

Steed's Collision Center Grows Through Certification and Customer Trust



James Steed's journey into the collision repair industry began with a passion for paint and body work back in high school.

Despite encouragement from his family to pursue other lines of work, James quickly realized that life behind a desk was not for him. After earning a degree and working briefly in the public sector, he returned to what he loved: repairing cars. In 2014, he opened the first Steed's Collision Center in Biloxi, Mississippi. Built on a foundation of hands-on experience in both collision shops and as an insurance adjuster with Progressive, James had a clear vision: to provide top-quality, honest repairs with an emphasis on long-term customer satisfaction.

By 2023, James began noticing a shift in the industry. While many collision shops were struggling following the pandemic, Certified shops were not only staying afloat but growing. Recognizing an opportunity, James began investing in OEM Certifications, seeing a long-term opportunity for sustainability and growth. By 2024, Steed's Collision Center held Certifications from major manufacturers like Tesla, GM, Nissan, and Ford. That year became the company's most successful to date, increasing revenue from 3.2 million in 2023 to 4 million in 2024, even as much of the industry declined.

For James, the biggest value in Certification has been the ability to market his shop's expertise effectively. He uses Facebook to highlight Steed's as one of the most Certified facilities in the region. These efforts have proven powerful. After expanding his marketing efforts into nearby communities, James saw his market share in one area jump from three percent to over twelve percent, which led to the opening of another location.

James believes most customers do not know what Certification means until they need a repair, so his

team takes time to educate them. He explains how Certified shops use manufacturer-approved repair procedures, have specialized training, and use the right tools for the job. "When you come to my shop, we have the education, the equipment, and the expertise to repair your vehicle to standards," James explained. "Everybody thinks a body shop is just a body shop until you explain it to them like that." He stresses the importance of educating customers. Certification alone is not enough to win business. It's how you use that Certification to show customers the value and safety behind your repairs that makes the difference.



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Internally, Certification has enhanced nearly every aspect of operations. The shop now runs more efficiently thanks to improved parts availability, fewer delays, and standardized repair procedures. With access to manufacturer repair guidelines

and a strong focus on quality components, Steed's team can streamline workflow and reduce rework. James has also found that being Certified gives him leverage when working with insurance adjusters. Drawing from his experience as an adjuster, he speaks their language and explains that his shop cannot risk losing its Certification by cutting corners. "I can explain that maintaining our Certification means we have to meet specific repair standards, and I work with adjusters to find solutions that align with those requirements." This transparency builds mutual respect and often leads to better outcomes during negotiations.

Beyond marketing and operations, James has cultivated a strong company culture by prioritizing relationships with employees. He maintains close ties with local trade schools, which gives him early access to emerging talent. He believes in training young technicians from the ground up rather than relying on technicians possibly set in outdated methods. When asked about the staffing shortages that have challenged the collision repair industry, James responded: "I don't have those problems. I treat people differently. I don't see my employees as numbers." His leadership style is rooted in compassion and treats his employees like his own family.

Steed's Collision Center **continues to grow because of the trust it builds every day with customers, employees, and the community.**



Looking ahead, James plans to continue leveraging Certification to grow his business. He currently owns four locations, three of which operate under the Steed's Collision name and hold I-CAR Gold Class status. When it comes to getting Certified, he does advise shop owners to pace themselves. Acquiring multiple Certifications at once may seem appealing, but James warns that the annual renewals can be overwhelming if the process is not staggered properly.

For James, the impact of Certification is clear. While others are seeing declining numbers, his phone is ringing daily with offers from MSOs wanting to buy his shops. That, to him, is a sign of success. Steed's Collision Center continues to grow not just because of the logos on the wall, but because of the trust it builds every day with customers, employees, and the community.

Interested in learning more about getting your shop Certified?

Learn more about the OEC Collision Performance Network and OEM Certification [here](#).

