

Used Car Shopping



The Office of the
Minnesota Attorney General
helping people afford their lives and live with dignity, safety, and respect

Over 36 million used cars were sold in 2022. Buying a used car may be an affordable option, but these vehicles often come with bumps and bruises. A used vehicle may have a history of accidents or repairs or other problems that are not obvious at first sight.

Just as it is necessary to look at the dashboard and road before taking off for a drive, there are certain things to check before buying a used vehicle. Consider the following:

Know the Value of the Vehicle

Nobody wants to overpay for a vehicle. Review the Kelley Blue Book or J.D. Power guides to get a sense of what similar vehicles are worth. These guides can be found online at www.jdpower.com or www.kbb.com. Searching local Internet classifieds can also show the price at which similar vehicles are selling

Get It Inspected

Having a used vehicle inspected by a trustworthy mechanic before purchase can help safeguard against future problems. A car might look great on the outside, but a trained mechanic can help uncover hidden or difficult-to-diagnose issues under the hood. A good inspection will cost some money on the front end, but may save much more money in repairs down the road.

Go For a Test Drive

Make sure to go on a test drive. Test drives are an opportunity to get behind the wheel and get a feel for the car. Don't just go around the block; drive the car on highways or freeways, hills, and city streets. Test the brakes, steering wheel, and other components of the car.

Check the Vehicle History

There are a number of National Motor Vehicle Title Information System-approved companies that sell vehicle history reports online. These reports can help reveal issues with used vehicles, including flood damage, odometer rollbacks, lemon histories, and salvage titles. Make sure the report you receive is current, as outdated reports can be used to disguise recent problems.

If you're buying from a dealership, ask to see the reconditioning paperwork, which documents the work the dealership did to the vehicle after receiving it.

Read the Contract

Never take a salesperson at their word. If a salesperson makes a verbal promise, make sure it is in the contract. Always read through the contract thoroughly so that you know exactly what you are signing.

Used Car Warranties

Contrary to popular belief, there is no three-day right to return a used car. Once a person leaves the lot with the vehicle, it is generally theirs for good. For cars not covered by Minnesota's used car warranty law (e.g., used cars with more than 75,000 miles, eight years of age old or older, or purchased for less than \$3,000, among others), the buyer is responsible for all repairs after the sale.

Shop Around for Financing

A buyer is not obligated to finance directly through the dealership. While doing so may be more convenient, it may also be more costly.

While taking the above steps is not a guarantee against an unexpected issue with a used car, they will go a long way in helping you avoid a defective used vehicle. Remember, if something does not feel right about the vehicle, do not buy it.

For more information or to file a complaint against a used car dealer, contact:

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