



## A Used Car eh?

Many households with school age children are either just now starting the back to school rush; if not, they're about to. Many of us think of "back to school" costs as exclusively books, pens, paper, calculators, etc, with some fancy new clothing thrown in there, just for good measure. That assessment is accurate for sure; however the nature and magnitude of expense changes significantly, if as parents we're covering the costs of older children, particularly those just starting or returning to college or university.

Something very few of us think about, especially if we are not affected by such a consideration, is transportation costs for our post secondary aged children. Yet this is a huge consideration for many; particularly if our kids live off campus, at home yet a distance from their educational institution, or in a small rural community and decide to drive by the day into a major center where their school is located.

We started to note a trend about seven years ago, when parents, and to a lesser degree the kids themselves, started purchasing a "used car" to help in a practical way with school related transit costs. No doubt the same kind of scenario will roll out this year in many households. In fact, in some families I'm sure the search may already be underway; with stressed parents pulling their hair out while their starry eyed progeny is counting the days "to freedom", at what she or he believes to be a snail's pace.

Buying a used car is not something to be entered into lightly. After all, what's more frustrating and downright aggravating than car problems? Can you think of any single event that causes you more fried nerves? You want to be sure that you're not buying someone else's trouble. So the first piece of information you'll need to know is why the current owner is trying to move this car. It's best to ask the vendor outright and up front.

In a perfect world, you've got a family member or friend who's a mechanic; even the back yard variety will do. Make sure you include him or her in your search. If this won't work, maybe you can arrange to have a mechanic at least to be available on short notice to look critically at your prospective purchase. If the vendor – that's the person selling the car to you – won't hold it long enough, without a deposit, for your mechanic's overlook, you've got a decision to make. Remember, an unwillingness to hold the car may even be the sign of something else. So be very cautious.

You'd never buy pants without trying them on right? And I'll bet you'd always try sitting on a new sofa at the furniture store. Well, cars need to be tested and taken out for a drive. Make sure you take it for a good jaunt, both in the town where you're buying and on the highway. Try and determine from the vendor the name of the garage who has performed the repairs on the vehicle until now; and if you can, talk to them about the maintenance record to date. This is also an ideal way to find out if your prospective new "baby" has even been in an accident, or even a fender bender.

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The vast majority of vehicles on the road today have been financed by a bank or finance company. Financial Institutions protect their rights by placing a lien on the vehicle in question. In other words, the person initially purchasing the car does not actually own it until all payments are made and the loan is paid in full. You wouldn't want to purchase a car (or anything else for that matter) only to learn later that the person selling it to you had no right to do so by virtue of the financial institution's lien. You can check to determine if there is a lien on your potential purchase by checking the provincial government's web site for this purpose. This is also an ideal time to determine if the car has any outstanding fines or penalties against it. If you determine that there are, make sure that payment is paid in full by the current owner, and not by you. Ask to see a receipt to be really certain that they've paid up.

If you're especially attracted to a particular vehicle because it's still got a warranty, make sure you check with the local dealer to ensure the plan is still in effect.

Look at how, "clean" the car actually is and yes, be wary of pleasant, flowery or perfume type aromas within the interior. I know one man who purchased a 4 year-old pickup that "smelled flowery" at the time. Turns out that the vendor was a rabbit hunter and within 10 days the stench in the cab was unbearable.

Most used vehicles sold from one individual to another are sold "as is and where is", with guarantees neither given nor implied. I can safely say that in my 25 years of practice, I've never seen anyone who sold a car privately take it back later because of problems or an unhappy buyer. I've sure seen a fair number of lemons though.

So go slowly, think everything through and always make sure that your gut is not sending out any negative vibrations. Yes, the old gut is an entirely legitimate force you can defer to when purchasing anything, especially when acquiring a potential jalopy.

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