

Case Study : Piloting a Kitemark®

Available to the industry in January 2007, the much talked about PAS 125 crash repair standard and Thatcham BSi Kitemark® scheme are set to become the most important initiatives in the crash repair industry for over a decade.

Following the release of the standards document in October, a number of pilot audits have been carried out by the audit team from BSi. These pilot audits have been designed to assess the level of bodyshop preparedness in a cross-section of the industry. We spoke to one repairer involved in the pilot to find out more about their motivation for taking part and in particular their thoughts and feelings regarding the recent audit.

Chris Oliver is the Managing Director of AJC Fix Auto Dagenham, which although it operates as an independent bodyshop was also one of the first Fix Auto franchises in the UK. Chris has 15 body repair technicians, 3 Thatcham trained apprentices and 13 administrative team members on his staff at this busy and successful crash repair operation.

Business Improvement

As a supporter of the Thatcham BSi Kitemark® scheme throughout its development, Chris

has recognised the scheme's importance in addressing many of the industry's most pressing issues. He believes that: "For far too long now the industry has been faced with a growing number of issues, not least of which have been: a skills gap that has developed into a chasm; concern over the availability of methods of repair; much confusion over the capacity of equipment to deal with emerging technology in vehicle construction and general safety concerns relating to the integrity of the repair process. The Thatcham BSi Kitemark® takes on board all those concerns and in a structured way begins to address them."

Chris can also see the benefits from the point of view of individual repairers who will strive for Kitemark® licensing. "This scheme is based on some sound fundamental business improvement tools and techniques and the framework required to attain the Kitemark® means that I know it will deliver huge benefits to our organisation."

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AJC Fix Auto Dagenham

On the pilot audit itself, we asked Chris for some detail on how the audit worked, how he felt it went, and what AJC Fix Auto Dagenham as a company has learned from the experience.

“The initial part of the pilot was a self-evaluation check list. This was a list of questions sent out by BSi which enabled us to quickly benchmark where our organisation was, against a known set of criteria. Once that was completed a BSi auditor contacted us to arrange a convenient time to visit and undertake the audit. The audit itself took one auditor a full day, BSi then complete a report in their own time and return the detailed findings to us.

The level of detail was huge, much greater than I have ever experienced with any other audit process and for that reason much more meaningful. It covered every aspect of our operations from top to bottom. The most encouraging part was that it was not sufficient to merely assert that we had a process or operation in place, BSi wanted to see actual evidence that the process existed. We had an expectation that the process would be

rigorous, but it was much more than this. We found it to be a very good balance between robust, open and enquiring questioning of our systems, and an understanding, independent, objective viewpoint.

I was particularly pleased to see the audit focus in some detail on the technical aspects of repair. This was definitely not just a paper exercise. If a technician is not following a prescribed procedure, I'm confident BSi will uncover it. Although it would be incorrect to suggest that they are industry experts through and through, they certainly had enough knowledge to ask some very pertinent and searching questions. With spot audits and follow-up checks I'd say it is virtually impossible to 'cheat' your way to Kitemark® registration. You also have to remember BSi have seen, done and probably produced a T-shirt for it. This is what makes it so worthwhile for us as repairers to be registered.

Having a thorough external evaluation of all your systems and processes cannot in any way be underestimated. It adds a great deal of value. And this for us is the primary purpose

of the scheme – to add value. All of the team here at AJC Fix Auto Dagenham welcome the structural business improvements for which the audit is a catalyst - continuous improvement is a constant theme of our operations and our staff reacted positively to having this independent assessment.”

The BSi Auditor's View

The BSi auditor at AJC Fix Auto Dagenham was Eric Friend. We spoke to Eric for his view on how all the Kitemark® pilot audits that he has been involved in have gone.

“Generally speaking, we found a mixed bag in terms of readiness for Kitemark® licensing. As is to be expected all the repairers we visited were at different levels and have demonstrated strengths and weaknesses in different areas. Some have a way to go, most commonly with the production of formal written procedures and process management documentation. All the participants are given a gap analysis document explaining our findings and showing them the areas they need to concentrate on as they work towards the standard.



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We only spent one day with each repairer for the pilot but we fully expect that different operations will require more time when the formal audit process takes place. However, as an exercise for both the audit team and the participating bodyshops, the pilot has been extremely useful in assessing the levels of preparedness and identifying the challenges that lie ahead."

What Next?

The Thatcham BSi Kitemark® scheme will be officially launched in London's Docklands on 21st February, where it is hoped a number of the repairers who have undergone the formal, even more rigorous audit, will be officially awarded their Kitemark®.

Summing up the Kitemark® scheme from a repairer's perspective, we leave the last word to Chris Oliver: "As a manager, leader or principal in any organisation it is impossible to be everywhere all the time. The best you can hope for is to set processes and procedures and the tone, ethos and values of the business. Having someone independently look in minute detail at many different levels, makes you realise people do not always deliver what you want or hoped they would - sometimes the results are even better than you thought they might be!

To ensure the outcomes of the scheme are delivered as ongoing business improvements, the formal processes identified and mapped out must be driven through the business and steps taken internally to ensure the scheme implementation is enduring and sustainable.

The Thatcham BSi Kitemark® scheme now raises the bar for those professionals in our industry and receiving external recognition for the hard work they all know goes on, day-in and day-out will go a long way to recognising the status they justifiably deserve."



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