Secondhand buying – proceed with care! Robin Roberts advises... and bought a Toyota...

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Robin’s smart Auris ticked all the boxes for a good buy.

Buy with your head (not your heart!)…

…says Robin Roberts (and Miles Better News Agency).

Robin ventures into the used car market in the form of a tidy Toyota Auris, but first gives sound advice on how to avoid pitfalls and scams when buying used…

Car buying scams are on the rise, driven by criminals hoping to take advantage of drivers searching online for their next set of wheels.

The second-hand market is becoming a hot bed for shady and illegal practices and last week six people were arrested after a major virtual vehicle scam was uncovered by police. It is thought hundreds of victims across the UK had been targeted, parting with cash for a vehicle that never existed.

When it comes to online car scams, young drivers are among those most at risk of being taken for ride. That's because as digital natives, they're used to ordering anything they want online and expect fast delivery. Young drivers also make-up a large percentage of second-hand car buyers.

So how can drivers avoid falling victim to a virtual vehicle scam when searching online for a used car? James Armstrong, CEO at temporary car insurance company Veygo offered some tips.

Get information about the car upfront

Beyond the listing, ask the dealer for as much information about the car as you can. Make sure you know its make, model and year of manufacture, and the registration number so you can do your own checks on its history before taking anything further. The mileage recorded may be another weakness of the thief if they haven't done their homework and it may also deter you, so beware of suspiciously low figures related to first year of registration.

In police investigations, they often find real listings are copied by fraudsters, so when you

have all the information about a used car, search online to rule out that a listing has been cloned from a genuine dealership's stock.

If the price is too good to be true, then it probably is

Before engaging with the seller, check the market value of similar vehicles. If the price listed doesn't feel right, then something probably isn't. By offering a bargain, fraudsters can reel you in and make a purchase hard to resist.

See it to believe it

If you think you've found a great deal on a used car online, always arrange to view it in person whether you're purchasing from a private seller or a dealership.

You can often select the radius for your search, so make sure it's within a realistic travel distance that you can drive to or get public transport.

This will help you check its condition and that everything else is up to scratch. You could take it for a test drive, too. Always bring a friend or family member with you for a second opinion.

Check the dealership is approved

The AA has a useful directory of approved car dealerships who have signed a dealer promise to offer top-quality customer service, giving you peace of mind. They'll also help you sort out any issues between you and a dealership that's registered under the scheme.

It's good practice to search the dealership's name online and on social media before you pay them a visit. This will uncover any discrepancies in the information you have been given and any reports of suspicious behaviour from other car buyers.

Never send money via bank transfer

Even if you have seen the car in the flesh, never pay for it online using a direct bank transfer. This offers you no protection if you have been scammed. More banks now ask you to tick that you understand you could be being scammed when transferring money online, which waivers your rights if the worst does happen.

Instead, as with any other large online purchases, use money-protected services like credit card or PayPal. If the dealer demands a bank transfer, it’s time to walk away. Never pay in cash and an old fashioned cheque is still traceable.

Report any suspicions pronto

If you have any suspicion that an online car dealership or seller isn’t legitimate, or if you fall victim to a scam, report it to Action Fraud immediately.



The pre-owned Toyota Auris TR 1.6 petrol 5dr bought and driven by Robin Roberts…

With new car prices skyrocketing and delivery times close behind them, it’s little wonder the used car market has taken off as well.

Nationally, approximately three second-hand cars change hands for every new car sold, sometimes it’s a higher ratio in densely populated areas such as South Wales or the Midlands where it might be 6:1.

No wonder the used car dealers are rubbing their hands but car buyers might be wringing theirs when the market attracts so much attention, with values going up and criminals swoop for quick profits before disappearing without trace.

Selling a car can be fraught with problems but at least you can hold onto your property until the money is in your bank account. But what do you do when it comes to buying a set of wheels?

We decided to plunge into the second hand market to see what’s about.

Like all sensible buyers we set a few markers in the sands of time and narrowed down our requirements regarding size, seats, models and of course price, to which we would add excise duty, insurance and running costs.

Where do you start? On-line and local papers seem sensible and then it became apparent that sellers were asking a lot but generally not giving much.

Dealers are plentiful close to us and range from the gin palaces with sales staff that spend most of their time on phones or tapping away on keyboards to the garages with a man and a dog straight out of Only Fools & Horses.

How they greet you, engage in light conversation to gauge your gullibility or knowledge and

then wander away is remarkably commonplace.

For peace of mind we went to a main dealer who was advertising what seemed like a perfect match to our requirements but it was well past the age you might expect them to be stocking. It had a fully dealer stamped service book since 2010 and MoTs on-line indicating annual mileages, service advisories together with a traceable mileage track.



Further questioning revealed it had the classic one elderly lady owner from new who put it into the main dealer for any work whatsoever and had about 51,525 recorded, equivalent to under 4,000 annual miles. Ok, the price was at the top end but overall and judging by

condition with only a few minor bodywork and trim blemishes, immaculate boot and back seat area it looked a genuine car and far better than many 13 year olds, that's cars as well as children.

This slideshow requires JavaScript.

The car was given a mechanical and cosmetic make-over with new tyres included and a test drive revealed it went as if new, although I noticed a poorly working bonnet release catch.

It was too good to turn down and we arranged to collect the following week after it had a new MoT test and payment of around £5,600 was sorted. A thorough and efficient salesman quickly went over the sales agreement, DVLA procedure and it came with roadside assistance for 12 months and drive-away insurance cover for three days so I could look around for a good premium, which I did on line and relatively hassle-free.

It's worth pointing out that the insurance quote I obtained was less than extending the three-day cover with the main-dealer's provider.

A month with the car has revealed the bonnet latch still sticking but it has been attended to, I hope, at the main dealer's sister outlet closer to me, and something I missed on that initial inspection and drive, a broken spring in the driver's seat backrest which is poking through the fabric when the seat is occupied. Hopefully that will also be done under the warranty.

When it went in to have the latch checked and fixed, the dealership checked and topped up levels and gave the car a good wash free of charge.

Verdict

All in all, it has been a good experience buying the 13 year-old second-hand from the main dealer and I have gradually managed to improve the fuel economy from about 39mpg to an average around 42mpg and my passengers regularly comment on its condition and comfort.

So, in conclusion, the buying second-hand experience and carefully chosen car has been impressive and reaffirmed my belief that good dealers are out there if you are prepared to do your homework and not rush into a purchase at a too good to be true price.

For: Roomy, versatile, economical, comfortable, reasonable performance.

Against: Stiff ride over bad surfaces, lots of road noise, rolled around bends and tendency to understeer.



FAST FACTS

Toyota Auris TR 1.6 Hatchback manual


VALVE
MATIC

Price: £12,995 *at launch*

Mechanical: 122 bhp 1598cc 4-cyl petrol, 6 speed

Max Speed: 118 mph

0 – 62mph: 10.4 sec

Combined MPG: 31 to 48 *at launch,* 42 average

Insurance Group: 5E

C02 emissions: 153 g/km

Bik rating: VED band G. £220 annual

Warranty: 3 yrs/ 62,000 miles

Size: L 4.22 m (13.85 ft), W 1.76 m (5.77 ft), H 1.52 m (4.99 ft)

Bootspace: 354 to 761 litres (12.50 to 26.87 ft)

Kerbweight: 1,280 kg (2,822 lb)

Information about the Auris model:

Toyota Auris – derived from Latin for gold, aurum – was produced to replace the Corolla between October 2006 and July 2020.

The five-door model was made in Toyota's Burnaston, Derby plant and used engines

manufactured on the Welsh border in Deeside. It achieved a five-star Euro NCAP crash safety rating, the highest at the time.

The trims' range was revised in 2009 and given a new front styling face a year later with mechanical revisions including the addition of a hybrid motor came before it was discontinued and replaced by the Corolla.

At the time Auris was made with a choice of 1.4 and all-new 1.6 VVT-I petrol engines or three diesels, 1.4, 2.0 and 2.2 litres along with three possible transmissions, five and six speed manuals or an sequential automatic/ manual. They started at a fiver under £12,000.

When launched, the 1.6 model out performed the VW Golf, Ford Focus, Renault Megane, Vauxhall Astra and Peugeot 307.