

*Finding
&
Buying
A
Reliable
Used
Car*

1

Check out the car online

2

Checking out the car

3

Driving the Car

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Negotiation for the Car

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What success is & is not

Finding & Buying a Reliable Used Car

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- 1 Check out the car online
- 2 Checking out the car
- 3 Driving the Car
- 4 Negotiation for the Car
- 5 What success is & is not



Overall checklist

- What do you get for your money? Car Type, Year and Miles
- Car Manufacturers
- Car for Sale Websites - where I start ...
- Car for Sale Websites - more ...
- Used Car Dealer or Private Seller
- Searching for known Problems
- Body
- Engine
- Interior
- Your drive wants to be at least 20 minutes, the longer the better - see A/C below.
- Turn radio off, at first to listen & feel
- Automatic shifting OK?
- Engine OK?
- Braking OK?
- Park in a different spot & check for leaks
- Questions for the seller?
- If you like the direct approach
- In general, you can tell if someone is direct or likes to talk, use your EQ
- Some Examples from our history - Experience: Cents per mile & Dollars per year

Downloadable file: [Buying_USED_Car_public_33020.xlsx](#) contains all of these pages in one document



This focuses and applies to steady, reliable transportation.

You are looking for:

Clean title, you do NOT want salvage title. At this point you might want to sell the car in the future, if you do people rarely buy salvage title cars.

Clean - minor accident at worst Carfax is OK

Stock or unmodified car. Modified means fast, but also means worn out.

Lowest miles you can get for \$, less worn.

Be careful with a car that has been sitting - belts, hoses, paint, etc. usually need work.



What do you get for your money? Car Type, Year and Miles

(These two sites have the 'accepted' price for a car)

For Example - Looking for \$3K Toyota Corolla in Spring of '19):

Price \$3,000

Kelly Blue Book (KBB) 2003 Toyota Corolla CE ~\$3076 Fair Purchase Price at a Dealer

Private Party Value \$2300 (So, you save ~\$800)

NADA 2003 Toyota Corolla CE ~\$3375 'Clean Retail'

In conclusion: For the \$3K I have to spend I can afford a ~ a year 2003 Toyota Corolla CE at a dealer & likely 2004+ in a private sale.

for the Mileage?

You will be buying an 'OLD car' - typical mileage is 160,000 miles and this car is now 16 years old (rem was 2019) for ~ \$3,000.

Maintenance is going to become more important. See hoses, belts, water pump & maintenance on '2. Checking out the car'.



Finding & Buying a Reliable Used Car

1

Check out the car online



Car Manufacturers

Reliability #1 req't

This is not Consumer Report shorter term reliability, this is 10 - 20 year reliability.

Toyota #1

Honda #2

That's it for now, if you want high reliability & minimal additional cost & work.

I have owned more Honda's, but with Toyota automatic transmissions typically being more reliable.



Car for Sale Websites - where I start ...

#1 Cargurus

#2 Autotrader

#3 Autoblog

#4 Craigslist

For Private sales



Finding & Buying a Reliable Used Car

1

Check out the car online



Car for Sale Websites - where I start ...

For Example: Best to just sort by max price if you can - I put in \$3500

	PRO	CON
simple search	More likely to see private sales.	you might be on sheet 5+ under Google to find private sales.
Auctioneport & Co-part		Mostly salvage titles.
Auto	Great Deal' & sorts by this 1st, finds cars all over the country.	No listing for carfax, No distance from zip code.
Autotrader	Good' and 'Great' deal, catches most cars, distance from zip, carfax, more private sellers.	Must add 'sorting criteria', Too many ads.
Autoblog	Carfax, Nice plot of PRICE vs. Mileage in bottom right, but less valid for this low a price.	
Bringatrailer (BaT)		More for 'classic cars'.
Carsforsale	shows the number of days car listed, # views, # of inquiries.	email for price', no carfax.
Carmax		Typically overpriced on \$10K car by ~1.5K, yet inspected.
Cargurus	Says Largest online inventory, All of above, easiest slider bar sorter, shows their own Value, Title and Accident issues.	
Cars	Has private sellers, carfax, very easy initial sort.	Specializes in more expensive cars say \$10K.
Carsalesbase	Cool site for amount of cars made for US	
Carfax	Great initial sorting, accident reporting, if looking for cars say greater than \$10K.	Not a lot of cars listed, mostly accident reporting software.
Edmonds		Mostly a car value website.
Everycarlisted		
Kelly Blue Book		Mostly a car value website.
Truecar		Mostly for more expensive cars.
Carzone		Europe site.
Craigslist	private seller & owner usually says 'clean title', look in local major cities (GVL, Asheville, Charlotte, Atlanta.	no or few photos.
eBay - Motors	easily searches all over the country.	More for 'classic cars'.

Finding & Buying a Reliable Used Car

1

Check out the car online



Used Car Dealer or Private Seller

PRO

CON

	<u>PRO</u>	<u>CON</u>
Used Car Dealer	Will have Carfax or AutoCheck. Usually can buy a bundle check for a time period or number of checks.	You will Pay ~20%? More.
	Will be cleaned.	Why? Overhead.
	(This is both good & bad - any 'clues' to condition of car are likely 'wiped' clean.)	Slimy practices, like taking on a standard fee (\$400+) after all negotiation is complete.
Private Seller	You will pay for Carfax(more expensive)/Autocheck.	Pay typically ~20%? Less.
	Clean actually masks problems, yet impresses you.	Why is this less? Less overhead, less want to make money. More want to get rid of car.
		You will likely spend more time because you are seeing one car at a time.



Searching for known Problems

When shopping for an 'older car' likely complaints of problems and their solutions have been published online.

Once you understand what these known problems you can estimate and understand cost of the repair, see sites like: <https://repairpal.com/>

For example: searched '2003 Toyota Corolla known problems'

<https://repairpal.com/toyota-corolla-2003/problems>

yields the following results

11 different problems

Check engine light due to EVAP system - 299 reports, 103 comments

caused by many things: failed charcoal canister to a loose or worn gas cap

I highly recommend that you bring someone along with you, for:

To distract the dealer salesperson or the owner as you look in detail at the car.

To talk you into being sensible when you have found 'the car that you suddenly must have'.

To catch stuff you have missed.

To look at the car as an object and look at it with a very critical eye.

To be vocal when they have 'discovered' something that is wrong with the vehicle.

My Bride has played this role many, many times - Thank you!

You are looking for:

Things that are just plain wrong and you would therefore not buy.

Things that you can use to reduce the car price when negotiating.

Use your senses - See, Smell, Touch.



Body

- Is the Windshield cracked?**
Even a little crack you want to get it replaced - \$180 to \$300

- Paint condition**
Is the clear coat gone? Especially in the south the sun makes the paint look grainy, feel it - is it smooth?
Not a good to look at a car in the rain, you cannot tell if the clear coat is gone. Unless you are buying a convertible & you want to check if the roof is leaking.
Bring a magnet, check several locations along a body panel, if the magnetic pull feels weak, the car likely has some body filler and has been in an accident.

- Paint overspray**
Just behind the tire you will see paint color where it is usually just black plastic, this means accident.
Paint can also be anywhere it is not supposed to be, tire, frame, on chrome, etc.

- Paint Color change**
Another shade means an accident.

- Dings/dents**
Are you OK in driving around with a dented car to save some money?

- Tire type, wear and pressure**
I once bought a car with 4 different brand tires, I used this to lower the price.
You want a decent depth to the tread, if it is down to the 'wear bars' on the tire, it will cost you \$500 to \$700/set
Do you see a slight bulge where the tire touches the ground, above the ground & below the wheel?
If yes to bulge, then tire under inflated and likely it will pull to that side when driving

- Wheels**
I would look for stock alloy wheels, this means no chasing after hubcaps for your late-night speed runs
Scuff marks, dings and dents - All usually OK, but act like you are very particular - again negotiate hard

- Open every door, hood, trunk do keys and levers work?**
If there is more than one key highly likely it has been in an accident. - this is bad, say no
Do they squeak when they open? This usually means mis alignment and again accident
Are the gaps in the body equal or get wide or narrow on one side or the other and again accident

Engine

- OK, ask them how to pop the hood**
Yes, you do not want to demonstrate your knowledge of cars, yet!
- Engine Oil**
It wants to be light tan, the darker the worse. I have seen black. The darker the oil color, likey the worse the car has been maintained
If the oil color is 'milky' do not buy this car, there is likelihood of a head gasket leak or cracked cylinder head or cracked engine block. So no.
With all the fluids, especially with a private seller. Fluids full is an indication that car is cared for
- Radiator or Coolant fluid**
Radiator coolant used to be only green, but now has many colors from orange to blue, the key is that it is a brighter color. A dull muddy color means old.
You can get test kits at your local parts store for testing coolant to see if there is 'combustion byproducts' in you coolant, an option I rarely do
- Transmission Oil - Automatic**
It wants to be reddish in color, the closer to dark maroon the worse.
- Brake Fluid**
It again wants to be light in color, darker tan is not good.
- Is it clean?**
A dealer will clean-up, unlikely with private seller and good sign that they are ready or motivated to sell if it is dirty.
- Do you see leaks?**
Look for little trails of dried fluid on the engine, any drips on the ground
Older cars are likely to have front or rear main seal leaks, this is actually OK, you just need to fill up the oil periodically
- Hoses, belts and timing belt, water pump & MAINTENANCE RECORDS**
If you lucky, you will have maintenance records you can look through, yet:
Timing belt - for example 2003 Corolla has a timing chain, so you are safe. (if you go to prior model 1997 and earlier will have more miles and timing belt)
[How did I check? http://toyota.custhelp.com/app/answers/detail/a_id/7690/~does-my-vehicle-have-a-timing-belt-or-timing-chain%3F](http://toyota.custhelp.com/app/answers/detail/a_id/7690/~does-my-vehicle-have-a-timing-belt-or-timing-chain%3F)
Water pump - Factory recommendation for replacement is \$195 to \$302 from repair pal. Lots of cars are sold just PRIOR to when the Maintenance is due.
[Belts - Again Factory, but by 100K miles it is time to replace. Look up online - search 'warn belts'.](#)
Hoses - see above
A private seller might have maintenance records, a dealer will likely not. Sometimes you can pick up basic maintenance in the carfax report.
- How do you look up how much repairs cost?**
<https://repairpal.com/estimator>

Interior



What is working what is not?

Turn the Air Conditioning (A/C) on right away,

Why? If it has been recently charged temperature will no longer blow cold at the end of your drive.

Any warning lights on the dash?

Not uncommon to see a check engine light, this is usually the Oxygen Sensor, ~\$75 to \$100 each, usually you need two (2) & sometimes three (3)

Wipers work?

If the wipers are worn it is inexpensive to replace them, just an indication that the car is not cared for. If they don't move the wiper motor needs replacement/rebuild.

Lights work - you will need someone to help you here. Ask the owner to run thru all of the lights if you are alone

When you turn on the lights, does anything else flicker or dim. If yes, this is a bad sign, there is an electrical problem that will take unknown time & dollars to fix

Hazards

Interior lights - dome and glove box, etc.

Hand/emergency brake

How hard do you need to pull up to stop the car from rolling when parked on a hill. This needs to be part of test driving your car.

Horn

Turn off A/C - check the heater

Turn back on A/C

If owner is on test drive with you, they will likely start getting uncomfortable if the A/C has a leak in the system.

OK now you can turn on the radio, check out all the speakers and CD (if that is important to you) and MP3 port, etc.

You are looking for:

That everything works!

Things that you can use to reduce the car price when negotiating.

Again, use your senses - See, Smell, Touch & Hear everything. Please keep the radio off until the end.



Your drive wants to be at least 20 minutes, the longer the better - see A/C below.

Turn on A/C, first.

Drive on rough road, side road, park on a hill and hit the highway.

Straight is good, Left or Right is an indication of a problem

Does it pull to left or right? Does it track straight?





Turn radio off, at first

Is the shift smooth or clunky or abrupt.

Anything outside of smooth is bad

Transmission is the highest cost ~\$1500 to \$3000 & most likely part to be bad.

Do this several times with light, medium and foot to the floor acceleration.

Do not care what others think, step on it hard.



Automatic shifting OK?

I once found a car that was great, yet shifted poorly. I said no fixing transmissions is expensive.

Does it say in the same gear on the highway or is the transmission shifting up and down on a flat road a cruise?

Shifting up and down on a flat road usually means a sensor is bad, not expensive, but you have to find it which takes time/\$.



Engine OK?

Find a long gradual hill >40mph, accelerate slowly. If you hear pinging or the gas pedal is slightly vibrating the car engine is knocking. This could be due to cheap gas (the car requires super & they filled up with regular) or the engine has a problem. During acceleration if it is noisy you have an exhaust problem, this can be expensive. Ask your Mom about the time your Grandfather left the entire exhaust system in the middle of an intersection!



Braking OK?

Again - light, medium and break the pedal off braking.
Under hard braking you need to feel the brake pedal vibrate, this is the anti-lock kicking in.
If the car pulls to one side or the other something is wrong, brake cost is \$150 - \$300 per axle.
Stop on a side street with a hill, use your hand brake. Does it hold the car from rolling?
If the car rolls back with the emergency brake all the way up, the rear brakes likely need replacement.
Test the parking or emergency brake when parked on an incline



Park in a different spot & check for leaks

Go back to the original place the car was parked and check the ground for moist fluid.
If Reddish, it is transmission fluid and time to walk away.
If Tannish or Black, it is likely engine fluid and use it to negotiate hard.

You are looking for:

You must be willing to walk away

Remember, they are sitting on inventory that adds to their overhead. Everyday cost them money!

At a Used Car Dealer they will TACK on a larger \$, something like \$400/car. This gets added after you think the negotiation was complete.

Usually start at least 10% lower depending on how desperate (i.e. - how long car has been for sale)



Questions for the seller?

Easy - How long have you had the car?

What was your favorite thing about the car?

Any problems? Did it ever leave you stranded? (You want to bring out the story teller in them)

Was it a good car?

Do you have the maintenance records?

What was the biggest thing you had to fix?

Any recent problems?

Why are you letting this car go?

I noticed _____, would you be willing to give on the price at all?

All the tires are worn

It has four different types of tires

The fluids are very dark

The paint is a little rough

It has 4 small dents

The interior looks worn

The XXX does not work

(you get the point)





If you like the direct approach

NADA/KBB value for the car is XXXX, I see the following problems _____. I offer XXXX.



In general, you can tell if someone is direct or likes to talk, use your emotional intelligence (EQ)!

What success is & is not

You are looking for:

The lowest dollars/miles driven.

The lowest dollars/years owned.

A car that rarely leaves you stranded and is working most of the time.

Due to buying mostly 'used' cars, we always have had AAA mileage plus (~100 miles of towing) & gotten our money's worth!



Some Examples from our history - NO maintenance (for example belts, oil changes, tires, batteries, brakes, etc) or cost to operate (for example gas), just major repairs.

A 'very cold' look, How much did it cost?, Did it run? Was it down for repairs?, Did it leave us stranded?

Some conclusions:

Only time will tell if 'this car' is was a 'good one

Honda > GM/Chrysler

Used > New

Larger vehicles are more costly even without fuel cost

Frequent towing is hard on a vehicle increasing wear rate for everything

	<u>Cents/mile</u>	<u>Cost(\$)/year</u>
1997 Honda Civic - bought used - sold	0.01	63
1982 Kawasaki 550 LTD motorcycle - bought used - sold	0.02	210
2003 Honda Civic - bought used - using	0.09	571
1993 Saturn SLII - bought new - accident	0.08	1,000
2003 Honda Pilot - bought used - using	0.15	1,314
1990 Plymouth Laser - bought new - sold	0.10	1,483
2005 Acura TL - bought used - using	0.25	2,200
1997 Chevy Astro Van - bought new - sold	0.16	3,191

For details on each car download file: [Buying_USED_Car_public_33020.xlsx](#)

Above costs only include major maintenance and cost of car

