



How to buy a used car

Want to buy a previously owned car but don't know where to begin? Our svengali of the secondhand, **James Ruppert**, guides you through the used car jungle



PRIVATE SALE



FRANCHISED MAIN DEALER



CAR SUPERMARKET

Lowly Car



ONLINE

AUCTION



Private sale

Here's where you could get lucky and meet a very lovely person who has a truly lovely car to sell. You could be buying from someone who is passionate and protective and has clearly cherished what you want to own, plus they have a folder full of service history and a plausible reason to sell. So the rule is always to buy an enthusiast's car from an enthusiast, if you can.

On the other hand, they may regularly sell cars for cash without a word to the tax man. That makes them car dealers without any of the

responsibilities or warranties.

Genuine private sellers may have the balance of a factory warranty, or an independent one, or one that applies to specific parts, be they tyres, batteries or alternators, so do ask. There's no comeback if you have a problem, provided they haven't misled you or sold an unroadworthy car.

WHY YOU WOULD
They have the perfect car

WHY YOU WOULDN'T
There are no comebacks

The roadside once-over

YOU DON'T NEED to get your hands dirty – just use your senses and take a knowing mate.

- **Tyres:** you want the same tread pattern and make on each axle at least, not some remoulds you've never heard of. Different tread depths suggest alignment/suspension issues.
- **Alloys:** chipped, scraped and caked in brake dust? An owner who doesn't care.
- **VIN plate:** make sure they match and haven't been tampered with.
- **History:** old MOTs are worth studying for continuity. Plus you might find a bill for a new front end after an accident.
- **Electrics:** press and prod

everything and use your mate to tell you if the lights work.

- **Levels:** look at the oil, water and hydraulic fluids. All should be fresh and at the max level.
- **Bodywork:** panel gaps, bits of dirt in the paint, overspray? It's all about observation.
- **Locks:** make sure they work smoothly. If they catch, perhaps there's been a big prang.
- **The owner:** do you trust them? Be a snob. Can they afford to run the car you want to buy?

WHY YOU WOULD

Common sense and as a prelude to a proper engineer's report

WHY YOU WOULDN'T

You like living dangerously

Private eye: three I found



Lexus RX400h 3.3 SE-L, 2005, 115,000 miles **£7950**
A cared-for two-owner Lexus? Why wouldn't you?



Honda Jazz 1.2 i-VTEC S, 2010, 15,000 miles **£5000**
A small, reliable Honda is a perfect private purchase.



A 2008 Skoda Octavia 1.9 TDI with 170,000 miles? Surely an ex-minicab, despite the seller saying everything works.

Franchised main dealer

The point here is that you'll pay more for the car because franchises have big, big overheads. The upside, of course, is that the cars should be the very best available and they'll come with a great warranty. The car should have a main dealer service history and the dealer should be able to sort out any issues to your total satisfaction. Ideally you should

be getting something pretty close to the new car buying experience, and the whole deal is completely manufacturer backed. There should even be a no-quibble 30-day return policy. Oh yes, they will take whatever you have in part exchange.

The downside to main dealers is that because of space and these sorts of policies, the dealer's used range may not be all that used, so

you will be offered nearly new or fairly expensive two or three-year-old models. For many used car buyers, though, that's about as risky as they would ever want to get.

WHY YOU WOULD

Cast-iron cars sold with cast-iron guarantees

WHY YOU WOULDN'T

Too pricey and not enough choice

Warranty worries

LIKE ANY FORM of insurance, a car warranty is a precautionary measure that could save you paying out unexpected mechanical and electrical breakdown costs. Before purchasing a car warranty, you should weigh up the pros and cons and take certain factors into consideration. Is the car warranty worth the cost in comparison with the car's value and costs to fix? How likely is your car to break down? Unfortunately, you should read the small print. Warranties can vary widely, so make sure you are clear on what exactly is covered.



Forecourt fancies: three I found



Porsche 911 Black Edition, 2011, 30,000 miles **£44,900**
Factory-backed 911 starts to look like brilliant value.



Maserati GranSport V8, 2008, 50,000 miles **£26,995**
Ramped, stamped, warrantied: the ideal used Maser.



AVOID!

A 2014 Land Rover Freelander 2.2 SD4 with 34k miles for **£35,500** is going to depreciate like a 4x4 brick off a cliff.

Car Supermarket

Well, the main reason to go to a car supermarket is that they have loads of cars to choose from, which, of course, is good, plus it's often arranged in related rows to make it even easier for you to browse, just like a real supermarket.

What you will find, though, is that the windscreen prices are plus an admin fee and are usually

non-negotiable. Some of the stock also comes direct from company/fleet auctions and can be scruffy, so you might need to offset the asking price against refurbishment, a service and a thorough valet.

WHY YOU WOULD

Choice - masses of it, as far as the eye can see

WHY YOU WOULDN'T

No haggling

How to pay

IF SOMEONE wants cash, well, it's their right to ask, but do you really want the hassle of carting thousands of quid around? Also, some sellers don't have the car and just want to meet you in a lay-by and cosh you for the money. Don't have nightmares, but it does happen. So keep it virtual. Cheques are so last century and will take an age to clear, but they're okay if you and the seller are prepared to wait. Dealers will, of course, take anything, including your old

motor as part exchange, but put what you can on a credit card, as you stand an outside chance of getting the money back if things go pear-shaped. A debit card is instant. Also consider a bank transfer, which, depending on your account, will see the money instantly transfer, although it doesn't always show up online straight away. One of the best ways to pay privately is PayPal. This shows up instantly and has a degree of buyer protection, like a credit card.



Trolley dash: three I found



Ford Focus 1.6 Sport, 2011, 44,000 miles **£7325**
A no-brainer. There's tons of these to choose from.



Mercedes C320 CDI Sport, 52,000 miles, 2009 **£14,999**
You can buy posh, and better than a year-old Insignia.



AVOID!

A 2011 Renault Wind for **£6999** is proof that you get oddities at supermarkets. This looks like fun, but it's too much to pay.



Independent dealer

These can vary hugely when it comes to both customer care and the quality of the stock.

Specialists in a particular marque or type of car can be particularly good, however, and long-established family concerns often have a reputation to keep. Independents will part-exchange your old car and should offer a

warranty, but check what it actually covers. Their stock should be spring cleaned, serviced and given an MOT before sale. If not, they're not doing a proper job, so look elsewhere.

WHY YOU WOULD

Friendly, local and hassle-free

WHY YOU WOULDN'T

Sometimes scruffy cars

Independent checks

WHEN BUYING a specialist car, especially privately, it's a good idea to call in an expert. An independent report on a car's condition by an engineer is vital to avoid making a costly mistake. Having an inspection means faults can be pointed out so you can negotiate on the price or insist that the seller fixes the problems before you buy. It isn't worth paying for

an inspection on every car you see, though, just the one you actually want to buy. The AA charges £142 and the RAC asks for £149, but Click Mechanic starts at £89.60. For classics and sports cars you may need to get a specialist to do it through a car club. At the very least you should never look at a car alone, however mechanically competent you are.

Independent deals: three I found



BMW 335i M Sport, 2008, 29,000 miles **£15,489**
Low miles, tidy, warranty. A safe, sound used buy.



Volkswagen Polo 1.4 SE, 2009, 32,000 miles **£6000**
A full history, one-owner car for a worry-free buy.



A 2005 Bentley Continental for £27k. Nice price, but the dealer is selling from his drive. Many unanswered questions.

A real auction

Buying at auction presents several major drawbacks which can make it a less than ideal used car buying experience. First off, you can't drive the cars before bidding begins, or until you have actually bought and paid for it, plus you can't look inside until the last minute when it's driven into the ring. So the twin tenets of buying a decent used car are broken right there. Then there are the fees. You might think you've paid less than the market rate, but the hammer price goes up once all

the fees are tagged on. Also things happen really, really fast. That's exciting, but it's also a worry, as you can quickly become the owner of something that you believe has four wheels but otherwise remains something of a mystery.

So not for the novice, then, or the purist for that matter. Experts only should bid.

WHY YOU WOULD

You might get a bargain

WHY YOU WOULDN'T

You might not

Your rights if your used car goes wrong

WE COULD GET bogged down by legal speak here. In the simplest terms, you have six months to complain to a dealer about a fault. A car should also be free from defects, unless they were pointed out to you by the dealer, or are the sort of fault which should have been revealed by an inspection. The car should also be as described, so a one-owner car must be just that and fit for any normal purpose, meaning it must be reasonably reliable and capable of any tasks you specify, such as seating seven passengers, or towing.

The longer any dispute goes on, the less chance you have of rejecting the car. Some dealers will string it out and then invoke the warranty, so you end up paying for repairs. Just reject the car, take it back and ask for a refund. Letters of rejection are downloadable from the web, so don't be fobbed off. When it comes to private sales, unless the seller has misdescribed the car or sold you one that's unroadworthy, sorting out issues will depend on how reasonable they are and how confidently you approach them.



Auction stations: three I found



Audi A8 3.0 TDI quattro, 2004, 145,000 miles **£2900**
Not much for a comfy, frugal, decade-old barge.



Mazda MX-5 Sport, 2005, 109,000 miles **£975**
You can't go wrong with an MX-5, even at an auction.



AVOID!
I'll buy most things at auction, but I'll give this 196,000-mile 2004 Mazda Bongo a miss, especially at a staggering **£1500**.

Buying online

The joy of the interweb is that the whole wide world of used car classified ads is there on a screen in front of you. Obviously the flipside is that it puts temptation at the tip of your bidding finger. What you must remember is that just because the car is online, there is no reason why the normal rules of buying a used car should be ignored. You really do need to see it, especially if the vehicle is in the same country as

you. If it isn't then you must speak to the owner by phone/Skype and use clever modern-day devices to view the car and documentation. Do a ton of research about the seller, check feedback and, like a real live auction, set a bidding limit and stick to it.

WHY YOU WOULD

It can be fun and you might get a bargain

WHY YOU WOULDN'T

Trust issues. Does it actually exist?

Admin/final checks

THERE ARE three checks you can make from the comfort of your sofa. The DVLA's free MOT Status Check Request (motinfo.direct.gov.uk), MOT History Request and Vehicle Enquiry (taxdisc.direct.gov.uk) will confirm the car's details and give an indication of the recorded mileage. When it comes to checking whether the car is stolen, on finance or a write-off, an HPI check does the job. It will cost £19.99 for the peace of mind, but dealers will do this as routine.

The service history will help to verify the mileage, but make sure it relates to the car.

Contact the servicing garage and previous owners if in doubt. Ensure that anything the seller has agreed to do (repairs, get an MOT) is written into the contract. When buying privately, get the seller to confirm that the car isn't on finance and they own the car.

The DVLA has revamped its Vehicle Excise Duty system (no more tax discs), so you can register your new car online or over the phone. There's still paperwork to be done, however, so fill in the 'new keeper' section on the V5C, make sure both you and the seller sign it, and keep hold of the green bit.

Online goldmine: three I found



Mercedes-Benz CL600, 2002, 69,150 miles **£3300**
Big luxury cars for buttons. That's eBay for you.



Toyota Comfort Delux, 2001, 183km, **\$964**
The internet also lets you buy something truly odd.



AVOID

This 2007 Vauxhall Astra CC bid to £1021. Listing says it has a roof problem, plus it's got lairy aftermarket alloys.

AUTOCAR

USED CAR ALMANAC

Should you buy secondhand saloons in June and crossovers in October or the other way around? **James Ruppert** explains how careful timing can save you cash in the used car market – and which cars you should be buying in 2015

This may not come as a surprise, but the used car market operates all year round. So the good cars will always sell whatever the weather, prevailing conditions and time of the year.

Sometimes, though, the availability and prices of used cars can change on a seasonal basis. So as well as having your wits and a load of used car facts about you, don't forget to consult the calendar and tap the barometer before you consider buying.

Traditionally, the fortunes of the new and used car markets have been

linked to the change of registration plate. When that happens, it creates an artificially high demand for new cars and, to help pay for them, a larger number of part-exchanges flood into the car trade. This provides a variety of opportunities for bargain hunters.

If you can be patient, anticipate and take advantage of the seasonal swings and roundabouts, that's all the better. However, if you need a car tomorrow, don't worry too much about the weather and just get on with it. Either way, 2015 is going to be a cracker for the used car buyer.



Happy new year? It definitely is for used car buyers. This is when new car registrations blip upwards because buyers have waited patiently until after the festive break for a car registered in 2015. So part-exchanges increase and used values are certainly softer. A good time to buy.



It could be very cold outside. This means that the car dealer forecourts could be covered in snow and deserted. A jolly good time to be shopping for used cars, then, because dealers and desperate private sellers will be open to offers. For a real bargain, sniff out a privately advertised convertible.



4X4S/SUVS

"I WANT ONE of those SUVs" is a conversation that car salesmen genuinely have with regularity these days. No one really understands what SUVs are, but everybody wants one. Big SUVs tend to be more car than any normal person would ever need, but when you can bag a used example for half the value of a new one, there's no need to settle for a boring MPV instead. That's where the used market powers ahead.

For many years, the only logical engine option for SUVs has been diesel, but more buyers are turning to petrol, which is better value and more satisfying to drive. If the vehicle is mint, why not invest £2k more and go for an LPG conversion?

The arrival of the latest Volvo

XC90 was preceded by five-figure discounting of new versions of the outgoing model at brokers and dealers. So shop around for a five-year-old example, which is out of warranty and now depreciating at a reassuringly attractive rate. Try to find a one-family-owned example being sold privately. Otherwise, budget on about £14k for a 2010 XC90 2.4 D5 Active with 75k miles.



The facelifted 2010 Mercedes-Benz M-class also looks like excellent value. If you want to make a statement in a premium 4x4 that isn't a Range Rover, this is the way to do it. The 3.0 BlueEfficiency in Sport trim is the one that most will want, and you will need £16k to secure a 120,000-mile example from an independent dealer.

Meanwhile, there has been lots of activity around the Jeep brand, with new models arriving later in 2015. Although Jeeps don't feel as solid as their German and Japanese rivals, you get a lot of value. So a revamped 2010 Cherokee 2.8 CRD Limited, which has every piece of kit that you need, starts at under £10k for a 50k-mile example from a dealer.

ONE WE FOUND



VOLVO XC90 2.4 D5, £14,493
Finished in Sapphire Black with half-leather trim, this 2009 Swedish barge has 62,000 miles on the clock and is laden with extras such as privacy glass, climate control and towing kit. Contact 1st Choice Cars on 01367 700086.

Yes, it's 15-plate time. You won't be part of that madness, but you can lurk in the shadows and pick up a part-exchanged vehicle that is being advertised to clear. Mass-market Mondeos and Insignias are often the worst affected as owners ditch them for shiny new motors.

AC15

All of a sudden, the used car market is fully active with a vengeance, especially if the sun has come out. Prices will harden and sharpen and the canvas convertible that you promised yourself could now be out of reach. Be patient and do your drop-top hunting on a rainy day.



SPORTS CARS

THIS IS THE year of the Mazda MX-5. The new version won't be arriving until the latter part of the year, and more realistically 2016 for some, so it might be better to strike now and get the Mk3. Right now, a 2011-registered 1.8i SE with less than 60k miles on the clock is £7400. I did stumble across a 2010

version with just 30k miles for the same money, which is a bargain.

Otherwise, you could wait until the summer has gone and scoop up a private one, because there should be a lot of very happy owners part-exchanging theirs in anticipation of the new, improved MX-5. Yes, prices are going to fluctuate, but the trend is definitely downwards.

The other really big sports car arrival is the Audi TT. That will be a mid-year thing, so there are already some turning up in the trade that are worth a second glance. If you have up to £12k in hand, you can choose between some decent

private and trade deals. Indeed, as a celebration of petrol power, a 2010 1.8T FSI roadster at £11,500 would seem like a smart buy, especially in white and with a reasonable 41k miles. The dealer price is closer to £12k, but at least you would have a warranty. A dealer 2.0 TDI quattro is around that figure, so there is no shortage of TT options.

Good-driving cars are hardly in short supply, but a Subaru BRZ still fetches £18k-£19k. Surely, it is time this year to sort out the better-value Caymans. The Porsche badge trumps anything else and, as the older Boxsters look like a lot of bother, spending just under £14k on a 2007 example with about 100k miles seems sensible.

ONE WE FOUND



AUDI TT 1.8 TFSI, £14,995
A two-owner Brilliant Red 2010 model with just 18,517 miles. Six-speed manual gearbox, full black leather sports seats and a full service history. Interior is said to be "factory fresh". Contact ADW Automotive on 01299 251151.



MAY

For many businesses, the financial year ends in April and a higher number of three-year-old and four-year-old vehicles are for sale because of that. It might be worth hanging around the increasingly busy car auctions – although make sure that you don't get carried away.



JUNE

If things are starting to get hot and sticky, you might find that there are certain types of cheaper 4x4s knocking around that have been part-exchanged. The higher mileage and less fashionable Japanese and American examples will be the ones to go for.



MPVS



BUYERS HAVE BEEN falling slightly out of love with big people-carrying vans. Interest has shifted largely to SUVs, but the bottom line is that families are always going to need cars. So the fact that there seems to be more than enough deeply unfashionable but seriously practical wagons around must be a good thing. Especially as they are getting cheaper.

The one people-carrier that you should never overlook is the Ford Galaxy, which remains the best value, most practical and decent to drive. The Galaxy's ubiquity drives down prices of what is the nicest way to cram seven bodies into one space. A 2010 2.0 TDCi Ghia is just over £8000. Then again,

a 2.0 EcoBoost Titanium from a private seller will have fewer miles and a generous amount of kit. For families who do a modest mileage per year, that is a no-brainer.

And then there is the Vauxhall Zafira. It isn't nearly as good as a Galaxy, but as a mid-sized family runaround, it's the biggest bargain buy of all. About £4500 will get you into a 2010 1.6 Exclusiv. Below £5k,



there are loads of petrol options, but you will need to tiptoe between the specifications and get yourself a nice Design or SRi, although the Elite has largely everything apart from the kitchen sink.

Oddballs are good in this sector, because they can be overlooked and underrated, which is why I may be completely alone in suggesting that the heroically ugly Chevrolet Orlando be given the time of day – especially as a 2011 1.8 LT is under £7k. Most of the examples on the market are one-family-owners and sold through dealers who may be the only ones to part-exchange it. It has all the equipment that you would ever need and is a car to buy and run into the ground.

A BUYER'S GUIDE TO... COLOURS AND SPECS

Cars finished in alpine, toothpaste, emulsion and just about any other shade of white paint that you care to mention are now filtering through to the used market. And the colour is holding up extremely well. White is almost the new silver.

Whatever happened to silver? Well, it still exists and is tolerated by used car buyers because they have less choice and, hey, it will be cheaper.

Black, meanwhile, remains a favourite of secondhand buyers but, as ever, muddy metallics and some shocking citrus experiments are treated with contempt. They still sell, of course, but for less.

What used buyers never tire of is specification. They just can't get enough kit. A car without the essentials – which increasingly means climate control, heated seats and a sound system that you can sync with an iPod – might struggle to sell. The equation is a simple one: low spec means low price.



THE USED CAR YEAR

JULY

In the early part of the month, used business will be buoyant, so don't rush into any hasty deals, because it will start to change. For a while, everything will overheat, both on the forecourt and at the auctions. Now is the time to be patient and top up the tan.



AUGUST

The whole country has gone on holiday. The children have been scooped up and the last thing that anyone has time to do is shop for cars, especially in this weather (which is probably either too hot or too wet). Dealers will want to rustle up sales, and private deals can become too good to pass up.



COMPANY CARS



YOU KNOW THE ones: fleet manager favourites that were built to do the motorway slog. Unregarded, largely unloved, but there to do a job. And when that job is over, that's where we come in and buy them for buttons. Except that manufacturers are still building far too many of them, which explains

why you can pick up 'nearly new' ones for very tempting prices.

Exhibit one is the Ford Mondeo. There is a new one out that makes the old one look really, really old. However, once you realise that you can get a 2014 example for £11,995, you forget about that pretty quickly. It will have a year's worth of miles under its tyres, but at less than 30k miles, it will be nicely run in. What you will get is a Business Edition TDCi Eco that's an ex-demonstrator. Otherwise, there are ex-hire cars often direct from the hirers, with 10k fewer miles, for a few hundred quid more.

Even better, Ford franchises have them with even lower mileages for complete peace of mind. Nearly news are everywhere; I won't go on.

The new Volkswagen Passat is coming, but that won't necessarily mean that its excellent predecessor is going to be that cheap just yet. If anything, values will harden for a while. However, there do seem to be quite a few year-old ones around. Who wouldn't want a 2014 1.6 TDI Bluemotion that will deliver about 70mpg? Many car supermarkets now seem to have them in Tech S spec and you will pay from £12,500. Delivery mileage, though, would cost you a whopping £17k, so there are clearly bargains to be had if you can tolerate just a few more miles.

ONE WE FOUND



FORD MONDEO 1.6 TDCI BUSINESS EDITION, £14,999
This 14-plate Deep Impact Blue Mondeo Zetec has racked up a scant 3662 miles and comes in the desirable Business Edition trim, which includes plenty of equipment. Contact TrustFord on 01977 603644.



The change to the 65-plate. Those who care about such things have chopped in their old cars and this is your opportunity to pick them up for a bit less money, because suddenly there are more used cars around. Prices will be far from on the floor, though.

AC65 ZYD
AC65 ZYD

It's time to take a look at classic cars. There are ones that didn't manage to sell in the summer and disillusioned owners who've had enough. As for 'real' cars, the novelty of driving around in a full convertible could be wearing off as the early signs of winter start to bite.



A BUYER'S GUIDE TO... FUEL

This year doesn't look very good for oil-burners. There are suggestions that some long-in-the-tooth diesels may be banned from city centres and even incentivised off the road with a scrappage scheme, so the market looks quite nervous.

None of that is likely to take hold in 2015, but it could have consequences. Some car buyers could realise that they don't actually need a diesel to pop to the shops, so sales of new oil-burners could slump and the values of smaller diesels could also dip as a result. In addition, previously depreciation-light high-mileage diesels could start to drop in value significantly.

So this year is about the resurgence of petrol, and not just because the fuel is really cheap at the pumps right now. That can't last, but it may make cars with six cylinders and V8s easier to sell.



SUPERCARS

SUPERCARS ARE ALWAYS with us. They are not subject to the fickleness of the weather, or anything much, except global depression. Even then, there is a hard core of buyers, and not necessarily enthusiasts, who will always want the next very bestest thing. That may leave the previous year's model looking for fresh heated garage space. Oh, yes, and many supercars don't only go very fast; they depreciate quickly, too.

A new Aston Martin Vanquish is always something to celebrate and, as the company enters an exciting new era, now is the time to preserve the old stuff for future generations. Right now, you can bag yourself an original big-bodied, muscular

Vanquish from 2003 for about £50k. It has dropped in value considerably but should start to bob up again, and 2015 could be a smart time to buy.

Smarter people might be looking at bargain Ferraris this year, but actually there are no bargains and it is far too obvious a buy. Make 2015 the year of Maserati. Some might pitch them at Jaguar XK level, but that would be wrong; a GranTurismo is far more charismatic and a 2007 4.2 is now about £33k.

There is the Lamborghini factor, of course, but Gallardos are still holding out at £60k and they may even start to rise. Meanwhile, Audi's interpretation of the whole supercar thing, the R8, is looking

good. Over the past two years, I've watched them gently come down by £7k-£8k. Consider a 2008 4.2 FSL. All the factory-fit extras – Bang & Olufsen 12-speaker sound system, upgraded sat-nav, rear parking camera, Alcantara headlining and Magnetic Ride dampers – would have pumped the new price by £10k. Instead, it may cost around £42k now, or less for older model years.



TOTAL

excellium

Car Wash

per litre
premium unleaded 115.9

per litre
diesel 127.9

NOVEMBER

The used car market is winding down a bit now. If you are brave enough, the fleet cars washing up at the auctions might be worth a closer look. Private sellers are starting to get very nervous indeed at this time of year, so it is a good month to go shopping for a used car.



DECEMBER

This is a two-week month if the dealers are lucky. Everyone is worrying about Christmas dinner with the in-laws and buying presents, not cars. All of which makes it the right time to take a vehicle off the hands of a dealer or a private seller in the truly festive spirit.



A BUYER'S GUIDE TO... BATTERIES

The elephant on the forecourt is an electrified one. Even though sales have risen and buyers aren't so nervous of electric vehicles, the car trade continues to view them with suspicion.

Although the odd silver surfer will buy a Nissan Leaf for the cat food run and some businesses can justify the capital expense that can be offset by a clever accountant, people are not buying EVs in the numbers necessary to create a sustainable market.

The BMW i3 is doing wonders for the image, but only when it comes with the range-extender option. Meanwhile, the value of early hybrid vehicles is hardening.



DEALS

Bargain new
and used motors



Throwing fuel on the fire

The petrol versus diesel debate doesn't only apply to new cars. **James Rupert** fights his corner

When it comes to the used car market, I don't pay much attention to the 'official' industry line on anything. Instead, I listen to you. And the burning question in the emails I've been getting lately is: "Should I buy diesel or petrol?" This is an ongoing issue and won't go away until there is an official answer via the fuel tax system. In the meantime, please let me make it clear that if you are buying a used car and don't do that many miles – say, around 10,000 a year – then you might as well buy petrol. Before I replied to a reader, I looked out of the window and noted that the four cars on my drive were all petrol, while the quite old one in the garage was also petrol-powered. I really don't need

diesel in my life and, depending on the circumstances, neither do you.

Now, I know that 85mpg is all very impressive, but you will have to spend a substantial amount of money to enjoy that level of fuel economy. Used cars don't have to be dirt cheap, but the most singular appeal is that they dial out the most expensive motoring cost of all: depreciation. The second biggest cost is fuel, unless you have a major engine breakdown, which will take you back to square one. So although you can get lucky with a high-mileage diesel, I get rather frightened by the associated particulate filters, turbos and dual-mass flywheel clutches, never mind all those injectors that have to be replaced.

Our reader wasn't looking for



Toyota Avensis is dull but dependable

anything complicated, either; he just wanted a sensible family car to do a solid few thousand miles each year without breaking down. His budget meant he was in the market for relatively recent 100,000-mile motors. So petrol it was.

The shortlist included a Vauxhall Insignia or a Honda Accord, and I unadventurously suggested a Ford Mondeo or Toyota Avensis. So with £5000 to spend – my projected average

I know 85mpg is impressive, but you have to spend a substantial amount of money to enjoy that level of economy



P66 James Ruppert
Used car expert



P68 Mark Pearson
Deals expert



P70 Nic Cackett
Data expert

A Honda Accord 2.0i EX for £5000 is a great used buy

BANGERNOMICS BEST BUYS



READER'S CAR: FORD FOCUS ESTATE

Piers Couzens has recently sold this Ford Focus Estate, which had served him well.

"I bought my 2004 Focus TDCi Ghia Estate for an admittedly bargain £600," he says. "Having added 20,000 miles to it over 18 months, it has eaten a handbrake cable and two tyres and had one service. I just sold it for £800, so I can't really say it owed me a penny.

"I'm hoping the one-owner, full-history BMW E36 320i I've replaced it with proves to be as good a buy."

SEND YOUR BANGERNOMICS TALES TO JAMES

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WHAT CAUGHT MY EYE THIS WEEK: RUSTY RIP-UP

Beware adverts on the interweb that claim to be selling an old car but really all they're offering is a piece of paper and some rust. That should be illegal. Don't encourage the

USED CAR DILEMMA: DAIHATSU YRV

Daihatsu was a reassuringly bonkers company that took Toyota hardware and made it more interesting. Take the YRV, for example. A turbo, go-faster graphics and twin exhausts made this mini-MPV tacky and rather wonderful.

for a decent used buy – the options are a 40,000-mile 2009 Insignia 1.8 16V SE, a 2008 Accord 2.0i EX with 69,000 miles, a 60,000-mile 2008 Mondeo 2.0 Zetec or a 2009 Avensis 1.8 V-Matic TR with 74,000 miles.

The Avensis was interesting because it was the latest shape. And you can never rule out the Mondeo, which is consistently a lot of car for the money. However, the Insignia seemed to me like the pick of the bunch on sheer value. Our reader, though, is poised to dive into an Accord – the most sensible thing to do. It's not only classy but also shouldn't give the owner any sleepless nights. In fact, none of those models should, and 99% of the reason for that is because they are run-in petrols. So buy them.

Old-school
Yaris

With
personality





Autocar @autocar · Aug 10

Most popular blog on Autocar this month? @Bangernomics explaining why he doesn't do diesel bit.ly/1N3PVv7

