AutoTrader Shares Expert Tips to Spot Flood-Damaged Vehicles

As flooding rains submerge cars across the Northeast, consumers need to be vigilant so a water-logged vehicle doesn't end up in their driveway

ATLANTA, Aug. 13, 2014 /PRNewswire/ -- In light of the recent flooding events in the Northeastern U.S. and beyond, AutoTrader.com's car shopping experts have some advice to help consumers avoid unknowingly purchasing a vehicle they may have seen floating down a flooded highway on the news.

"Damaged vehicles can often end up hundreds of miles away from the flooding event to cities where consumers might not be as suspicious of them," said Brian Moody, AutoTrader.com site editor. "It's important for car shoppers to always be aware that flood damage could be a possibility and be mindful of the signs."

Flood damage can cause a myriad of problems in a vehicle, damaging critical electrical systems that operate vehicle functions like locks, windows and key safety features. Hidden corrosion and rust can also slowly eat away at metal and components, destroying the car from the inside out. These issues can take weeks, months or sometimes even years to emerge, resulting in ongoing expenses and issues for the unfortunate buyer.

To avoid buying one of these vehicles, Moody and the AutoTrader editorial team encourage car shoppers to:

- ***Look out for hidden rust.*** Key places to check include the trunk, on exposed screws under the hood, around doors and on exposed metal areas under seats. "Rust in these areas indicates exposure to excessive moisture at some point in the car's life, and can be difficult for an unscrupulous seller to get to and fix," Moody says.
- ***Give the car a thorough sniff test.*** The smell of mildew is never a good sign, according to Moody. Areas like underneath carpets and in between gaps in the seats can harbor telltale odors. Also be wary of cars with extra potent or an excessive quantity of air fresheners.
- ***Beware of "too good to be true" deals.*** "If a car seems to be priced well below what similar makes and models are selling for in your area, that's a big red flag," Moody says. Sites like KBB.com can help car shoppers get a sense of a new or used vehicle's Fair Purchase Price (what cars are selling for locally) through the KBB.com Price Advisor tool, and shoppers can also look at listings of comparable vehicles on AutoTrader.com.
- ***Watch for suspicious mud and debris.*** Many sellers will thoroughly detail flood-damaged cars before resale, but consumers can sometimes catch hidden areas of mud and debris where it wouldn't end up normally, such as crevices and corners underneath the hood, in the trunk and on the underside of panels and brackets.
- ***Get a vehicle history report.*** While they may not catch flood damage every time, Moody says history reports are a great initial indicator if a car has had a watery past.
- ***Get the car inspected by a reputable mechanic.*** AutoTrader's experts recommend getting every used car inspected, regardless of if you suspect something as serious as flood damage. "While it does require some additional time and money, an inspection could save you thousands in the long run," Moody says.

For more expert shopping tips and more than 4 million new and used cars for sale, visit AutoTrader.com.

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