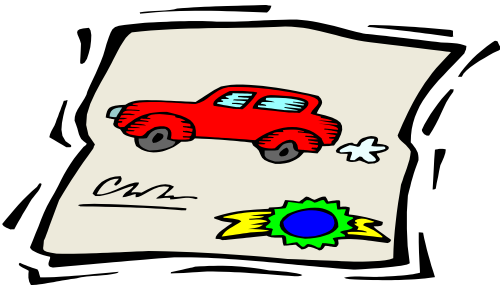




**Consumer Affairs Commission
Jamaica W.I.**

Buying and Caring for Your Motor Vehicle



CONSIDER YOUR OPTIONS

Buying a vehicle today can be a highly stressful experience, even if you are an auto expert. There are so many choices of vehicles and so many other considerations to factor into your decision. But the most important question for most automobile buyers today, is “what is the best vehicle to buy for my money?”

In making your decision you will need to take account of all the purposes for which you will need the vehicle and all the features you admire. A full sized Sports Utility Vehicle (SUV) although highly attractive may be difficult to maintain depending on your budget. It is wise to establish the amount you are willing to spend not only for purchase but also for maintaining and insuring the vehicle.

HOME WORK



Be a smart consumer...Do your research!

The key to getting the best deal to meet your needs and which falls within your budget, is to follow some important guidelines endorsed by consumer affairs experts around the world.

Do your homework and take your time about it! In today's free global market economy, your choices are widened and you may even be able to 'pick, choose and refuse'.

If you find yourself in a situation where you are being pressured into making a hasty decision, politely ask for all the relevant information you will need, and find the most suitable time for you to make your final decision.

Part of your research should involve visits to as many car dealerships as you feel necessary, in order to get all the relevant information about all your options.

Search for the vehicle of your choice, obtain free price quotes and information such as after sales service, availability of spare parts and warranty provisions, from accredited dealers. Compare information in making your choice!

MAKING THE RIGHT CHOICE

Engine Size

Does your job entail much travelling? If you live on hilly terrain, travel extensively and have a large family, then you may wish to obtain a car with engine capacity of no less than 1500cc.

Colour

In choosing your car, look carefully at the colour. Non-metallic colours have the advantage of being easier to handle if sections of the vehicle need to be re-sprayed.

Upholstery

Although leather seats may seem very attractive, remember that fabric lasts longer in the tropics and tends to be cooler.

Tyres

Choose tyres that are available, affordable and suitable for local road conditions.

BUYING A USED VEHICLE

Be careful when purchasing used vehicles from private individuals. One of the first questions



you should ask the vendor is the reason for selling the vehicle. The Consumer Affairs Commission has received many reports of vehicles malfunctioning shortly after purchase and allegations of misrepresentation of the condition of the vehicle. Have the car checked thoroughly by an experienced mechanic.

Automotive Fluids & Leaks

The automatic transmission fluid should be pink and should not smell burnt. The coolant should not be rusty, and there should be no green strains on the radiator which would suggest that there is a leak. There should be no oil spots around the engine or under the car. This could be indicative of a defective gasket or a more serious engine problem which may be very expensive to correct.

Body Integrity

Look out for rust as well as signs of an accident. Bring along a small refrigerator magnet and place it gently along various body panels (lower door, front fender, etc). If there is any plastic body filler, the magnet will not stay in place, indicating that the vehicle may have been in an accident. Ask to ascertain if this is so. Have an experienced mechanic check to determine if the vehicle was cut in two and then reassembled.

Tyres and other Accessories

Check the status of the tyres, including the spare. Uneven tyre wear could be a sign of damage caused by an accident and you may incur high costs for front end repairs. Ensure that you obtain a jack and lug wrench with the vehicle. Where other accessories such as radios, CD players and alarm systems are sold with and included in the price of the vehicle, ensure that they function properly.

Suspension

Push down and quickly release each corner of the vehicle. If it bounces more than once or twice, it could mean that the shocks or struts are poor.

Seatbelts

Make sure that the seatbelts work. Seatbelts help to save lives in an accident. Remember also that the wearing of seatbelts is compulsory under Jamaican laws.

Controls

Make sure that the controls in the vehicle work properly. These include the steering wheel, clutch, gear-stick, brakes, indicators, lamps etc.

Test Drive

Ask to test drive the vehicle before making your final decision. During the test drive, pay special attention to the following:

- How smooth is the **acceleration** when going up hill and when overtaking.
- Any **pull in the steering**. This might suggest an alignment or tyre inflation problem or it might be indicative of a need for front end repairs. This could be confirmed by an experienced mechanic.
- If there is **smoke emission from the exhaust system**, which is heavy and white it could mean defects in the head gasket or other engine problems. A full engine overhaul may be required depending on the problem.
- When **applying the brakes**, check if there is a strong pull to any side. Also note the length of the stopping distance and any vibration in the pedal. If you observe any of these, the brakes and front end alignment should be checked to determine what corrective action

should be taken.

- **Excessive bouncing** over roads in poor condition. This could be indicative of problems with the suspensions.

When buying a vehicle, do not be in such a hurry that you neglect important details. Obtain written verification of the condition of the automobile. Verbal claims cannot always be verified.

CARING FOR YOUR VEHICLE

PREVENTING AUTO THEFT

Remember, it is your responsibility to protect your vehicle. There are some simple steps which you can follow to help prevent the theft of your automobile. The police recommends the following precautionary measures:

- Whenever possible, park in brightly lit areas.
- Identify and install an affordable and reliable alarm system and remember to activate it each time the vehicle is parked.
- Use a steering lock.
- Do not leave original and other documents for the vehicle inside it, as this will make it easier for the criminal to dispose of the vehicle.
- Do not leave goods and valuable items in the vehicle as this can attract thieves.
- Keep all windows and doors locked when leaving the vehicle.
- When entering your vehicle, avoid delays by

- having the correct key ready.
- Ensure that the keys for the vehicle are secured at all times, preferably in your possession.
- When shopping, make a note of exactly where your vehicle is parked.



Consumer Affairs Commission, Jamaica

HOW TO MAKE YOUR VEHICLE LAST LONGER

Do the following on a weekly basis

- * Check the level of all fluids in your vehicle, including oil, coolant, windscreen washer fluid, brake fluid reservoir, battery electrolyte (de-ionised water) level, transmission fluid, power steering fluid.
- * Check the pressure and soundness of the tyres by using a pressure gauge or just ask the gas station attendant to check it for you.
- * Ensure that all lamps work properly.

Do the following every three months (or every 3,000 miles, whichever comes first)

- * Change oil filter
- * Rotate your tyres and check wheel alignment.
- * Check brake pads and brake shoes
- * Change spark plugs
- * Clean battery terminals
- * Have the engine tuned
- * Check hoses and connectors
- * Lubricate ball joints and wheel bearings
- * Check belts where applicable

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