AutoTrader.com Experts Help Consumers Avoid Costly Car Shopping Mistakes

Timely advice ensures shoppers who take advantage of year-end savings don't spend more in the long run

ATLANTA, Sept. 24, 2013 /PRNewswire/ -- As the year begins to draw to a close, many consumers may be tempted by model and calendar year-end savings events at their local car dealer. While it's a great time to consider pulling a new car into the garage, the car shopping experts at AutoTrader.com® have some advice to help buyers avoid mistakes that could turn their new dream car into a nightmare.

(Logo: http://photos.prnewswire.com/prnh/20110425/CL88097LOGO)

"Buying a car is something people usually only do at most every few years, so naturally the right way to go about it isn't always top of mind," said Brian Moody, AutoTrader.com site editor. "But a misstep during the shopping process could turn a great deal into a money pit in the long run."

The AutoTrader.com editors have identified seven of the most common mistakes people make when shopping for a car – and how to avoid them:

1. Negotiating the price based on monthly payment
"This is one of the most common and expensive mistakes people make," Moody says. "It may seem more affordable to stretch out your payments over a longer term to give you that lower monthly payment, but in the end you're paying much more. Negotiate total price first. If the payment is too high, then you're getting a sign that the car is outside your budget."

2. Not getting a mechanical inspection
When shopping for a used car, an inspection is important. "Just because a car sounds and runs fine during the test drive, doesn't necessarily mean everything is in top working order," Moody says. "Cars are complex machines, and nothing is worse than an expensive repair shortly after you drive the vehicle home."

3. Buying things you don't need
The experts say this goes back to a key tenet in car shopping: make a list of wants and needs before ever setting foot in a dealership and stick to it. Factory and dealer-installed options add up quickly.

4. Not running a vehicle history report
While not a replacement for a mechanical inspection, AutoTrader.com editors say history reports are a quick, usually fairly low-cost way to get a sense of if a car is what a seller says it is.

5. Not taking a thorough test drive
AutoTrader.com experts say test drives should be at least 45 minutes on a variety of roads and driving conditions. Also shoppers should make sure to bring family members and bigger personal items (strollers, golf clubs, etc.) to make sure the car fits their lifestyle.

6. Falling in love with the car before you buy it
"While we know people have emotional attachments to cars, it's important to stay focused on the fact that this is a major purchase," Moody says. "Play it cool until the deal is done."

7. Not shopping around
AutoTrader.com editors recommend test driving as many of the competitive vehicles as possible, then narrow the selection and visit several different dealerships. "This will give you peace of mind that you've found the right car for you at the best possible price,"

Moody said.

More tips on how to avoid these car shopping pitfalls can be found on AutoTrader.com: http://www.autotrader.com/research/article/car-tips/212007/7-common-car-shopping-mistakes.jsp

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