

Ask Ronny

by Ronny Shaver @ Ronny's Garage

Answering Your Questions About Classic Car Care Service And Restoration

Published March 18, 2014

To Buy or Not to Buy

by Ronny Shaver

Many of my clients contact me and tell me about great deals they have found searching the internet. Many of these clients are excited and ask me to "take a look" at the postings and give my opinion. Since we live in a "bargain searching" competitive shopping culture, the excitement of getting a "great deal" can often overpower "common sense" instincts. I myself have been caught up in the excitement of buying a different car and have overlooked and ignored details which after purchase have led to un-expected additional costs and remorse over my purchase.

I am at this moment advising a client about a certain car he is excited about posted on an online forum and have told him repeatedly to walk away from this one but he still keeps coming back that it is "so much cheaper" than all the others he has seen. Big Red Flag!

When the client first contacted me I took a few moments and checked out the posting which had plenty of photos of a car in Florida (across the country!). The photos included shots of the car with some scantily clad ladies in the car along with some photos of the interior, exterior and engine compartment. The text for the ad stated the car was mechanically sound and had passed a state required inspection. It also stated that the interior was in great condition, the car had been re-painted and the air conditioning worked great. All good things, right? Well, maybe.

After reading the advertisement, I looked at the photos carefully one by one and discovered tell-tale signs of "possible" misrepresentation of the car. One of the photos had a shot of the dash from the driver's angle and it had a portable electric fan mounted in the middle of the dash, hmmm. Didn't the ad say the air conditioning worked great? Some other photos showed different angles of the interior which had cheap covers over the lower seat cushions (front and back). Wouldn't someone selling a car that had an interior in "great condition" want to display the cushions also? Most of the photos of the exterior were taken from a distance except a few and to be honest, the distance photos made the paint job look fairly decent, but the three that weren't told a different tale. The close up of the front of the car showed serious "orange-peel" or what can also be described as a rough pitted look in the paint. Another shot of one of the opened rear door showed that the entire door jamb had been painted including all the hardware and rubber seals (not what I would call a proper paint job). And finally, one shot was an angle shot of front of the car showed deep scratches and nicks in the fender (what about the other angles of the car not shown?).

Another interesting point is that the posting had a "buy now" price and no posted bids. That would tell me that no other buyers were interested at this point because perhaps the price is too high for this particular car. The seller also offered a "limited warranty" which would be a great thing if he were local to the buyer, but possibly weak when offered from across the country from a private seller. The seller also stated that he had other offers. Dubious.

Now just to be fair, the car is posted at a much lower price than others and one would expect flaws in the car. The point I am trying to make is that if one were able to walk around the car in person, perception of what a "great deal" this car is may be slightly or drastically different. Add to that a quick road test around the block to feel how the car rides, runs and sounds and another perception adjustment could occur. I know of no better way to assess a potential purchase than to meet the car face to face and take a drive. One final important point, the prospective buyer is the bottom-line on what is acceptable to himself. It is impossible for a professional as myself to make that particular judgment call, I can only point out what I see and give my opinion.

My recommendation for this client was to re-think his budget on this venture and look for a more costly but potentially higher quality car that would not possibly empty his wallet to make drive-able and presentable in person. Buying a car cheaper with some needed mechanical and cosmetic issues with the goal of "fixing it up" can be fun so long as a logical assessment of the financial aspects of correcting the present condition of the car and the final value of the car are approached correctly. If someone wants to buy a car "they have always wanted" I always recommend that they buy the best "example" in their budget rather than the best "deal" they can find with hopes of "fixing" it up.

I have many clients who have purchased cars online and bought great deals and good cars so it is possible. Sometimes luck plays a part, but in my opinion "common sense" and attention to small details is a better approach to success.

Thank you for the questions and keep them coming. Please send your questions to Ronny at ronnyshaver@ronnysgarage.com.

Happy Motoring!
Ronny