5 BASIC STEPS TO CAR BUYING

Buying a car means matching wits with a seasoned professional. But if you know what to expect, you’ll have a much better chance of getting a really good deal!

There’s no question that buying a car can be an intimidating experience. But it doesn’t have to be. First of all, you have in your hands all of the information you need to make an informed choice. Secondly, if you approach the purchase logically, you’ll always maintain control of the decision. Start with the following basic steps:

1. Narrow your choice down to a particular class of car—sports, station wagon, mini-van, sedan, large luxury, SUV, truck, or economy car. These are general classifications and some cars may fit into more than one category. In most cases, The Car Book presents the vehicles by size class.

2. Determine what features are really important to you. Most buyers consider safety on the top of their list, which is why the “Safety” chapter is right up front in The Car Book. Airbags, power options, ABS, and the number of passengers, as well as “hidden” elements such as maintenance and insurance costs, should be considered at this stage in your selection process.

3. Find three or four cars that meet the needs you outlined above and your pocketbook. It’s important not to narrow your choice down to one car because then you lose all your bargaining power in the showroom. (Why? Because you might lose the psychological ability to walk away from a bad deal!) In fact, because cars today are more similar than dissimilar, it’s not hard to keep three or four choices in mind. In the car rating pages in the back of the book, we suggest some competitive choices for your consideration. For example, if you are interested in the Honda Accord, you should also consider the Toyota Camry and Ford Fusion.

4. Make sure you take a good, long test drive. The biggest car buying mistake most of us make is to overlook those nagging problems that seem to surface only after we’ve brought the car home. Spend at least an hour driving the car without a salesperson preferably. If a dealership won’t allow you to testdrive a car without a salesperson, go somewhere else. The test-drive should include time on the highway, parking, taking the car in and out of your driveway or garage, sitting in the back seat, and using the trunk or storage area.

TIP: Whatever you do, don’t talk price until you’re ready to buy!

5. This is the stage most of us dread—negotiating the price. While price negotiation is a car buying tradition, a few carmakers and dealers are trying to break tradition by offering so-called “no-haggle pricing.” Since they’re still in the minority and because it’s very hard for an individual to establish true competition between dealers, we offer a great means to avoid negotiating altogether by using the non-profit CarBargains pricing service described on page 68.

THE 180-DEGREE TURN

When buying a car, remember that you have the most important weapon in the bargaining process: the 180-degree turn. Be prepared to walk away from a deal, even at the risk of losing the “very best deal” your salesperson has ever offered, and you will be in the best position to get a real “best deal.” Remember: Dealerships need you, the buyer, to survive.