

Buying Guide



Searching for your next car can be an exciting experience. Unfortunately, there are people who may look to profit through scamming others, and some fraudsters can appear to be quite convincing when operating online.

Although this only happens in a minority of cases, disreputable people posing as car buyers, sellers or traders can tarnish the reputation of legitimate companies and individuals trying to make an honest transaction.

The responsibility to check the sale is legitimate resides with you as the buyer. This is known as “buyer beware” and it is important that you have satisfied yourself that the transaction is legitimate and right for you. As a classified advertising site, Motors.co.uk disclaims any responsibility for the information published on the car as we receive the information direct from advertisers. However, with common sense, and our top tips, you will be able to buy with more confidence.

Here are our top tips on how to avoid potential fraudsters when searching for a used car.

1. Do not transfer any funds to a seller before you have seen the car in person. Most fraudulent activity draws you in to transfer money before seeing the car. Whilst some services may be legitimate, our firm advice is to never transfer funds until you have satisfied yourself with all factors in this list which need to be done in person.
2. Check that the price of the car is in-line with the market. We all love a bargain, but a price that’s “too good to be true” is often a sign of fraud. If a car appears under-priced, ask the seller questions surrounding the valuation to satisfy yourself that the transaction is legitimate.
3. Always inspect any car you are looking to purchase and take it for a test drive. This should be done from the forecourt of a car dealership or, in the case of private sales, from somebody’s home address. Don’t agree to buy from a lay-by or service station, even if the seller offers to meet you half way.
4. The seller should be able to display documents including the V5C, which lists the address the vehicle is registered to. Check this against the address you have visited to inspect the car. You should also check that the mileage matches up against the vehicle’s service and MOT history. Mileage should have been recorded at every MOT since the car was three years old – a discrepancy could be a warning indicator of car clocking (the process of rolling-back the odometer to display a false mileage).
5. The MOT document will also highlight any advisory items to be aware of.
6. Remember that the V5C is not proof of ownership, but records a vehicle’s registered keeper. Ask to see a proof of ownership from the seller, for example a receipt

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showing the amount they paid and the date they purchased the car.

7. You can enter the registration number from the V5C and make of the car onto the gov.uk website to find DVLA information on the vehicle.
8. When inspecting the car's exterior, check the panels for any damage such as dents and scratches to the bodywork. Look at the make and size of the tyres – all of the tyres should be the same size, and a pair of tyres should be the same make on both wheels of one axle.
9. When you get in the car before a test drive, turn the ignition and look at the warning lights which display on the dashboard before you turn the engine on fully. All warning lights should light up for a few seconds before they all go out again - with the exception of the handbrake, oil and charge warning lights.
10. Make sure you are starting the engine from cold. This should not be a problem and the engine should start up easily. A worn engine will usually rattle when it starts.
11. On your test drive, cover a route with some bumpy roads to check the suspension and steering. Make sure the car does not pull to either side, which could be a sign of defective tyres or tracking, and do a hill-start to test the handbrake and check for a worn clutch. It is also a good idea to perform a reasonable braking test when there is no traffic following behind you, and travel downhill in second and third gear to check for a worn gear box.
12. When you return from your test drive, leave the engine on and go to the back of the car. If the exhaust produces grey smoke and a bad smell, this could indicate a worn engine.

The best way to protect yourself is by remembering that if it sounds too good to be true, it probably is. Your instinct is one of your best tools, do not be afraid to use it. You should not be pressurised into buying.

Never be afraid to ask questions about a car you are considering buying and, if things don't look right, walk away - don't assume you can fix any faults later.

Above all, make sure you have seen the car (and corresponding documents) and are completely satisfied before you hand over a penny or make any commitments. When you are happy to go ahead and buy, look to pay in such a way that you can track your money, for instance by card, bank transfer or cheque, and remember that cash transactions cannot be tracked.

The vast majority of car sales are perfectly legitimate, so do not be afraid. But by keeping your wits about you and following our tips, we hope that we will be able to buy with confidence.