your car.

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