

“The Best in the Industry...” Rip-offs in the Auto Industry.

by Annie Margarita Yang

Sauna. That’s what our Honda Civic sedan felt like in the Texas heat last summer. We used a windshield cover and parked in the shade when possible, but it still wasn’t enough to combat the heat. We’d been planning to tint the windows before the summer season starts. I got them tinted last month and wanted to share my experience shopping around.

Maybe you’re not that into cars. Me neither, but I also don’t like getting ripped off, and I’m sure everyone else feels the same. Last week, my coworker told me she didn’t want to fix her broken car horn. She wasn’t sure whether a mechanic would overcharge her. Even if you find cars boring, I hope you find this newsletter interesting.

In the automotive industry, prices and quality of work vary. How do you know you are getting the best value whenever you are purchasing a product or service? The answer is to research. With the Internet, it’s easy to be an informed consumer. The first page of Google search results about window tinting had enough information. To summarize, there are four types of films: dyed, metallic, carbon, and ceramic. I am listing the pros and cons of each so you know what I’m talking about in the rest of the article.

Film Material	Pros	Cons
Dyed	Least expensive. Good for privacy.	Least functional for heat reduction. Color fades from black to purple.
Metallic	Scratch and shatter resistant. Reduces heat by reflecting it away.	Interferes with cell phone, GPS transmission, and radio reception. Shiny appearance.
Carbon	Blocks 40% of infrared rays. Attractive matte finish. Never fades. Does not block electronic signals.	None.
Ceramic	Blocks 80% of infrared rays. Never fades. Shatter resistant. Does not block electronic signals. Retains great visibility at night.	Most expensive.

The dyed film was off the list, as it didn’t reduce heat. I didn’t want metallic film either because we rely on electronics. That left us with carbon or ceramic film. According to CostHelper, tinting a passenger

car costs between \$100 and \$600. Any quote outside that range is abnormal.

It was time to call for quotes from every shop in town. I called Shop A first and was quoted \$169.00. When I asked the person on the phone what type of film they use, he answered, "Llumar, the best in the industry." Hmm, weird because Llumar wasn't a type. I googled it and it turned out to be a brand. Llumar makes dyed, metallic, and ceramic, so his answer didn't help me at all. Since he wouldn't say much on the phone, I drove to the shop to ask more questions.

What happened there?

Me: "Hi, I called for a quote earlier. I wanted more information on what type of film you use."

Shop A: "I already told you Llumar."

Me: "That's the brand, but what type? Dyed, metallic, carbon, or ceramic?"

Shop A: "Ma'am, it's metallic."

Me: "You don't offer carbon or ceramic?"

Shop A: "No, we only offer metallic. I don't see why you would want carbon anyway. Metallic is better than carbon."

Me: "I read online that metallic film interferes with cell phone reception and GPS."

Shop A: "Listen, Miss, I've been doing this for 15 years. I know more about window tinting than what you can find out by reading on the Internet. I use the best in the industry. There's not a single customer that ever complained about electronic signal interference."

I walked away. "The best in the industry," is a subjective claim. How can I trust his word, especially with that attitude? Plus, even www.Llumar.com states that their ceramic film eliminates interference with electronic signals, implying that the metallic film lacks that feature. They even label dyed as "good," metallic as "better," and ceramic as "best."

There is nothing wrong with being an informed consumer. He might have been intimidated by my knowledge. It wasn't personal because I wasn't questioning his ability or skill; I was questioning the product he used. And to be clear, shopping around doesn't mean I am cheap. I am willing to pay more money for quality, but I want to know exactly what I'm paying for. That was my first quote, so I hope the other shops didn't treat me that way when I called.

Business	Dyed	Metallic	Carbon	Ceramic
Shop A		\$169.00		
Shop B		\$165.00		
Shop C		\$189.00		
Shop D		\$225.00		
Shop E			\$195.00	

Shop F	\$150.00	\$225.00		
Shop G	\$164.00			\$350.00
Shop H	\$179.00		\$229.00	\$419.00

They didn't. They were surprised by how much I knew about window tinting. Apparently, most customers are fixated on price and never go beyond that. In the end, I went with ceramic film for \$350 from Shop G. I am very happy with the result.

The best way to not get ripped off, especially in the automotive industry, is to do your research and shop around. This article was about an optional add-on to my vehicle, not even a repair. If it were a repair, you should apply the same process by getting a second or third opinion. Repair shops and dealerships can overcharge or suggest unnecessary or inadequate repairs. Don't get me wrong—there are honest people out there, but there are some dishonest ones who ruin it for everyone. Arm yourself with knowledge.

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