

## A Used Car Purchasing Guide

**Three important things to consider in a used car purchase are the reliability rating of the vehicle, the safety rating and the maintenance history.**

The reliability and safety ratings aren't too hard to discover, but determining the maintenance history may take more time.

There are a number of sources of information about **reliability**. On [Edmunds website](#) there is a "True Cost to Own" (TCO) rating which calculates depreciation, taxes/fees, fuel costs, maintenance, repairs, financing and insurance. Taking all these into account, the TCO will tell you the expected cost to own any vehicle for 5 years. Another source of reliability information is [J. D. Powers](#). This website gives ratings on used vehicles in the areas of performance and design, initial quality, and dependability. There is also [pricing information](#) for retail and trade in prices for your area.

Aside from reliability ratings, these websites offer car reviews, car care tips and other general information like how to pick a repair facility. You can narrow down your search by looking at the information on these web sites before you even test drive. **Safety ratings** for new and used cars can be found at [Safecar.gov](#).

If you're planning to purchase a low mileage vehicle, the maintenance history isn't as important as it is with a higher mileage (over 60,000 miles) vehicle. Regular oil changes are a must. Many vehicles are driven short distances and without regular oil changes, sludge will accumulate, threatening engine damage. If you purchase a vehicle from an individual they should have service records or be able to get copies from their repair facility. If purchasing from a car dealer, it may not be possible to obtain those records unless the previous owner provided them to the dealer.

When you've found a vehicle that fits your requirements it's time to test drive it. During the test drive pay attention to acceleration, cornering and handling, braking and visibility. After the test drive, sit in the vehicle, making sure the seats are comfortable and that the controls are easily accessible. Be sure to familiarize yourself with how the rear seats fold and the amount of space for storage.

When you get to the point of being ready to purchase, take it to your repair facility for an inspection. Even if you are buying from a friend, have the vehicle inspected because the owner probably isn't fully aware of the car's condition. Usually on a Monday we'll receive a call saying "I just bought a car, can you check it out?" It's wishful thinking to believe the car you already bought is in good condition. Inspecting the vehicle before purchasing is the best way to assure you're getting a quality vehicle and it puts you in a better negotiating position.

A "Certified Preowned Vehicle" (CPO) is worth considering because of the warranty associated with it. Here is more [information about CPOs](#). A Carfax report can be helpful, but not necessarily comprehensive.

I did a comparison of SUVs using Edmund's True Cost to Own calculator. I compared a 2006 Volvo XC90 (2 out of 5 dependability rating from JDPower) with a 2006 Lexus RX330(5 out of 5 dependability rating). The Volvo purchase price was \$20,900 and 5 year cost to own was \$44,004. The Lexus purchase price was \$27,000 and 5 year cost to own was \$43,523. After 5 years depreciation the Lexus is predicted to be worth \$5200 more than the Volvo.

**My conclusion is the best quality vehicle is a better buy even though the purchase price is \$6000 more.**