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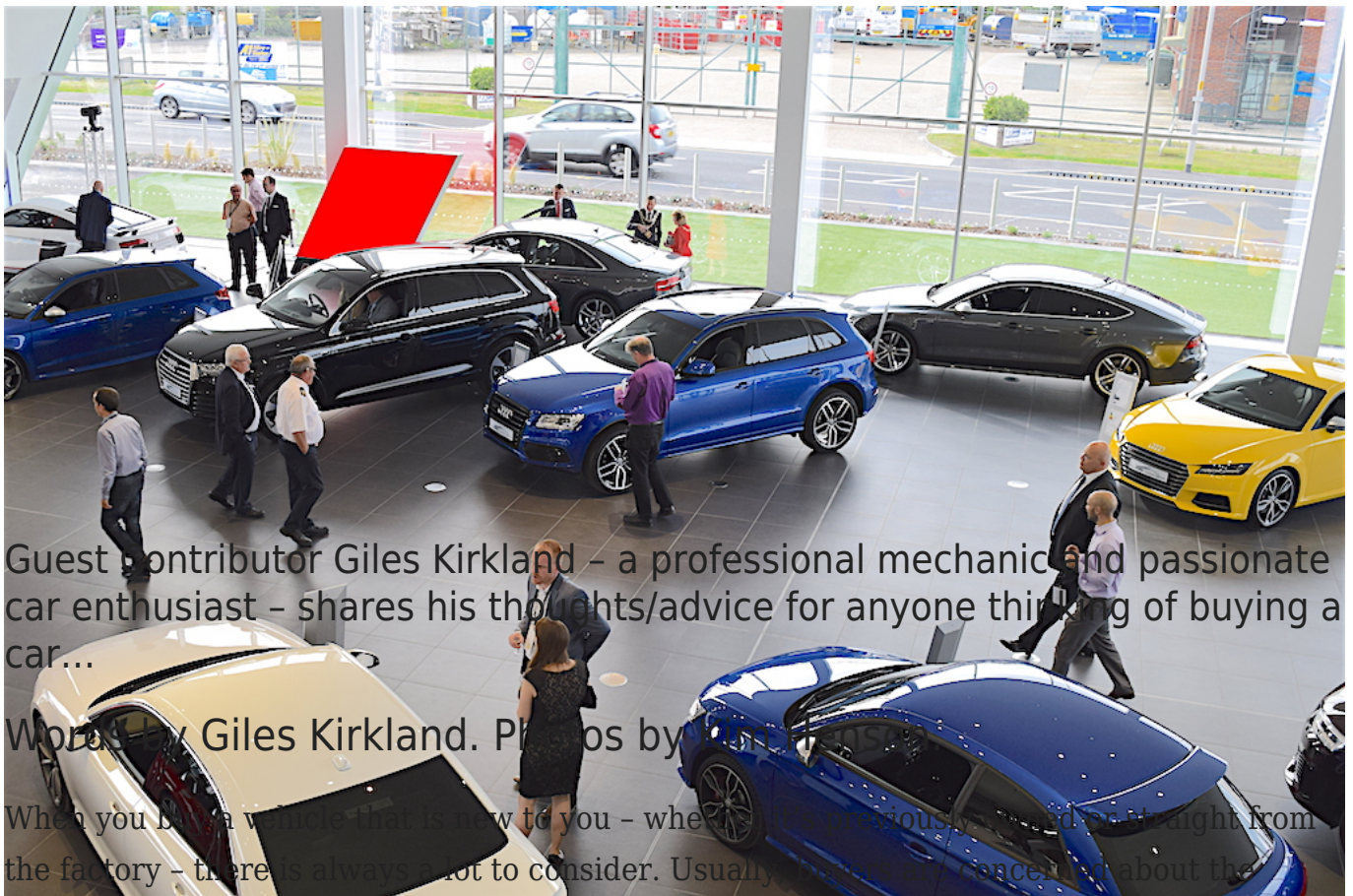
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Five Things to Check/Consider When Buying a Vehicle that is New to You

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Author:

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Guest Contributor Giles Kirkland – a professional mechanic and passionate car enthusiast – shares his thoughts/advice for anyone thinking of buying a car...

Words by Giles Kirkland. Photos by Jim Henson

When you buy a vehicle that is new to you – whether it's previously owned or straight from the factory – there is always a lot to consider. Usually, people are concerned about the

asking price, yet there are other factors that can also contribute to the cost of the vehicle, or otherwise cause problems down the line if you do not consider them.

1. Test Dates



When will the car next require an important safety test, such as an MoT? If that MoT is a year or so away, then you could arguably consider that the overall cost to you of the car is lower, to reflect this. The longer it's been since a vehicle has been subjected to such a test, the more likely it is that it will require work in order for it to pass (especially relevant if the owner has been trying to sell it for a long time). In any event, with any vehicle, there's no guarantee that it is going to pass 100%, and an MoT Test certificate only means that in the opinion of the tester, the vehicle met the requirements at the time it was tested.

In addition to the [cost of the MoT test](#) itself, you have to factor in any possible faults and a rough idea of the services required. Of course, this is seldom an issue on relatively young vehicles, bought via a dealer, as you can often ask them to complete an MoT before buying the car.

Note too that a secondhand car that has been properly serviced as recommended by the manufacturer, and with high quality parts having been used consistently during its lifetime,



has a better chance of long-term safe operation, good performance and survival than one that has been neglected. Always check the service history, if available; such documentary evidence is always worth having and enhances the value of the vehicle.

2. Wheel Condition



A well-driven car may look good on paper, but the wheels may have had some significant wear. Fortunately, this is something that's easy to see on inspection. You can easily check the hub and wheel for any scratches or irregularities - as well as the wheel bearings (with the car safely supported and the wheel clear of the ground, movement in the bearings can be felt while the wheel is 'rocked' by hand, and if the wheel is rotated by hand, resulting 'grumbling' noises indicate wear).



These checks are especially important with older vehicles (where some customisation may also have been carried out).

More importantly, the wheels might also have the wrong/inappropriate type of tyres for your driving environment. For example, if you living in a remote area, slick summer tyres aren't going to be very beneficial once you get off the smooth tarmac.

3. Replacement Tyres



Speaking of tyres, you should always check the condition of the current tyres on a car. Even a car fresh from the dealership has likely been for a number of test drives, and not all

drivers are careful, of course. As a result, the tyres may have become excessively worn down, or, if old, they may be suffering from crazing, or they may even be impact-damaged (with kerbs, etc.). This may mean you have to change the tyres: a cost you may certainly want to negotiate into the final selling price. Check very carefully.

The [tyre tread depth indicators](#) built into modern tyres enable this to be easily and subtly done when inspecting the vehicle.

4. Interior Features



While it doesn't necessarily influence the driving quality of the vehicle, it may very well be



that you appreciate a certain number of home comforts in your car. Music players, GPS equipment and other pieces of supplementary technology can all change from car to car, as too can the general display and controls.

Are you switching from a conventional gearchange lever, for instance, to flaps and paddles on the wheel? If you can, take some time in the driver's seat to assess how everything looks and feels, to ensure you don't make any expensive mistakes that you may regret a week or two after buying the car.

5. Fuel Efficiency



Drivers usually have an understanding of how fuel-efficient their car is, even when this doesn't match the Official figures quoted in the sales literature and the car's manual.



Factors that can influence the real-life mpg of any vehicle include our individual driving style, the [tyre fuel economy](#), the weight of the car (plus people and loads carried), also the quality and frequency of maintenance, and, on older vehicles, the accumulated wear in the mechanical components.

Hopefully the seller should be honest with you about the car's consumption figures while in their ownership, but, again, you have to assume a possible/probable difference in driving style and environments. If you're often driving in a city environment with heavy traffic, for example, any car you buy will use more fuel than if it was cruising on open main roads.

Is it a Deal Breaker?

After going through all of these points, you might find that many cars look less attractive from your perspective. Yet these aspects are relevant to all vehicles, and considering them may help to ensure that your prospective purchase really is suitable for you, and for the use you intend to give it.

When you're buying any 'new' car, it simply helps to be aware of the more immediate potential pitfalls as, if these add up to be significant, you will need to be able to afford these financially, as well as to cope with any practical limitations that the particular car might bring with it.