Car Care Corner

Car Manufacturers Warn Against Remanufactured Wheels

(NAPSA)—Though often taken for granted by motorists, wheels and tires are two of the many components that can greatly affect your vehicle's safety. In recent years there has been much written about the need to keep your tires properly inflated, rotate them regularly and check for wear, but the role of your wheels—especially if your vehicle has been in a collision—has drawn far less attention.

Whether steel or aluminum, sporting hubcaps or spinners, wheels can help express a vehicle's style, but their less glamorous function is to hold your tires in place and keep them fully inflated. Unfortunately, wheels are frequently damaged in automobile accidents, from minor scrapes on the finish to significant dents or gouges that not only change their shape, but also prevent them from performing their primary duty.

What typically happens to a damaged wheel during the collision repair process? A large number of wheels undergo a remanufacturing process—also commonly called refinishing or reconditioning—that routinely strips metal away from the wheel to reshape a dented or warped wheel, or adds metal to a wheel that has holes or missing pieces. These remanufactured wheels are then placed back on your vehicle.

This practice of repairing damaged wheels has come under fire from many auto manufacturers that claim the remanufacturing procedure may alter the performance and durability of the wheels, and raises serious safety issues. To protect and educate their consumers, several carmakers—including Ford Motor Company, General Motors, Chrysler and Honda—have issued position statements regarding the remanufacturing of wheels for reuse on vehicles that have been in an accident.

For example, in Ford's statement, the company does not recommend the addition or removal of any metal to or from a wheel. According to the manufacturer, doing so might change the size and/or shape of the wheel, which could cause steering, suspension, axle or transfer case/power transfer unit failure, creating an increased risk of loss of vehicle control, vehicle rollover, personal injury or death of the car's driver and/or passengers.

Aside from the obvious safety concerns, automakers also are quick to point out the lack of regulation surrounding the refinishing of wheels. Steve Nantau, Ford's Collision and Light Repair Supervisor for the Aftermarket and Remanufacture Engineering group, points out that there are currently no federal guidelines or standards in place to determine how to test a wheel that has been remanufactured. "A collision repairer has no way of knowing if the remanufacturing process has changed the fundamental structure of the wheel," said Nantau.

Nantau recommends that in the case of an auto collision where a wheel or tire needs to be replaced, the vehicle owner should use replacement tires and wheels that are the same size and type as those originally provided by their car's original manufacturer. If consumers choose to use a remanufactured wheel on their car, they should:

- Request written assurance from the wheel's aftermarket supplier that any wheel repair recommendations provided by the vehicle's original manufacturer have been followed;
- Verify that the wheel carries permanent markings that identify the aftermarket supplier and the date of remanufacture;
- Request clarification regarding the warranty provided by the remanufacturer and/or aftermarket supplier, if any;
- Consider that many carmakers, including Ford Motor Company, do not warrant any remanufactured/refinished/reconditioned wheels provided by an aftermarket supplier;
- Confirm the use of new coated balance weight to reduce future cosmetic damage.

Car owners have the right to choose the type of replacement parts used to repair their vehicle after an accident, including replacement wheels. Motorists should check with their insurer or collision repairer to be sure the proper types of wheels are used during the repair.