

How to Avoid Odometer Fraud

Odometer fraud happens when the mileage on a used vehicle's title and odometer are altered. Odometer tampering is not only illegal, but expensive. Because the buyer thinks the car has fewer miles, she pays more for the car - and more in insurance and repairs. The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration estimates that odometer fraud costs buyers about \$10 billion every year.

Steps:

1. Compare the current mileage with the odometer statement the seller received when she bought the car.
2. Check the tires. The car's original tires should last for about 60,000 miles, so new tires on a car with low mileage should alert you to take a closer look.
3. Look for things that indicate the mileage of the car. Oil change reminder stickers, warranty cards and service receipts will usually have the mileage noted.
4. Have a reputable mechanic inspect the car thoroughly. The mechanic should look for wear on the engine, suspension and steering, as well as problems with the emissions system. These areas will show signs of high mileage. Also ask the mechanic to see if the odometer cover has been removed.
5. Be especially alert when buying certain models: Popular models for rolling back miles include sport utility vehicles, Chevy Luminas, Ford Tauruses and Chrysler minivans.
6. Ask the DMV for the car's title history and previous owner's name. You need to provide the DMV with the vehicle identification number (VIN). Reconsider buying this particular vehicle if the title shows it was sold several times in a short period.
7. Be wary of retired, low-mileage fleet vehicles. Unscrupulous buyers will clean the car up, put on a new brake pedal cover, roll back the odometer and resell it for a tidy profit. These cars are typically driven more than 30,000 miles a year.

Hot Tips:

- Order a free copy of AAA's AUTOgram newsletter. Send a self-addressed #10 envelope to AUTOgram/Odometer, MS 75, 1000 AAA Drive, Heathrow, FL 32746.
- Use Carfax to check your car's history. There is a charge for this service, but it's much quicker than the DMV.