

Kyle Busch is the author of Drive the Best for the Price: How to Buy a Used Automobile, Sport-Utility Vehicle, or Minivan and Save Money. In 1991, the book's author purchased a used 1986 vehicle for \$2,600 that a private owner had driven 82,000 miles. He has driven the vehicle for over nine years and the odometer has now logged over 292,000 miles. The vehicle continues to provide for his daily transportation needs.

<http://www.drivethebestbook.com>

Transportation Should Provide Enjoyment, not a Financial Burden Kyle Busch

What enables people to be on time for an important appointment, attend a favorite social event or recreational activity, or just drive on a pleasant summer day? What machine do many people get to know as if it were almost a member of the family? What enables drivers to experience an increased sense of freedom? Of course, what else but the automobile. Or in today's terms, the automobile, sport-utility vehicle, or minivan.

More and more people are realizing that the cost of new transportation can really throw a budget into reverse. In many instances, today's new vehicle prices compare to the cost of a new home just a generation ago. Since dependable transportation is a necessity--do not despair; a two to four-year old used vehicle can be purchased at a savings of 25 to 50 percent as compared to its cost when new. Additionally, the number of well-built, dependable vehicles has increased during the past decade. When well maintained these vehicles can be driven for many miles, and they are now available at substantial savings.

The purchase of a dependable, reasonably priced used vehicle is not a matter of chance or luck, but rather, it is a matter of knowledge and understanding. Becoming informed is one of the most important factors in successfully purchasing a dependable used vehicle at the best price.

Gathering Information

Variety is the spice of life. Certainly, the number of vehicles that are available today can add spice to one's daily travels. Literally hundreds of different vehicles are available, but which one is the best for you? To better determine the vehicle that satisfies your transportation needs, first take the time to carefully identify your current and future driving needs, then become aware of the many available vehicles, and finally, zero in on the vehicles that best meet your needs.

A vary dangerous frame of mind to be in is to "fall in love" with a particular make or model of vehicle based purely on emotion. Although some emotion is always part of life, it is wise to put excessive emotions aside and focus on day-in and day-out transportation needs. Some questions to consider about transportation needs include:

- How many people will be transported in the vehicle?

- What type of objects and cargo will be transported in the vehicle (space considerations)?
- Will driving be conducted in poor weather conditions or off-road (rear-wheel drive, front-wheel drive, all-wheel drive)?
- Will stop-and-go or interstate driving be performed? Thus, is an automatic, a semi-automatic, or a standard transmission preferred?
- Is there a preference for an American or a foreign vehicle?
- In a sport-utility vehicle, is a more rugged full box type frame needed for off-road driving, or will a unit-body type frame be suitable for intended general highway driving? Additionally, what towing capacity should the sport-utility vehicle have?
- In a minivan, are sliding doors needed on both sides of the vehicle for easier entry and exit?
- How much will insurance cost to protect the driver and the vehicle (consider obtaining an insurance quote before buying a vehicle)?
- What is the approximate amount of money to be spent on a vehicle?

If you are not familiar with which vehicles meet your transportation needs, consider visiting a local public library to consult the yearly publication or the April magazine issue of Consumer Reports. This objective information source provides technical specifications for vehicles including the size, weight, engine horsepower, optional equipment, and miles per gallon of fuel. If technical information is desired for a specific used vehicle, review the Consumer Reports issue that matches the vehicle's year (1998 Toyota Avalon--consult the 1998 April issue of Consumer Reports).

After determining the type of automobile, sport-utility vehicle, or minivan that satisfies your needs, it is worthwhile to consult Consumer Reports' Frequency-of-Repair information to identify specific vehicles that will likely have fewer future repairs. Regarding the Frequency-of-Repair information, if a vehicle of interest is six years old or less, consult the most recent April edition of Consumer Reports. If the vehicle is more than six years old, add five years to the vehicle's year and then consult that year's April issue of Consumer Reports.

It is a good idea to identify at least two or three used vehicles that meet your transportation needs. Then, instead of being in a position to only consider vehicle A, you will have the flexibility to consider vehicle A, B, or C. This increases your ability to purchase a used vehicle that is in excellent condition at the best price.

In addition to becoming informed about particular vehicles, it is worthwhile to learn the approximate prices for vehicles of interest. To obtain a general idea of vehicle prices, consult the current monthly edition of the N.A.D.A. Official Used Car Guide at a public library, bank, or automobile dealership. Vehicle price information can also be obtained by consulting the vehicle classified sections of major newspapers at a public library. This is a convenient way to get a read on future prices, because vehicle price trends usually begin in major cities and then progress to other areas of the country. The bottom line on becoming informed about vehicles and prices is to obtain a used vehicle that is in excellent condition, with a low repair history, and at a substantial savings.

Used Vehicle Sources

There are a number of possible used vehicle sources from which to choose. Rather than becoming overwhelmed with all the possible sources, keep in mind that each source is actually competing with the others. Therefore, when shopping for a vehicle, be certain to let each source know that you are also considering the other sources. Some of the sources to consider when buying a used vehicle include:

- The Internet (Investigate if the source is reputable)
- Used automobile lots (buyer beware)
- Rental car companies
- Company vehicles
- New automobile dealerships (investigate if the dealer is reputable)
- Private owners

Contacting a used vehicle source by telephone and obtaining specific information can help to reduce unnecessary legwork. The telephone inquiry will enable you to determine if a vehicle is worth your time to investigate. Some questions to ask a private owner or other used vehicle source about a vehicle include:

- How many miles has the vehicle been driven (the average is about 10,000 to 12,000 miles per year)?
- Is the transmission an automatic, a semi-automatic, or a manual? If the transmission is not what you want, there is no need to ask further questions.
- What is the condition of the vehicle's body? Is there any rust?

- Has the vehicle been repainted and if so, why? Avoid repainted vehicles. It is better to see the original paint even if a few small stone chips need to be touched-up.
- Has the vehicle been involved in any accidents? Avoid vehicles that have been involved in any accidents.
- When are the next state inspection and emissions standard test due? The vehicle should have a minimum of at least six months remaining until the next required state inspection and emissions test.
- How often were the engine oil and the oil filter changed, and who performed the service? An acceptable answer would be every 3,000 to 3,500 miles or about every three to four months.
- Are you the original owner of the vehicle? Original owners tend to take better care of vehicles.
- What is the reason that the vehicle is being sold? It is encouraging if the individual is the original owner and if he or she is planning to again buy the same make of vehicle.
- Are parts and service readily available for the vehicle? Where can parts and services be obtained? Avoid buying a vehicle if parts and service are not readily available.
- Has the vehicle had any recent repairs (new brakes, tires, exhaust, battery) or service and if so, what garage performed the repairs or service?
- What price are you asking for the vehicle?

The interior and exterior inspections and the vehicle test-drive are used to verify the information obtained during the telephone inquiry.

The Exterior Inspection

Before conducting a vehicle exterior inspection, make certain that good weather conditions exist. The ground should be dry and there should be plenty of sunlight. Some aspects of the exterior inspection include:

- Consider the environment that surrounds the used vehicle. Are the dealership surroundings clean and orderly? Does the retail car company provide courteous and efficient customer service? Is the private owner's property well maintained? Was the vehicle kept in a garage? Rather than just a minor point, the surroundings, in point of fact, can provide an indication of how well the owner maintained the vehicle.

- Look to see that the state inspection and the emissions test stickers are valid and note when they will be due.

- Observe how the vehicle sits. The vehicle should sit level horizontally when it is viewed from the front and the rear. When viewed from the side, the rear of the vehicle should sit slightly higher than the front. A vehicle that does not sit properly or have a "good stance" has been driven hard.

- Check all four of the tires for evenness of tread wear (similar to how the soles of a person's shoes indicate how he or she walks). Also, check to see if all four of the tires are the same brand and type. Be suspicious if the front tires are a different brand than the rear tires. Sometimes, an owner will install a new set of front tires on a vehicle to hide the uneven tire wear caused by a steering and/or a suspension problem.

In addition to the points covered in this article, the successful purchase of a used vehicle involves many other details. Being attentive to details and knowing what to look for when inspecting and test-driving a used vehicle will translate into significant savings. Additional information about the exterior and interior inspections, the test-drive, saving money, and selling a used vehicle are explained in the book: *Drive the Best for the Price: How to Buy a Used Automobile, Sport-Utility Vehicle, or Minivan and Save Money.*