

Vehicle Pre-purchase Inspections: *Money Well Spent!*

By Tom Burgess, Owner, Christian Brothers Automotive, Cumming GA

“Don’t buy this car,” the technician advised as he passed the keys back over the counter. It had taken less than five minutes to determine the car’s coolant was full of Stop-Leak, a product which would have caused overheating issues throughout the life of the vehicle and would require tearing the motor apart to remove it from all the passages inside the engine. This was one of our regular customers, and the vehicle was a beautiful Jeep Liberty they had just purchased the day before. Their daughter was so excited; she had saved \$5000 and her parents had matched her savings which enabled her to buy the spotless black Liberty. It looked to be in incredible condition inside and out, and even the engine bay was fully detailed and shined like new. After the discovery, both the mother and daughter were in tears, as they had already paid for the vehicle, and we felt terrible for them. Luckily, they were able to get their money back that same day. We didn’t charge her the normal \$117 inspection fee, because we were able to find the issue immediately. That five minute inspection saved them from owning a Jeep with major problems. They found another Liberty a few weeks later that checked out fine. So, a nice ending for them, but I wonder who ended up with that jeep.

Obviously, used vehicles can provide savings in many ways. They cost less of course, which also means less sales tax, and you avoid the huge depreciation hit that occurs the instant you drive a brand-new car off the lot. But how do you know if what you are buying has issues that need to be addressed, or is even a lemon that should be avoided completely?

The answer is a pre-purchase inspection from a qualified repair facility. This is a low-cost way to greatly reduce the risk and avoid potential



headaches when buying a used car. As another example, a customer brought in a 2013 Cadillac CTS they were planning to purchase from a dealer. They had agreed to a final price, but before signing on the bottom line they brought it in for our pre-purchase inspection. It checked out perfectly with one exception; there was a small oil leak originating somewhere between the engine and the firewall. The oil was burning off before hitting the ground, so there were no visual clues under the car that there was a problem. And due to its location on the engine, we couldn’t pinpoint the source of the leak, but we advised them to have the dealership make the repair before they finalized the deal. The salesman agreed, and upon returning the next day to pick up their car the salesman informed them the repair took 7-hours... That was a significant future cost avoided. Another example - A Toyota was being raised up on the lift when the technician said “Oh boy.”

When I asked him what he saw, he said there was an inspection plate on the engine which is rarely opened up, and on this engine, there were signs it had been removed and re-sealed. Sure enough, with a mechanics stethoscope he was able to hear internal engine noises that indicated the engine had been driven while starved for oil - that engine was a disaster waiting to happen. The buyer wisely chose to walk away from the deal.

We have done many pre-purchase inspections over the years, and there have been very few where the buyer did not save more than the cost of the inspection. Worn-out wheels bearings, leaking

CV axles, and suspension issues such as worn tie-rods, bushings or struts can be hard to spot or feel when test driving the car, but are easy to find when a technician has the car up on the lift. We have inspected cars with a clean Carfax report that were hit and repaired, but the owner never informed their insurance agency, which is why the accident didn’t show up on the Carfax report. This is good information to know prior to handing over your hard-earned dollars. Often times, the buyer and the seller (if a private party sale) will come in together with the vehicle, and we will take both parties out into the shop and let the technician show them his/her findings while the car is on the lift, and they then negotiate the final price in our waiting room.

When purchasing from a dealer, the buyer will be given an electronic report stating anything noted along with pictures and videos. That gives the buyer a very powerful leg to stand on when negotiating the cost of repairs into the final purchase price. Even if the car checks out perfectly, that’s tremendous peace of mind for very little money. On a final note, we are now discovering vehicles that were flooded coming into the area. They look fine, but they will mildew, smell and have other issues for life.

According to CNBC, during hurricane Harvey, an estimated 500,000 cars were flooded in Houston alone when that city received 52 inches of rainfall. Some of these cars were totaled and destroyed - others were cleaned up and are now being shipped all over the country with clean titles. Many damaged cars were not reported to insurance companies because Texas does not require flood insurance, so there was no claim to be made. That’s why these cars have a clean Carfax.

Remember, only claims made to insurance companies will show on a Carfax. Our technicians know what to look for, as often these vehicles have been detailed inside and out and look fantastic at first glance. That is until you look behind the door panel or pull a seat out and the water line becomes visible.

Bottom line, the next time you hear a friend mention they are considering buying a used car, advise them to take it to a qualified mechanic to have a pre-purchase inspection performed, they will be thankful they did! ■

