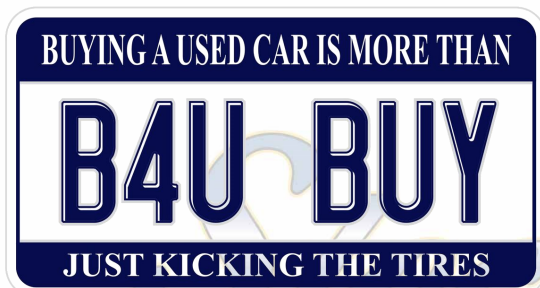


# Beauty Is Only Skin Deep, Rust and Junk May Lie Underneath

## How to Buy a Used Car, Especially in the State of Illinois

There is a difference between a car in good repair vs. one that is well-maintained, but B4U-BUY-IT, know these tips.

1. The most important thing to know is that Illinois is a "Buyer Beware" state; that means **you** are responsible for what you have purchased! This is the second-largest purchase you will make, and a bad buy can be devastating.
2. Pick popular. The more popular a vehicle is, the more likely that parts are easy to obtain used, new or aftermarket (meaning another manufacturer is making a similar part or the exact same part). Also, it's easier to find repair and service information. Cars have become complex, and the information and specialty tools are just as complex. Information isn't free. Most manufacturers charge extra for detailed information specific to your vehicle.



3. Research websites such as Kelly Blue Book or Edmunds for values, general ratings and reviews about the vehicle. The National Motor Vehicle Title Information System (NMVTIS) tries to track and prevent the unknowing sale of flood-damaged vehicles. When Hurricane Katrina hit Louisiana and Hurricane Sandy hit New Jersey, we heard that truckloads of flooded vehicles were shipped to other states to be dried out, cleaned up, retitled and sold to unsuspecting buyers. You need to know that of all the states that are participating in the NMVTIS program at some level, only recently did the State of Illinois comply with title sharing. For more information visit <http://www.nmvtis.gov/> website.
4. Google the 17-digit Vehicle Identification Number (VIN) found at the base of the driver's side windshield or driver's door jamb tag. We are often surprised by what we find when we do a possible purchase inspection. (I was inspecting a vehicle for a possible purchase, and while Googling the VIN, I found that it had been "For Sale" for 14 months between 5 different car lots. How is that possible? Keep in mind that if a car lot hasn't sold a car within 90 days, they will usually trade it off to another lot to keep their lot looking like everything sells.) Buying a used vehicle is very risky business! Make sure you always involve a professional. Just like a house, it should be inspected because 'beauty is only skin deep.'

5. Beware of VIN data banks such as the well-known Carfax. They can only report what has been made public or what they have been told. We often find evidence of body work that was never reported. It is not the only approved VIN data bank. There is CheckThatVIN, InstaVIN, TitleCheck.us, VINSmart, InAudit, DMVdesk, AutoCheck, and RigDig for semi-tractor trailer trucks. All these VIN data banks can be found on the National Motor Vehicle Title Information System website. But before selecting one, try tip #4 first.

6. The walk around. It's more than just kicking tires. Walk around the vehicle, and verify that all four tires are the same brand and size; that the paint and body panels look even and clear; and that the glass is clean and free of major chips and cracks (small cracks will grow into large cracks). Open the trunk with the key and cable and smell the inside for musty odors (leaking trunk or rear window seals). Sit in the back seat; it gives you a whole new perspective. Leave what's under the hood to a professional, but make sure you can pop the hood and get it open on your own.

7. The test drive. Before starting the engine, turn off the radio. Now listen to the engine while you start it. Do this a couple of times; starters don't always act up every time. Listen to the vehicle as you place it in gear and drive backward and forward. Have someone watch the tailpipe for smoke when first started and when revving the engine a little. Operate all buttons and switches; listen to window, seat and sun roof motors. Do all windows go down and back up? Does the blower motor have all speeds, and does the air switch from floor to vent to defroster? Notice any odors? Hear any whistling? All this information can be helpful to your technician when he examines your vehicle because he has only a small window of opportunity to look over your vehicle.



8. Involve a professional. 'Beauty is only skin deep,' and car lots have a great deal of experience in curb appeal. But the true story lies underneath. No one can tell you how long it will last and whether or not the transmission or engine will last. What we are looking for is evidence of past care. Was it well-maintained or ignored? Was it repaired correctly or were shortcuts taken? Its state of health at this point in time will dictate its future reliability. You should get a detailed inspection report and a list of current issues. We also provide a reliability report from a specialized website.

9. **A must do!** The State of Illinois requires an official scan of the OBDII Emissions Test (the onboard computer runs the test and has verified that the vehicle has passed – 1996 and newer). However, unlike Missouri that requires it tested and verified before licensing, Illinois does not. This is where most buyers get tripped up. The "Check Engine Light" is out, so therefore there is no problem. Right? WRONG! Many times the car lot or previous owner will reset the light to clear the code. Until the vehicle has been driven for a while to run its emissions tests, it will not have the light on. After the new owner drives around for a while after buying it, the light comes on. Have a professional verify that all the emission monitors have run, passed and no pending codes have been set. Also, since this is not the only computer on the car, have the entire network scanned for codes. Many of these computers can set codes but don't have a light to inform you, so we recommend a network scan every year.



10. **Two keys are better than one, fobs included!** In the olden days, we used to be happy with just getting one set of keys. And it wasn't that big a deal to simply run down to the local hardware store and have another set or two made. But those days are pretty much behind us with the advent of computer chip keys. Some of these computer chip keys cost as much as \$300! So make sure you get two sets of keys/fobs with that used car deal. And just because that car you're looking at has two sets of keys/fobs doesn't mean you're ready to go--there is more to know. How we use keys has changed. We used to unlock our car doors mechanically with a key thousands of times. I know, life was tough in those days. And when the driver's door lock failed us, we could still get in on the passenger side. But the key fob changed all that and life got easier. Because we no longer use our door locks regularly, the manufacturers removed the passenger side door lock to save money and made the driver's door lock of lesser quality. Remember that old line, "use it or lose it"? Just so happens that this applies to the driver's door lock. Because the door

locks are seldom used, are made cheaper, corrode easier, and don't wear to match the key, they are doomed to fail. So we need to perform a key/fob test to make sure everything is in working order. Examine the keys/fobs for equal wear, identical logos, color and abuse. Some keys, like the all-in-one fob with folding blade, are pretty difficult to mimic. Keep in mind that the onboard computer must be programmed to acknowledge all keys and fobs or they will not work. Take only one set of the keys to the car at a time. The reason for this is that many computers will recognize a key with a security chip nearby and allow a blank key to start the vehicle. Use the door key to mechanically lock and unlock the door. Verify that it does or does not have a passenger door lock. Did the key bind, move stiffly or not at all? Now start the engine and be aware of how the key moves in the ignition. Try turning multiple times to get a feel for the ignition. Then lock and unlock the door with the key fob. Do all door locks operate properly? Go get the other set of keys and repeat the process. Don't forget to try the trunk lock with a key (and some fobs have a trunk release button) and the inside release lever. You don't want to get home to find out one set of keys is a fake or that the other fob works incorrectly.



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