

## **Things to look out for Buying A Second Hand Car**

### **WHY AM I WRITING THIS?**

Following my recent chat in the pub with an old friend of mine Big John Walker, I received a lot of sound advice in buying second cars. So instead of keeping it all to myself I thought I'd share it all with you guys :) Aren't I nice! LoL

Right you've spotted the car you like, price seems affordable but what next?

I think the first biggest danger in buying a second-hand car is using your heart rather than your head. It might look like a dream machine and the seller may seem genuine, but never-ever-just slap down the cash just because you've got a good feeling about the car.

### **SO CHECK THE:**

#### **GLOVEBOX**

Make sure all the paper ties up with the car you're buying. The Vehicle Identification Number (VIN) in the registration document should tally with the one stamped on the metal VIN plate, which you'll find under the bonnet or at the base of the windscreen.

Cars more than three years old also an annual MOT certificate. Beware of forgeries. If the seller tries the old "It'll only take £20 to get it through the test" line, just remember: If that was true he'd have already done it – cars with an MOT shift far quicker.

#### **ENGINE**

Show up half an hour early so owner doesn't have time to start the engine and warm it through before you arrive. A healthy motor should turn over on the first twist of the key, then settle down to a smooth, regular idle. Great clouds of smoke from the exhaust are a bad sign, as are odd rattling and knocking sounds from under the bonnet. So bring along a friend the spot for these signs just in case owner tries distracting you.

When you come back from test drive (make sure you get a test drive!) take the cap off the oil filter. If it's coated with goo, the cylinder head gasket's failed and there's water in the oil.

Ask the owner if he knows how often the cam-belt should be changed and ask for proof that it's been replaced recently.

#### **FLUIDS**

Check the oil level and the level of water in the radiator or expansion tank, and ensure the brake fluids up to the max mark. If the car's got power steering, don't forget to check that level too.

#### **CLUTCH**

Should the engine sound as if it's going too fast for the speed of the car, the clutch is on the way out. Not difficult to fix, but you'll want a substantial lump knocked off the price.

#### **BRAKES**

On the test drive, insist that you stamp hard on the brakes from a reasonable speed. Keeping a light grip on the steering wheel, check that the car pulls up straight and fast.

A grinding noise people usually mean the pads are worn out – dangerous and costly. Juddering through the brake pedal can mean the discs are warped. This will probably mean getting a replacement part.

#### **HANDBRAKES**

Find a hill or slope to see if the handbrake will actually stop the car rolling away.

#### **SUSPENSION**

If the car floats and wallows after you've gone over the bump, the shock absorbers are shot. And look at them under the car – any sign of oil leaking means their days are numbered.

#### **EXHAUST**

Too loud and it probably means the exhaust system's got a hole in it somewhere. If the car is fitted with a catalytic converter, make sure it has a recent MOT; if not, get emissions check done – replacement catalytic converters are very expensive. Could be as much as £900.

#### **GEARBOX**

The level should slip easily between all the gears, and you definitely shouldn't be able to hear any whining noises. Should pretty smooth :)

#### **LIGHTS**

Walk around the car and make sure that all the lights are in full working order. If not, there could be a major electrical fault. Even test the break lights.

#### **TYRES**

If the Law stops you and they're not in a good mood, bald tyres could cost you £1,000 a corner. Also, look at the way they've worn at the front. If the outside or inside edge is badly worn; it could mean the suspension or tracking is out of line.

#### **MILEAGE**

What it might say on the dial isn't always what the car's really done – 'clocking' is an annoyingly common practice. See if the seller has any old MOT certificates which register the mileage.

#### **BODYWORK**

Is the car all one colour? If not, why not? Strange creases in the roof or floor could be a sign that your new motor is two old crash- damaged ones welded together. Hmmm would that be nice?

Rust is another killer. If you spot holes in the sills, the floorpan or at the top of the suspension's strut towers, be prepared to fork out for some welding.

#### **INTERIOR**

Try out all the electrical nobs and buttons. It can be a nightmare to track down faults, and expensive if have to start pulling the dashboard apart.

Ok may I wish you much success in finding yourself your dream car!

Thank you for taking time to read!

Dan & Big John (The Full-Time Mechanic) - 2003