

# The Ultimate Guide to Buying Used Cars

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02/2012

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Hi and thanks for downloading my eBook.

I'm a part-time blogger and a full-time car enthusiast. Over the years I have owned and sold numerous cars and wrote this eBook so that you can learn how to buy a used car like a pro.

To me, buying or leasing a new car is a complete waste of money. I once [leased a Honda Prelude](#) back in 1997 and remember what a waste it was to throw money at a car I didn't even own.

The moment you sign those documents for a new car you've already lost over a month's worth of wages. With rising prices and shrinking paychecks nobody can afford to waste money like that.

In today's sluggish economy, people are forced to find ways to cut back on spending. Whether buying new or used, a car is usually the second biggest investment most people will make.

But buying a cheap used car doesn't mean you have to sacrifice quality. If you know [which cars to buy](#) and [which to avoid](#) you can increase your chances of buying a high quality car for a low price.

Shopping for used cars is an arduous task for anyone. If you follow this eBook carefully you should have no problems finding an affordable used car that will last many years.

## Don't Judge a Car by its Cover



You know the old saying – “Don’t judge a book by its cover”. Well the same applies to cars also.

Let’s face it, first impressions matter a lot in life and I do mean a lot.

It's the deal breaker when going on job interviews and on blind dates. An employer will make a decision in the first 30 seconds of meeting a job candidate. A person on a blind date will usually make a decision within the first minute.

Buying a car is no exception. People shopping for used cars will instantly be attracted to the cars that have a glossy paint job and a clean interior.

That’s why car dealers go above and beyond the call of duty to keep their cars clean. They know it's an effective strategy to lure customers into their showrooms.

I can’t tell you how many times I’ve encountered a car with a spotless exterior and interior only to be disappointed by its poor mechanical condition.

On the flipside, I’ve seen cars that looked like they were ready for the scrap yard but were in good mechanical condition.

Your job as a buyer is to look at the whole package and not let your emotions take over.

## Avoid the Low Mileage Trap



People often associate mileage with a car's condition.

Most people will assume a car with 30K miles is in better condition than a car with 60K miles. But let me tell you that mileage is no indicator of a car's condition.

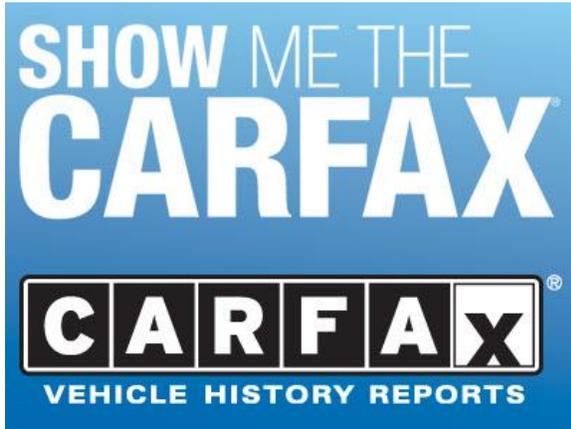
I've seen plenty of cars with low mileage that were in horrible mechanical condition. If most of a car's time is spent in stop and go traffic then there may be lots of wear on the engine and especially the transmission.

In fact, in most cases I would rather buy a car with 120K miles than a car with 80K miles. Because by the time a car reaches 120K miles many of the original parts would have been replaced by the owner. Not so with a car with 80K miles.

People will start to consider trading in their cars when it reaches the 80K mile mark. The warranty has expired and many of the original parts are worn out. In addition, the car is worth more on the used market because of the lower miles. So it's no surprise that many people trade in their cars during this time.

Don't focus too much on mileage the next time you go out shopping for a used car. Today cars can last well over 200K miles when maintained properly.

## Run a Carfax Report



Running a [Carfax](#) report on a car is crucial no matter how good you think a car's condition is.

Get the VIN number from the seller and run a report. The report will show you the number of owners and any history of accidents or [flood damage](#).

As of today, you can buy a single report for \$34.99 or five reports for \$44.99. Get the five report option because you should be looking at more than one car. Walk away from a car if the report shows a history of accident or flood damage.

If you buy from eBay then everything has already been taken care of. You'll see a free history report with every car listing.

In the report you'll see the number of owners, any accidents or flood damage and if the car was used as a rental.

Don't buy a car if it's been in an accident. A car's frame can get compromised after an accident which can make it dangerous to drive on the road. Your safety is far more important than saving a little money.

A car that's been in a flood will cause you all kinds of problems down the road. It's just not worth the headache. There are plenty of cheap cars on the market that haven't been in accidents or flood damage. You need to research and do your due diligence.

A car that's been a part of a rental fleet has its share of [pros and cons](#). There have been many success stories with people buying rental cars. The obvious bad part is that these cars tend to get abused by customers.

## Check for Odometer Tampering



Besides running a Carfax report, is there any way of knowing if a car's odometer has been rolled back?

One way to tell is to check for excessive wear on the steering wheel, brake pedal and shift knob.

If a car has 30K miles and the steering wheel is already worn out then something isn't right. Either the odometer was rolled back or the driver spent a lot of time in stop and go traffic.

I once saw a car with low miles that had a worn interior. The driver's side leather seat was worn out and the steering wheel was peeling. Something about the car didn't seem right.

If the wear on the car isn't consistent with the mileage then walk away. There are plenty of other cars out there.

## Search For Cars in Your Area



Look for cars that are in your neighborhood so that you can thoroughly inspect and test drive the car.

eBay is a good way of finding cheap cars but I wouldn't bid on a car that's on the other side of the country. There's just no way of knowing what you're getting into. You want to meet the seller in person and ask questions in person.

Craigslist usually has tons of listings but be wary of scams as there are many ads that look suspicious. I once saw a BMW M3 with low miles advertised for three grand. Now you know something isn't right here.

Don't ever wire money through Western Union to pay for a deposit. Once the money is sent there's no way of getting it back. Many people have been scammed by this method. This is why it's important to meet the seller in person. You want to see the car and make sure it's exactly as advertised.

If a seller isn't patient with you then walk away. You should always take your time when buying a car. It's a big investment and you have every right to ask as many questions as you want.

Car sellers are in the business to make money, not do charity work. If a deal seems too good to be true then it usually is.

## Don't Be a Penny Pincher



Though it's important to save money when buying a used car, you also don't want to be too cheap. In most cases you'll get what you pay for.

Cars sold for under a thousand dollars can have many problems so I would stay away from those cars.

I would recommend spending at least 2K. When I buy used cars I look for those that are in the 2K to 3K range. Cars in this range usually do not have major defects and generally have small ticket items that needs to be fixed.

But if you're really tight on cash I would recommend buying these [cars for under a grand](#).

## Cold Start the Engine



A car with problems will be hard to start when the engine is cold.

If you're buying from a private party then set the appointment early in the morning when the weather is cool. Make sure to tell the owner not to start the car before you arrive.

If buying from a dealer, go early in the morning when they haven't had time to move cars around the lot.

I once contacted a seller and gave him explicit instructions not to start the engine. When I arrived at his house the car was already warmed up. I was suspicious and walked away. You should do the same if you're ever in this situation.

## Check the Engine Oil



With the engine turned off open the hood and check the engine oil.

Don't worry if the engine bay is dirty. What you want to check for is the color of the oil. If the oil is translucent brown then the oil has just been changed. This is a good thing.

If the oil is light or dark brown in color, it just means that it's been a while since the oil has been changed. Nothing to be alarmed about here.

But if the color of the oil is as black as your morning coffee then you need to walk away from the car. The owner neglects to perform the most basic maintenance such as oil changes. You have to wonder what else is being neglected.

## Take the Car For a Spin



After the car has passed the visual inspection, it's time to take it out for a spin.

Try to go to an area where there's a steep hill. Accelerate up the hill and check if the car loses power.

Does the car shift smoothly from one gear to another or is there hesitation? If the ride going uphill isn't smooth then there could be problems with the transmission.

The transmission is the most complex and most expensive component of a car. It can cost upwards of \$2500 or more to replace or repair a transmission. Walk away if you suspect a worn transmission.

With the radio off, do you hear any unusual noises coming from the wheels or engine?

If possible, test drive a newer car of the same model so that you know how the car is supposed to sound and drive. Does the older car have a major decrease in power? Are there unusual noises in the older car not present in the newer one?

If you don't find any major defects then it's time to get a professional opinion.

## Get the Car Inspected By a Certified Mechanic



If everything checks out fine then the last thing to do is get an inspection by a professional.

I highly recommend taking the car to a certified mechanic. They usually charge around \$125 for a complete inspection. The mechanic will be able to put the car on a lift and check for any leaks, rust or corrosion.

If the mechanic finds any problems you can take the report and negotiate the price even more with the seller. Since \$125 isn't exactly cheap, you should be certain the car you choose is the car you really want.

I can't tell you how many times I got burned because I rushed into things and didn't take the time to inspect a car properly.

Remember, there are plenty of used cars out there. If your gut feeling tells you to walk away from a car then walk away.