

5 Easy Steps to Buying a Used Automobile

Article by: Jerry Christopher

Are you looking to buy a used automobile for the first time? Are you concerned about making the right choice? Yes, it's true that a car's value will decrease the second you drive it off the lot, all the more so with a brand new vehicle.

So, there is actually a great deal of merit in deciding to buy used. In fact, you may save up to 50% on a well-maintained 2-4 year old used auto as compared to buying a new one.

Does it seem that your head is already swimming with a variety of makes and models? Don't despair! Purchasing a used car can actually be very simple, if you follow some key steps in the buying process:

1. Identify Driving Needs. One way to keep from getting overwhelmed by the variety of cars available is for you to get specific about what your driving needs are. This will help you to stay focused on that sensible minivan you'll need to drive your three kids around, and to avoid getting sidetracked by that gorgeous two-seater sports car you saw. Here are some questions you may want to ask yourself before you begin looking:

- How much money can I spend on a vehicle?
- How much can I afford to pay on insurance?
- How many people will be depending on this car for transportation?
- What items will the car be transporting on a regular basis? (groceries, equipment, etc.)
- (If buying a minivan) should there be two sliding doors, or only one? Right side? Or left side?
- What is the maximum amount of mileage the car can have?
- Will I be required to drive in potentially hazardous weather conditions?
- Do I want a standard, automatic or semi-automatic transmission?
- Foreign or domestic?

2. Become Informed. Once you have clarified your specific driving and transportation needs, it is time to search for the specific kinds of cars that will meet your requirements. Consumer Reports and online discussion groups and bulletins can be useful sources of information with regard to different vehicles, their pros and their cons.

3. Begin Your Search. Use several used car resources to diversify your search. Try browsing the internet, using the resources at your local library or skimming your local newspaper. Once you have narrowed your search down to a handful of used vehicles, you are ready to pick up the phone and inquire about each one; but first, do a little research on what their fair prices are. This will help you gauge the fairness of the quoted price, taking into account the car's age, mileage and condition.

4. Uncover Maintenance and Warranty History. This is perhaps the most important aspect to buying a used car. An automobile that was diligently maintained will be a most reliable vehicle that will require few repairs. On the other hand, a car that was not cared for properly will be more likely to give you problems in the near future. Here are some helpful hints:

- Ask the seller if the car comes with any records of oil changes, routine services and repairs. Some car owners will keep meticulous records.
- Run a Vehicle History Report online at www.carfax.com or at www.autocheck.com. **(Please Note: While we do recommend using one of these services, do not be mis-lead into believing that the reports are all inclusive of all damages and histories)**
- Take an online course at usedcarwise.com to learn how to tell if a car has been in an unreported accident or if it has been well maintained or not.
- Check for any open recalls at www.nhtsa.dot.gov/

5. Go Out for a Test Drive If you have made it this far in the process, chances are you are ready to take your prospective cars out for at least a 20-25 mile test drive over different road surfaces. Here are some things to consider:

- Can you adjust the seat, headrest, steering wheel and mirrors to a position that is comfortable for you?
- Do all the locks, windows, horn and lights function properly?
- How does the engine sound? It should be smooth, without any tapping or ticking, grinding or rumbling
- If the car has power steering, there should be no loud squealing noise when the wheel is turned.
- If the brake pedal sinks all the way to the floor after pumping it a few times, it may mean the car's brakes need work.
- Do the gears shift smoothly and crisply?
- Does the steering wheel vibrate while you drive? The steering wheel should stay steady.

These five easy steps will help you to narrow your choices and to have a good used car-buying experience. If you know the things to look for and what to avoid, you can land a sweet deal.

Finally, be sure to keep various choices in the running, since having several options in mind will give you negotiating power. Once you factor in all the variables, try to get a deal on the best car you find; and remember that the time you

invest in researching and carefully investigating your choices will surely pay off, both in the short and long-term.

To quote the phrase "patience is a virtue". It's true when searching for a quality used car. Don't get in a hurry, do your research and minimize the risk of purchasing a lemon. Jerry Christopher/Owner <http://www.usedcarwise.com> offers a new and innovative training course teaching the average consumer "How To Buy A Used Car The Right Way"