



Avoid "Curbstoner" Scams When Buying a Used Car

Written by David Rosenthal

California's Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV) is warning everyone to watch out for unlicensed car dealers who peddle cars while posing as private sellers. It's easy to fall prey to this scam when scanning the most popular Internet want ads for used cars. You may think you're going to a seller's home or place of business. However, the "sellers" may just be pretending to have ties to the meeting places or they've been selling a number of untrustworthy used cars from their homes for many months if not years.

Keep in mind that if someone tells you that the car being sold is their own, you should still always ask to take it to a mechanic you know. If that's not possible, ask for the car or truck's Vehicle Identification Number (VIN) so you can run it elsewhere to check out the car's title. Your own car insurance agent may even do that for you as a business favor so you can avoid buying a vehicle already classified as "salvage" goods (and that can't be insured).

DMV's Current "Curbstoner" Sweep

In an effort to help consumers, the DMV sent out more than 160 investigators, statewide, on September 17, 2011, to catch deceitful vehicle sellers (called "Curbstoners") who were trying to sell old salvaged cars or low-end ones. These vehicles frequently have many mechanical problems that haven't been fixed or addressed prior to sale.

According to the DMV, 163 citations were handed out to presumed "curbstoners" on the first day of this operation. Clearly, these used car scams are far worse than most of us have ever imagined. Each of these unlicensed sellers can be fined thousands of dollars for *each* vehicle they try to sell in this "crooked" or unsafe manner.

Remember, if there's more than one car on display in the lot where you go to view a car supposedly being sold by a private seller, be very suspicious. In fact, the DMV says that, "[C]urbstoners create 'pop-up' lots by parking multiple vehicles in one location, clogging city streets, public parking lots and private property. They also lure

potential buyers by advertising on Websites like Craigslist; using different seller names, but the same phone number.” Fortunately, when the DMV investigators find these types of operations, they usually confiscate and tow the questionable vehicles – and then issue fees and fines to those trying to sell them.

Help Put “Curbstoners” Out of Business

The simplest way to help put these dishonest sellers out of business is to refuse to buy from them. You can then immediately contact law enforcement officials, *after* leaving the location, to tell them what you just saw. The DMV and others [also suggest](#) that buyers:

- Checking out multiple vehicles on Craigslist or other similar Web sites, should take note of the phone numbers. If you see the same one “pop up” more than once, you’re probably dealing with one of these scammers;
- Should ask to use a money order or cashier’s check. If the seller will only accept cash, think twice before buying. You will probably have no recourse after leaving the lot since the buyer’s name won’t be listed anywhere reliable;
- Need to make sure the ad’s “contact” information matches what’s on the actual vehicle’s “For Sale” sign; and
- Should carefully compare how the owner’s name is listed on the vehicle title with what’s shown on the seller’s ID. You should also ask if you can make a copy of the seller’s ID.

We hope this information will help you avoid purchasing a dangerous vehicle in the coming months and years.

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