

How to Avoid Buying a Hot Car

Not all stolen cars are wrecked or carted off to the chop shop for parts. Thieves have found that for a little trouble, they can roll back the odometer and sell a stolen car in the newspaper for a song. If you're the unlucky buyer and the car is eventually tracked down, too bad for you. Here's how to avoid buying a stolen vehicle.

Steps:

1. Ask yourself why this car is going for such a great price. Has it been wrecked or flood-damaged? Has someone tampered with the mileage? Is the car hot?
2. Check the seller's name and address against the information on the title and registration.
3. Verify who financed the car and who insures it.
4. Examine the vehicle identification number (VIN) plate. This is located on the driver's side dash close to the windshield, and can be viewed from outside. Scratches, dents or loose rivets indicate tampering. A magnifying glass may help.
5. Make sure the VIN matches the number on the title.
6. Be suspicious of a fresh paint job. While some legitimate sellers will have a car painted to spiff it up, that new paint may also be hiding mismatched parts or the original color of a reported stolen vehicle.
7. Take a copy of the title to the DMV and ask them to run a title history. (If an insurance company is listed as one of the owners, you don't want this car; it's likely been totaled.)

Tips:

- Remember: If it sounds too good to be true, it probably is.
- If you buy a stolen car, you risk having to keep up the payments even if it's taken away - and you can be charged with receiving stolen property.

Warnings:

- If you suspect a car may be stolen, notify the police.