



# Find Peace of Mind: Certified Used Vehicles

If you're too thrifty to buy a new car and are too timid to trust one that's used, now there's a third option: certified pre-owned vehicles. They can offer the best of both worlds—the lower cost of a used car with the peace of mind of factory-backed warranties.

Here's how it works: Factory-trained technicians thoroughly inspect and recondition a slightly used vehicle to meet manufacturer specifications. When the vehicle is up to snuff, it's certified as an automobile worthy of many of the same assurances that auto makers put on new cars, with manufacturer warranties lasting anywhere from three months to seven years.

As a result, a dealer can tag another \$500 to \$3,000 on the price of a qualified used car, but the buyer can breathe easier knowing that the vehicle—though not new—is reliable enough that the original manufacturer stands behind it.

## Price of Peace

About 1.5 million certified used cars were sold in 2006 according to *Automotive News*. That's barely a dent in the 17 million new and 44 million used cars sold that year, but it's a fast-growing alternative.

Dealers like it because they can charge a premium for well-kept refurbished cars. Consumers get greater assurance that they're not stuck driving someone else's problem vehicle. Car makers protect themselves with a rigorous selection process before allowing a used car to be certified.

## Car Makers' Stamp of Approval

Certification programs vary by manufacturer, but they all limit the mileage and age of cars eligible to be certified. Most are less than five years old with fewer than 60,000 miles. Typically, they're well-maintained and accident-free. Inspections cover between 100 and 300 items inside the car and out.

But just because a used car is certified doesn't mean the buyer should relax the healthy skepticism that ought to govern a big-ticket purchase. Among

the precautions you should take in pursuing a certified used car:

**Assess your needs.** Consider such factors as how you'll use the vehicle, how many miles you're likely to drive in a year, and how long you'd like to keep it.

**Shop.** Compare reliable used models that best suit your needs. Learn how much they cost without certification through classified ads or Web sites such as *kbb.com*, *Edmunds.com*, and *AutoTrader.com*.

**Compare programs.** Once you've narrowed the choices, use the Web sites above to compare manufacturers' certified pre-owned plans. Go to *kbb.com*, click on Used Car Values, Certified Pre-Owned, then Compare Programs. Find the fullest protection for the longest period. Not all of them are created equal.

And even when something is certified, understand that there's quite a variation from one manufacturer to the next as to what that means and how much value that offers to the consumer.

**Get details.** Be clear what's covered by the warranty—both what remains of the original new-car service and any extension from the certification. Compare the mileage limits on the warranty with the odometer reading.

Ask the dealer for the car's inspection report as well as its maintenance and repair history. Match the vehicle identification number (VIN) on the reports to the vehicle you're considering.

Do you have to return to the same dealer for repairs? What about out-of-town emergencies? If there's a deductible, make sure it does not exceed \$100 per visit. What's the return policy?

**Test-drive it.** (See "Make the Most of Your Test-Drive," p. 10.) Get a second opinion. Taking a used car to a mechanic of your own choosing and getting it

evaluated is a good thing.

**Haggle.** Negotiate the price. Let the dealer know you've been shopping and that you're aware of your options elsewhere.

Don't confuse a manufacturer's certified program with a dealer's effort to sell a third-party extended service agreement (see "Take a Hard Look at

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Extended Warranties, p. 18). And remember that these are supposed to be top-choice vehicles. Steer clear of used-car lots where every auto is labeled "certified."