

The Active Consumer

Used Car Buyers Steer Clear Of Con Artists

(NAPSA)—If you're considering buying a used car from a private seller, it's wise to be aware of a scam that costs consumers millions each year: curbstoning.

Curbstoning is a type of fraud that involves private sellers dealing in multiple vehicles without a license, which is illegal in most states. Curbstoners scam unsuspecting buyers by selling vehicles that reputable dealers won't touch because of hidden problems that affect their value and safety. Often, the vehicles are picked up at junkyards by the curbstoners for very little money. The con artists then perform minimal repairs to make the vehicles appear safe and sound and sell them to an unwary buyer at a significant profit.

Law enforcement officials estimate that 60 to 90 percent of cars advertised in the classifieds or at the curb are sold by unlicensed dealers. So how do you avoid curbstoning? Try these tips:

- Know with whom you're dealing: Try to stick to established, reputable car dealers. If you do decide to visit a private seller, ask to see his or her driver's license and make sure the name is the same on the title. Avoid meeting in a parking lot if possible. Also, make sure you have a way to get back in touch with the seller once you've purchased the vehicle. Beware of a seller who only provides his or her cell phone or pager number or an e-mail address.

- Know your history: Ask to see any service records the vehicle may have and get a history of the vehicle. You can get a vehicle history report from a service called



Buyer Beware—Curbstoners are con artists who sell vehicles with hidden problems.

Carfax. The reports can reveal hidden secrets in the car's past—such as whether it was in an accident or flood. They can even help you spot odometer fraud (the illegal practice of rolling back a car's odometer to make it appear less used).

- Know what's under the hood: Take the car to a trusted mechanic for a complete inspection. Inspections can turn up evidence that the car was rebuilt after an accident, as well as a variety of mechanical problems that could cost money down the road. Be wary of any seller who discourages you from taking a vehicle to a mechanic before buying.

- Know your mileage: Look for signs of odometer tampering. If a car says it only has 15,000 miles on it, take it for a spin and see if it feels like a relatively new car. If it doesn't, the odometer may be off. Also, a car should have its original tires if it has fewer than 20,000 miles on it. If it doesn't, that could be a sign of fraud.

For more information, visit www.carfax.com.