



Used Car Buying Tips the Experts Use

When it comes to buying a used car, you should not only bring in outside, professional expertise, but make a professional out of yourself, too. By combining a physical inspection from a licensed mechanic (which you should always try to do), with the information directly available to you as a consumer, such as vehicle history reports, you can empower yourself with the knowledge and confidence you need to make the best decision possible.

No one will dispute that fact that uncertainty is the most prominent and unwelcome part of the used car-buying process. Since the first Model T rolled off the line, people have been fixing and selling vehicles without disclosing their full, and sometimes checkered, pasts. And, be it your first or fourteenth used car purchase, the questions always loom: Am I buying a problem vehicle? Has it been in an accident? How do I know this isn't a lemon?

In this information age, you can arm yourself with the same information and techniques used by professionals to answer these questions and make an educated and confident used car purchase. These techniques include:

- 1) **PEDALS AND STEERING:** Examine the pedals for wear. While the paint and interior are often updated to make a car appear less worn, sellers rarely replace pedals. Also, with the engine off, jiggle the steering wheel back and forth. There should be less than one inch of play and no clunking noises. If there are, the car may need a steering gearbox or rack or other front suspension repair such as tie rod ends.
- 2) **FRAME DAMAGE:** Never buy a frame-damaged car. Check the radiator core support, which connects the front fenders and holds the top of the radiator and includes the hood latch. It should be bolted, not welded on either side. Inspect the bolt heads at the top of the fenders inside the hood; scratch marks indicates that the fenders have been replaced or realigned after a crash. Uneven tire wear is another indication of possible frame damage. When cars are involved in a major collision and frame damage occurs, the frame often remains slightly off keel and the tires will show this hidden problem.
- 3) **PAINT:** Carefully check the paint job, taking note of any rust spots, dents or scratches. Look at the sides of the car from end-on for waviness, which indicates paint work. Run your finger along the edges of the joints between panels; roughness indicates residue left from masking tape, uneven gaps between door, hood, and trunk panels and their openings indicate possibility of a major repair. Consider bringing a small magnet with you. If the body of the car is steel, then a failure of the magnet to stick can indicate the extensive use of body compound to conduct a repair. When using this trick however, keep in mind that many newer models use fiberglass for certain body panels.



4) **FLUIDS:** Remove the oil filler cap. Check for signs of thick, dark sludge which may indicate the vehicle didn't receive frequent oil changes. Look at the condition of the coolant in the overflow tank; filthy brown coolant means a rusted cooling system and possibly a leaky head gasket. Pull the transmission dipstick; the fluid should be pink or red. An old car may have dark transmission fluid, but the oil should not look or smell burnt. Check underneath the vehicle for fluid leaks.

5) **VEHICLE HISTORY REPORT:** Beyond your own firsthand detective work, checking a car's vehicle history is one of the most important things you can do before making a purchase. Vehicle history reports like Experian's AutoCheck (www.autocheck.com) pull data from various sources, including state department of motor vehicle records, auto auctions and dealers. AutoCheck now features the AutoCheck Score, which assigns each vehicle a numeric score based on that vehicle's specific history. In much the same way as a credit score distills large amounts of information into a simple, easy-to-understand, numeric score, this first-ever vehicle score makes it easier to understand the vehicle's full history and compare that car against the average score of similar vehicles.

Vehicle history reports factor in reported events such as title and registration information, accident, auction data, the vehicle's emission history, whether it's ever been repossessed or stolen, whether the vehicle has ever been a government car, police car or taxi and whether it'd ever been leased. The AutoCheck Score does the analysis for you, helping you easily understand what a vehicle history report really says about that used car.

Becoming a savvy car buyer will not only allow you to make a better investment, but it can also protect you and your family from an unsafe vehicle. Gone are the days of simply kicking tires and staring blankly under the hood. With a little research and some careful inspection, you can steer clear of problem used vehicles.