

Tips offered for hassle-free car purchase

Dear Attorney General Kline:
My son is ready to buy his first car. He has asked for a list of what to keep in mind while shopping the used car market. How would you advise him?

Dear Kansas Consumer:
Buying a used car rather than a new car can be a great way to stretch the budget. One must keep in mind, however, that used car purchases generally offer the Kansas consumer less protection than new car purchases, so the buyer must beware. My Consumer Protection Division receives calls from Kansans who mistakenly believe that our state has a lemon law for used car purchases. It does not. Others wrongly think that all vehicle purchases can be "unwound" within three days. They cannot. Thus one must be very careful when signing on the dotted line.

The Kansas Consumer Protection Act does offer protection to those purchasing new or used cars, as long as the purchase is from a business. Consumer to consumer sales are not covered by the Consumer Protection Act, so while buying a car from the neighbor may be the path to a great deal, your recourse to the law will be limited if the car has known, undisclosed defects.

The complaints filed with my



Phill Kline

• Consumer Corner

Consumer Protection Division reveal that those who rush into buying used cars are sometimes saddled with unpleasant surprises. Your son can spare himself some trouble down the road by taking note of these suggestions:

1. Decide what you want and need in a vehicle before reaching for your wallet. It's important to think through and write down exactly what you're looking for in a car or truck.

2. Research your options. The library is a good place to start your search for a vehicle. Magazines such as Consumer Reports showcase various tests on vehicles that reveal features, reliability and maintenance trends. Walking through many used-car lots in the area with a plan to not buy on impulse introduces a consumer to the many different vehicle styles and manufacturers available locally.

3. Research the market. Once you've identified a vehicle that interests you, check the monthly Na-

tional Automobile Dealers Association (N.A.D.A.) "blue book" or another similar source to determine the current value of the car you have picked. Check ads in the local paper and keep track of what is asked for in similar vehicles.

4. Determine where to buy. The Kansas Lemon Law does not cover used cars, only new ones. Nevertheless, used-car dealers are held to higher legal standards than someone selling their family car. If you buy from a licensed used-car dealer in Kansas, you will have legal protections that those who buy from private individuals simply do not enjoy. Also, it's best to steer clear of "curbstoners" (unlicensed dealers who pass themselves off as private sellers), auctions and the internet if you are a novice when it comes to purchasing vehicles. It is not uncommon for the uninitiated consumers who buy online, at an auction or from a curbstoner to find themselves with no title, a salvage title or an otherwise less-than-desir-

able vehicle.

5. Check on the title. Make certain the title contains no unpleasant surprises before you invest. You can do this by ordering the title history from the DMV, signing up with CARFAX or asking the seller to provide the information to you. You can also ask your insurance agent.

6. Check with a mechanic. If the vehicle passes your best review and has a clear title, take it to a reliable mechanic for an evaluation. The cost of a diagnostic test is minimal compared to the cost of replacing a transmission or engine.

7. Get everything in writing. If the seller promises to make repairs which are not listed on the Buyer's Guide, ask the seller to disclose those promises in writing on both the Buyer's Guide and the sales contract.

Attorney General Phill Kline offers this public service to help you avoid becoming a victim of consumer fraud. Although some of the details have been changed, the cases appearing in this column are based on actual complaints or questions. For further information or to file a complaint, please write Attorney General Phill Kline, Consumer Protection Division, 120 SW 10th Ave., Topeka, Kansas 66612, or call the toll-free Consumer Hotline, 1-800-432-2310.

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