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What to look for when buying a second hand car

CC0/ArtisticOperations/Pixabay If you're purchasing your first car, buying used is an excellent option. You'll not only be saving a considerable amount of money, but you'll also avoid first-year depreciation hits new car owners face. How Does the Mileage Stack Up? When you're looking at the condition of the car, how does the mileage compare? If you're looking at a used car with low mileage, be sure the shape of the body is good. If you're looking at a truck, are the cab corner and rocker panels rotting? These things add up. CC0/ImageParty/Pixabay Look at the Tire's Condition Even if you're working on a private party used car sale, the condition of the tires matter. Carry a penny with you and, if you can see the top of Lincoln's head when sticking the penny in head-first, then the tire tread is too low, and those tires need replacing. CC0/PublicDomainPictures/Pixabay Be Sure the Seller Is Reputable When looking at a used car sale online, be sure the seller is reputable. Research online reviews, what other buyers are saying and if anyone has had negative experiences with the seller. CC0/Pexels/Pixabay Check for Certification if You Want Reliability The best way to ensure the used car is reliable is to purchase it from a dealership that offers certification. These cars are supposed to undergo rigorous testing and inspections before hitting the lot. CC0/Skicab911/Pixabay Inspect the Vehicle Look over the used vehicle thoroughly before making a decision. Inspect the headlights, turn signals, tail lights, alignment, mirrors and dents. Expect owner-sale used cars, as well as cars from used car lots to have dings and scratches. CC0/StockSnap/Pixabay What Is the Interior's Condition? When inspecting the interior, you'll be able to tell if experienced water damage by looking at the flooring and unusual smells. If there are a lot of stains in the upholstery or if something smells off, then consider looking at other cheap used cars on sale. CC0/Iqiz/Pixabay Shop Around for Loans Even if you're looking at a used car sale site, it's critical that you shop around for the best loans. That way, you're not getting hit with high-interest rates. The used car sale price is a significant factor but so are the rates you'll be paying for the lifetime of the loan. CC0/Picsues/Pixabay Don't Forget to Look Under the Hood You may not know what you're looking for initially, but it's essential that you look under the hood when shopping for used cars. You'll be checking the oil, transmission fluid and brake fluid. When looking at used cars, be sure to learn about what kinds of fluids are best for the kind of car you're interested in buying. CC0/Amber Avalona/Pixabay Take It for a Test Drive Test driving a used vehicle not only will tell you if like how it feels when you're riding in it but also how it sounds on the road. You'll also get a picture of what potential problems may arise when you're driving the vehicle in the future. CC0/StockSnap/Pixabay What Is the Vehicle's History? Avoid buying a used vehicle that's been in an accident that totaled it, or that's been flood damaged. When researching 2008 used cars for sale, for example, you can pay the dealership a small fee to produce these records for you. CC0/Free-Photos/Pixabay MORE FROM QUESTIONS ANSWERED.NET From handy hints on how to spot if a car is stolen to alterations on the mileage, here's our essential list of questions to ask, and items to check when you're viewing a used car. If you buy a used car privately, it's a case of 'Buyer Beware'. You don't have the same legal protection as when buying from a dealer. It's up to you to ask the right questions and check the car thoroughly before you buy. If you don't feel confident about carrying out any of these checks or if you just want a second opinion, we offer car checking services. Documents Can the seller show you the V5C registration document? You won't be able to tax the car without it. Is the seller the registered keeper shown on the V5C? If not, why are they selling it for someone else? Does the registration document have a watermark? Any spelling mistakes on the registration document? Do the VIN (vehicle identification number), engine number and colour match the V5C? Does the number plate match the V5C? Has the VIN plate been tampered with? Do VIN numbers etched on glass or lights match the VIN plate and V5C? Any sign of scratches on glass to remove etched-in marks? Does the fuel filler look as if it has been forced or replaced? Does the car have a current MOT (if the car's more than three years old)? Check the MOT history and status of a vehicle » Mileage Does the mileage, age and appearance of the car look consistent? Any sign like worn screws that the instruments might have been tampered with? (Digital odometers can be tampered with electronically so clues like this won't exist) Check recorded mileage on service records, MOT 'certificates' and other documents. Does it look consistent with current mileage/condition and increase steadily year on year? Check MOT status and history online (with vehicle registration and make). Accident damage? Any signs of inconsistent gaps between panels or mismatched colours that could be a sign of extensive repairs? Is the paint finish even across the car? Any traces of paint spray on handles, window seals or plastic mouldings? Could the car's colour have been changed? (Look under carpets and in other hidden areas in particular.) Any unusual looking welding under the bonnet or in the boot? Safety Are the tyres in good condition and all of the specification and dimensions? Tyres with less than 3mm of tread will have to be replaced soon. Is the spare wheel or tyre inflator/sealant kit in serviceable condition? Are the jack and other tools present? Do all the seatbelts operate correctly? Check there are no cuts or fraying that could affect the way they work. If airbags are fitted, check that warning lights operate as described in the handbook - normally they will come on with the ignition and then go out? Do all lights and windscreen wipers/washers work correctly? Test drive Do all warning lights operate normally? Lights will generally come on to test and then go out - unless there's a fault. Are the brakes effective or does it take a long time or a lot of effort to stop? Is braking even or does the car pull to one side? Any unusual noises when you brake? Is the handbrake effective? Any steering vibration or pull to one side? If ABS is fitted, does the warning light go out after the engine is started? Engine Any abnormal noises when the engine is started from cold? Does the oil warning light go out as soon as the engine starts? Any signs of excessive visible exhaust emissions? Does the clutch operate normally? A noise when you press the pedal or a high biting point could mean that repairs will be required soon. Is the catalytic converter in good condition? Look for a recent emissions test, either alone or as part of an MOT. This will confirm that emissions are within the stringent limits applied to modern cars. Is there sludge on the underside of the oil filler cap? This could indicate poor servicing or predominantly short journey use. Is the oil level right? Too low shows neglect; too high could be a clue that the engine is using oil but it could just have been over filled in error. Has the cam belt been replaced according to the service schedule? Locks, windows and general controls Do all the locks, including central locking and remote control, work properly? Do all windows, including any sunroof, open/close normally? Any signs of forced entry, damaged or different locks, suggesting they've been replaced? Have you got all the right keys? Check the handbook to see which keys were provided when the car was new. Modern keys are expensive to replace, particularly the coloured 'master' key provided by some manufacturers to programme new spare keys to the car. Are locking wheel nuts fitted? Check that the special adapter required is included with the tool kit. Make sure it fits too. Do all the minor controls operate correctly - heating, ventilation, air-conditioning, radio/CD, navigation etc? (Updated 9 November 2015) Do your homework ... thoroughly Don't rush in, do your research. People say, "I bought the first one I saw because I didn't have time to look around." But if you've worked hundreds of hours to earn the purchase price, you should take at least a couple of days to shop around. Once you've picked a vehicle type, evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of different makes and models. Safety, reliability and running costs are vital considerations. Don't set your heart on one particular model. Test drive and check multiple cars and shortlist the best. When you've narrowed down to a model, drive two or three then pick the best to have professionally inspected. So, you've settled that all-important question of whether to buy a new or used car. Buying used can be a great way to get on the road without the hefty price tag of a new vehicle. But, how do you know a pre-owned vehicle is everything it was chalked up to be in the online ad? The checklist below outlines what to look for when shopping for a used car through a private seller or dealer so you can make the purchase with peace of mind. What to check before buying a used car 1. Vehicle history Get as much information as you can from the current owner and then do your own research. Running the VIN (vehicle identification number) through a paid service like CARFAX will tell you if the car has been in an accident, if there are any liens on it, and if there are any recalls on the model. 2. Rust or paint damage Take a walk around the car and keep an eye out for any rusty spots or paint chips. Small, localized rust patches aren't necessarily a deal breaker because they can be fixed fairly easily. If there are places where the metal is totally rusted through, you might want to reconsider the purchase. 3. Frame issues While you're walking around the vehicle, you should also look for problems with the frame. Is the car sitting level on the ground? Is there anything hanging from the undercarriage? Pay close attention to the bumpers and look inside the trunk and hood for new bolts or warping that could indicate a recent accident. 4. Under the hood The engine is the most important part of any vehicle. With the car turned off, pop the hood and visually inspect the engine for: fluid leaks, corrosion and cracked hoses and belts. Check the oil and transmission dipsticks for discolouration — oil should be light brown, transmission fluid should be pink or red. 5. Tire condition The tire tread should be worn evenly and all four should match. Uneven tread or extra wear on a few of the tires often means poor alignment, which can be a symptom of steering, suspension or frame issues. A poorly aligned car will pull to the right or left when driving. 6. Mileage The average car will rack up about 20,000 km each year. To figure out if the car you're looking at has high or low mileage, divide the number on the odometer by the vehicle's age. A car with high mileage with have more wear and tear on its mechanical components. Find out more about why high mileage matters when buying a used car. 7. Interior electronics Blasting the radio when your favourite song comes on is one of the little joys of car ownership. Press some buttons and make sure the stereo and the other electronic components in the cockpit are working properly. Turn on the air conditioning and heat as well. 8. Upholstery Seats and interior fabric can take a beating in a vehicle. Watch out for tears, stains and cracked leather on all the front and back seats — upholstery can be a pricey thing to repair. 9. Test drive The test drive is probably the most important part of shopping for a used car. Plan your route and put the car through the paces to test its maneuverability, acceleration, braking and suspension. Take it on the highway, if possible, and try parallel parking to get a feel for any blind spots the car might have. 10. Mechanic inspection If you think you've found the used car of your dreams you should take it to a trusted mechanic for an inspection. A mechanic can determine if the vehicle has any underlying issues or areas that might become an issue in the future. It's not a free service, but it could save you from buying a lemon. Birchwood Credit Solutions has a huge inventory of used vehicles. We also offer in-house financing so you can get a loan and a car in one place, no matter your credit situation.

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