

Vale National PDR Technician Certification

In 2002, Vale National Training Centers in Arlington, Texas was approached by a group of PDR company owners, and the owners of the Dent Estimators system, and asked if we would consider the development and administration of a certification test. The idea, as presented to us, was to bring standards to the PDR industry, and give skilled PDR technicians the credentials to set themselves apart from unskilled technicians, who were causing damage to the industry by producing sub-standard repairs, often done at a sub-standard rate. We were told that we were chosen because of our long-standing relationship with the insurance industry, and the respect Vale National has commanded in over fifty-six years of offering hands-on physical damage estimating training to the insurance carriers, auto manufacturers, rental car firms, and the collision industry. They also recognized that two other major certification bodies in the automotive repair industry could not offer the type of test that they were seeking, as the others offered only paper tests. In late 2003, the first beta testing was initiated with assistance from some of the best PDR technicians in the country. The first series of tests were open to the industry soon after, and demand has continued to grow. Most recently, the largest privately held PDR Company in the country, PARS, committed to the certification program, requiring that all technicians working for PARS become certified. We are aware of several other PDR companies that are making the same commitment.

Vale National offers three levels of certification: Journeyman, Craftsman, and Master Craftsman. The test consists of repairing three dents. One on a steel hood, one on a door, and, for the Master Craftsman level, one dent on an aluminum hood. The parameters of the test are detailed on our website at www.valenational.com. Suffice to say that the Master Craftsman dents are deep, approaching the limit of reparability. Once again, Vale National worked closely with very experienced PDR technicians, assisting us in the development of these parameters. While very difficult, it has been proven many times that the Master Craftsman level dents are, indeed, repairable to an industry standard level.

No matter the level of certification, all dents must be repaired and finished to a very high standard. Judging of the repairs is accomplished both visually, and with the use of an optical sensor that was first used by the military for locating and rating surface distortion in aircraft skins, including that of the Space Shuttle. The American and Japanese auto manufacturers for the purpose of rating surface distortion on stamped body panels, ensuring adherence to build tolerance, use the same technology. Our sensor has been specially configured for our needs, and to our knowledge, is the only one of it's kind in existence. The sensor applies a mathematical rating to the repair area, and then compares that rating to the undamaged surface surrounding the repair. In an effort to maintain consistency, only domestic, late model sheet metal is used, with the exception of the aluminum panels. The dents are created in the panels with the use of a calibrated air cannon, firing a projectile at a pre-determined velocity. Drilling of holes is not allowed, and front doors may only be accessed through the window opening or rear, pre-manufactured access points. Cracking of paint or sanding/buffing through the clear coat is an automatic fail. Test time is limited to one hour per dent.

In the event that one segment of the test is failed, the technician is allowed to apply passed segments to the next lower certification level without additional charge. Those failing any segment of the Journeyman test will be required to schedule for re-testing at full fee. Any certified technician wanting to upgrade to a higher certification level may do so at 50% of the original fee. Upon successful completion of the testing, the technician receives a numbered certificate and laminated identification card indicating the level of certification achieved, as well as a sew-on patch. Vale National Certified Technicians are listed on our website for quick verification.

Aside from the desire to set you apart from those producing sub-standard work, other compelling reasons exist in considering certification. We have been told by both hail and route/door ding technicians that the certification status has brought them a competitive edge. A route technician related to me that when approaching a new dealership or other wholesale client, he presents an information packet that highlights the certification, and includes our website address. He said that in more than one instance, it has made the difference and landed him the work. While working our booth at this year's Mobile Tech Expo, I couldn't

have been more pleased to hear several similar success stories related by technicians who had certified with us.

One of the best reasons for certification has been looming on the horizon, and has now begun to take root. A relationship between insurance carriers and body repair facilities most commonly referred to as 'direct repair' has gained widespread popularity. In part, this relationship allows the collision repair shop to write the repair estimate, complete the repairs, and invoice the insurance company directly, saving the owner the inconvenience and delay of having to take their car to an insurance claims center for inspection. The advantage to the repairer seems obvious, but this relationship does not come without qualification. Traditionally, a part of this qualification has been in the form of certification for their technicians. Insurance companies have only recently begun to examine the possibility of DRP relations with PDR companies, and some are now testing this concept in selected regions. There is no doubt that having Vale Certification can be a positive factor for a PDR company seeking to establish this type of relationship with a carrier.

Vale National continues to promote the certification and support Vale Certified Technicians, in part by calling on our insurance, rental car, and collision facility clients, as well as our presence and participation at conventions such as NACE, Mobile Tech Expo, The Society of Insurance Trainers and Educators (SITE) and others. We're pleased to report that word of our PDR Certification Program has traveled internationally. In November of 2004, we received an inquiry by the largest insurance company in Australia as to the feasibility of bringing the program "down under." We have also seen interest from Europe. Additionally, Vale continues our dedication to the PDR industry by offering our PDR Estimating Seminar based on the Dent Estimators software.

For more information on Vale National Training Centers and Vale PDR Certification, scheduling and registration, please visit our website at www.valenational.com
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