

# USED CARS

## WHEN AND HOW TO BUY

### HOW AND WHAT TO BUY

#### Why Buy a Used Car?

How much can I save on a used vs. new car?

### TESTING A USED CAR

### How much should I pay for a used car?

SUPPLEMENT TABLE

MODEL YEAR	HEATER	RADIO	*AUTO. TRANS.	OVERDRIVE	POWER BRAKES	POWER STEERING	AIR CONDITIONING
'54	\$60	\$75	\$80-125	\$50-75	\$20-40	\$75-100	\$200-425
'53	45	60	15-90	35-50	20-25	30-100	275-350
'52	35	40	35-85	30-35		50-85	
'51	30	35	30-65	20-30		40-60	
'50	30	35	20-50	15-25			
'49	30	35	5-40	10-20			
'48	25	25	10-35	10			

\*This added figure does not apply to cars which have automatic transmissions as standard equipment.

THIS IS A tough question. The chart that appears with this article is intended to be only a rough guide to the relative values of cars listed. Used car prices change so rapidly, vary so much by regions and are so dependent on condition of a specific car that it's nearly impossible to set a dollar value on any single automobile. Because of these reasons, answering this question is like trying to pick the winner of the fifth race at Belmont. Don't despair, however, because there are several ways you can get an idea of just what is a fair price for any given car.

Read thru the classified ads of your local newspapers and find out what is being asked for the type of car you want to buy. Visit used car lots and price cars similar to the one in which you are interested. If possible attend a few auto auctions at which dealers buy cars for their lots. These are all good ways to find out the value of a used car. Another good method is to take the car of your choice for a trial drive (you'll want to anyhow to make some of the tests outlined in this article) and drive it into a couple of used car lots for an appraisal. Act as though the car was your own and don't let them think you want to trade it. Just ask what they would give you for it. If the offer is within \$100 or so of the seller's asking price, you can figure that price is not far out of line. This difference might seem large, but if you want to argue it could be cut down. Remember too that if you're buying from a used car lot, the operator has to make some profit to stay in business.

Another good thing to remember in figuring how much you should pay for a used car is this: Don't spend your last dime on a used car! Remember that no matter how good the car looks, it's been over the road and may—probably will—need some repairs.

USED CAR RETAIL PRICE LIST

CAR	1954	1953	1952	1951	1950	1949	1948
BUICK SPECIAL	\$1895	\$1425	\$1050-1075	\$ 815-850	\$ 600-630	\$ 375	\$315
BUICK ROADMASTER	2528	1750	1300	950-975	735-790	495	330
BUICK SUPER	2300	1700	1245-1365	915-945	695-725	495	345
BUICK CENTURY	2295						
CADILLAC 61, 62	3900	2800	2215	1675-1875	1400-1525	995-1065	695-765
CADILLAC 60 SPECIAL	4200	3000	2400	1925	1725	1125	825
CHEVROLET	1350-1625	1050-1325	810-895	660-750	525-585	400-430	300-315
CHRYSLER 6	1995-2700	1410-1550	1065-1200	850-950	630-750	345-545	315-360
CHRYSLER 8 NEW YORKER, IMPERIAL, SARATOGA	2235-3150	1675-2225	1250-1550	995-1200	695-790	385-700	320-345
DE SOTO 6	1825	1435	990-1090	750-825	560-620	420-465	315-345
DE SOTO 8	2050	1620	1250				
DODGE 6	1450-1700	1075-1235	750-850	700-745	545-585	400-435	285-315
DODGE 8	1825	1350					
FORD 6	1380-1575	1050-1125	795-870	560-600	425-465	315-345	225-235
FORD 8	1485-1680	1150-1250	875-945	630-675	495-540	360-390	270-300
HENRY J 4	825	635	345	240			
HENRY J 6	965	645	425	300			
HUDSON WASP, PACEMAKER	1515	1065	795-915	600-660	335-365		
HUDSON SUPER 6, SUPER WASP, COMMODORE	1625	1190	930	700	375-425	285-315	225-250
HUDSON HORNET	1950	1500	1150	875			
HUDSON JET* & 8†	1225-1440	885-975	975	735	† 410-440	† 300-335	† 250-285
KAISER	1470-1675	990-1230	585-870	525-600	300-400	235-315	165-210
LINCOLN	2775-2950	2250-2450	1725-1845	900-960	630-660	390-435	210-250
MERCURY	2000-2125	1515-1665	1185-1275	810-860	585-635	420	285
NASH METROPOLITAN COUPE	1125						
NASH 2-DR. RAMBLER	1215-1545	1080-1185	860	570	390		
NASH 600, STATESMAN	1620-1785	1230-1300	885-960	435-545	375-410	250-300	165-225
NASH AMBASSADOR	1880-2035	1410-1500	1065-1150	600-645	435-465	285-345	240-250
OLDSMOBILE 6					570-600	415-450	250-285
OLDSMOBILE 8, 68, 78, 88	2070-2175	1595-1660	1250-1320	900-975	675-710	475-525	260-285
OLDSMOBILE 98	2475	1850	1395	1050	700-765	495-520	285-300
PACKARD 200 CLIPPER	1950-2100	1500-1600	1100-1200	850-910	480-500	325-400	285-300
PACKARD CUSTOM, SUPER, 300, 400, CAVALIER, PATRICIAN	2425-2850	1875-2025	1325-1475	1035-1125	480-630	375-540	330-420
PLYMOUTH	1295-1560	1050-1125	735-780	630-685	510-540	300-420	270-300
PONTIAC 6	1620-1725	1295-1375	1025-1065	750-780	535-595	410-440	285-300
PONTIAC 8	1725-1975	1375-1450	1095-1145	795-840	570-630	410-470	300-315
STUDEBAKER CHAMPION	1325-1530	1035-1180	720-810	510-560	385-435	310-345	275-285
STUDEBAKER LAND CRUISER, COMMANDER	1695-1950	1275-1370	850-930	600-685	450-510	345-380	285-375
WILLYS	1250-1380	785-915	630-760				

(Based on Red Book National Used Car Market Report for April 1, 1955)

## How much can I save on a used vs. new car?

	NEW CAR	YEAR-OLD CAR	TWO-YEAR-OLD CAR
<b>PURCHASE PRICE</b>	\$2400.00	\$1939.20	\$1435.20
You pay 1/3 cash	800.00	646.40	478.40
You borrow: \$1600 @ 4%, 24 mos.	1814.40		
\$1292.80 @ 6%, 18 mos.		1409.16	
\$956.80 @ 6%, 18 mos.			1042.92
<b>Total cost of car</b>	2614.40	2055.56	1521.32
After four years, car is worth	674.31	517.27	382.47
<b>Four-year depreciation</b>	1940.10	1538.29	1138.85
<b>Annual depreciation</b>	485.02	384.57	284.71
<b>Annual maintenance &amp; repairs</b>	108.00	132.00	144.00
<b>Total annual cost</b>	593.02	516.57	428.71

**T**HIS IS another rough one. A look at the special comparison at the left will give you some idea. It shows that the buyer of a year-old car spends an average—and remember that's only an average—of about \$75 less per year than a new car buyer. If you buy a two-year-old car you double this savings, on the average. Buying a three-year-old model means that you spend as much as \$225 less per year than a new car buyer. Part of this savings is only an illusion, however, unless you get a really remarkable used car. Otherwise you can figure on sinking some money into repairs. One other thing that is important to a lot of us: as the chart shows, a used car buyer needs a lot less ready capital to get behind the wheel of the object of his affections than a new-car buyer.

## HOW AND WHAT TO BUY

### What Type of Used Car Should I Buy?

**Y**OU'RE the only one who can really answer this question. In the end you know best what year, make and model will suit your purposes—but maybe we can give you some tips to help make up your mind.

First, what year should you buy? Look at it this way. The average automobile depreciates from 30 to 40 per cent in its first year. It drops another 15 to 20 per cent in its second year and about 10 to 15 per cent in its third year. From then on, the decline is considerably slower and depends more on condition than anything else. This means that you can ordinarily buy a two-year-old car for half its original price or less, keep it for two years, and lose only 20 to 30 per cent in depreciation. This doesn't always hold true and varies from car to car, of course, but it makes a pretty good rule-of-thumb guide.

As to make and model, a lot depends on what you want the car for. Obviously if you're buying a second car which ordinarily won't be carrying more than one or two people, a low-priced American or small foreign-made job might fill the bill. An American coupe, business coupe or Rambler might be best; a Volkswagen, Hillman, Austin, etc. from the overseas makes might be the ticket also. In general, however, you'll want a car that is economical to operate; gives good gas mileage, is inexpensive and easy to repair.

If the used car you buy will be your all-around family car, you will naturally want something that will suit your family's needs. If you travel a lot and take a

lot of long trips—and like solid comfort—look into some of the middle and upper middle-priced cars. As you can see from the accompanying chart, many of the cars in this price bracket drop in value faster than some of the lower-priced cars. For example, you can often buy a Dodge, Buick or Mercury for not much more than \$100 over the price of a Plymouth, Chevrolet or Ford of the same year; sometimes the difference is even less. You will also find that independent makes are often good buys if they suit your needs; particularly when you are looking for a car from one to three years old, because they tend to depreciate fast during that period.

Hardtop convertibles and convertibles usually bring higher prices than four-doors or two-doors; one reason for this is that they cost more when new. Whether they are a good buy depends on you. One thing to remember is that they often have less structural rigidity and may be more subject to squeaks and rattles as they grow older than the more prosaic models.

If you've heard that station wagons are a good buy because they drop in value fast, forget it. That was true in the days of wood bodies but has changed since all-steel station wagons appeared on the scene. Station wagons now depreciate at roughly the same rate as four-doors—maybe even a little less. You can still pick up wooden-bodied wagons at a fraction of their original value, but these older models are scarcely a bargain due to the upkeep necessary to keep them from deteriorating.

### How to Buy a Used Car

Here we come to one of the most important parts of this article as far as you, the used car buyer, are concerned. As has been mentioned earlier, the relative condition of the automobile you're interested in means more than its theoretical value in the Red Book or on any chart.

Here's one point to remember, however. You're not buying a new car—and any used car you purchase you should expect to have some minor and/or major defects. You should remember and allow for this in picking out a car. Many self-styled "experts" on buying used cars would have you reject an otherwise sound car because of minor faults. This isn't realistic; if you expected an absolutely perfect automobile, you'd buy a new one. Even then you couldn't be certain. All the lemons don't grow in citrus groves! The thing to remember is the ultimate price you pay for the car. If it has a few easily remedied flaws and is priced low enough to allow you to buy it and take care of those flaws, still keeping the price within the going market range—don't worry about it. You might be getting a better bargain in the long run. This doesn't mean that you should pay top dollar for a car with a defect that will take important money to fix up. The thing to do is recognize what is wrong with the car and know what it will cost to make those things right, add those costs to the selling price, and if you come up with an attractive figure—buy it! The next section of this article is aimed at helping you discover any flaws that might be present in the car of your choice . . .

# TESTING A USED CAR

**T**HERE are a number of tests you can put a used car thru right on the lot. Check it for abuse. Is the paint good and are there any ripples in the sheet metal? Is the body rusted badly? This won't affect its mechanical behavior but is unsightly and detracts from future resale value. Has it been in a serious wreck? If it has, shun it like the plague! Repairs to the frame, major body repairs or misalignment of hood and fenders, doors and other main body sheet metal areas could be caused by a wreck. Frankly, if you're in doubt, best idea is to look for another car.

How can you determine mileage? Pay no attention to the speedometer, for one thing. This little gadget can easily be set to read whatever the seller desires. As a rule-of-thumb you can figure the car has had approximately 10,000 miles on the road for each year of its life. To pin things down a bit more look at some of the little things like those shown in accompanying pictures. For example, if the car hasn't passed the 35,000 mile mark yet, the accelerator, clutch and brake pedals should be worn—but not too badly. If the car is two or three years old and pedal covers look like new, beware. No matter what the speedometer says this car has been over the road! Same thing if the pedals look badly worn. A car with 20,000 to 30,000 miles on the clock will show some wear; that you can expect. Upholstery will give you another clue. A two or three-year-old car with normal mileage will be worn some, particularly in the driver's seat. If it has new slip-covers, look underneath to see what they might be concealing. Worn upholstery in cheaper cars means 30,000 miles.

Check the tires too. They may not be original, but they can tip you to some of the car's flaws. If they're worn unevenly the car needs some front end work; the frame may even be out of line. If the

skins are badly worn—or if they look brand new—you can figure this job has passed the 25,000-mile mark. Be wary if there are so-called "snow tires" on the back. Dealers often use such tires to hide rear end noises, blame any funny sounds from back there on the tires.

Check shocks by bouncing on bumpers. After you get the car to bouncing at its natural frequency, stop. The car should then move up or down to its normal position. If it keeps moving at least one shock needs replacing. This isn't expensive, but remember it in arriving at a price.

## Road Testing the Used Car

There are some things you can't learn about a car by hearing or watching it run; therefore, we strongly recommend you drive any car before you buy. With a conventional clutch, look for jerk and chatter when you take off and accelerate. Even if this occurs, it might not be serious. The clutch may be greasy. Even if it's worn out it would probably mean a bill of only from \$30 to \$50. However, if the car has automatic transmission and isn't operating properly, let someone else worry about it. If it's wrong, it could run you up to \$150 or more to fix.

While you're driving the car around listen carefully for whine or other noises in the transmission and rear end. Drive over a rough stretch of road and see how it handles. If there is too much bouncing, you can figure the shocks are in bad shape.

Drive around a few sharp turns. The car should handle right, without dragging to one side. Same goes for the brakes. The car should stop in a relatively straight line, not pull from side to side when you hit the pedal.

Take your hands off the wheel while driving straight ahead on a level road. The car should continue in a straight line, not wander to either side.

Drive over a rough road—preferably a

curving one. This will show up any squeaks or rattles. Try to trace them down. Most will not be important and easy to eliminate but some might indicate serious trouble. A rough road will show up flaws in the steering system or loose front end.

Check for excessive oil burning by running the car down a hill without feeding gas. (If you live where there are no hills, accelerate to about 50 mph and then take your foot off the gas pedal and let the car decelerate gradually. Slow down to about 10 mph.) Now tramp on the accelerator and watch behind you for that tell-tale puff of blue smoke which indicates worn piston rings and/or loose bearings in the engine.

The dashboard gages can supply you with a lot of information during your road test. Does the engine overheat? Does oil pressure remain high after the car is thoroughly warmed up? A no in answer to either of these questions can mean trouble. Low oil pressure is especially serious since it indicates worn bearings—a fault that probably means you should start looking at other cars.

Speaking of dashboard gages—about the only one you can't trust is the mileage indicator. The others probably won't have been tampered with; it's too difficult and expensive.

By this time you may have pretty well satisfied yourself that this is the car for you. If you really want to make sure, however, make arrangements for a mechanic you know and trust to go over the car. The few dollars you pay him for his time will be well invested. He can check compression in the cylinders, manifold vacuum, timing and many other points you probably don't have equipment to do. Get his honest opinion of the car and ask for an estimate of how much it will take to make any needed repairs. Keep this amount in mind when you arrive at a final price with the seller.

## Why Buy a Used Car?

**T**HERE ARE a number of reasons why people buy used cars. One of the main—and most obvious—ones is that we all can't afford new cars. However, there are other good ones too. Now that auto makers can easily supply the demand for new cars, more normal rates of depreciation are in effect once again. Gone are the lush days of the late 'forties—and even early 'fif-

ties—when you could buy a new car, drive it for a year or so and still sell it for almost what you paid. Many buyers today feel it's only good business to let someone else take the heavy depreciation a car suffers in its first year or two of life. They prefer to shop around for a late model in good shape and save that initial depreciation. Other buyers go into the used car

market because they prefer a bigger, more expensive model that is a year or two old to a low-priced new car.

More and more we are finding another, relatively new type of used car buyer also; one who has a new car and buys an older model as a second car. If, for these or any other reasons, you are looking for a used car, the information here will be helpful.