

**Everything you ever
wanted to know about
buying a car online
in the USA***

***but were afraid to haggle**

Susan Z. Martin

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Where Can I Buy Anything Online, Inc.
3900 Rowley Road
Victoria, British Columbia, Canada
V8N 4C2

This eBook is dedicated to the thousands of people that visit [Where Can I Buy A Car Online](#) every month. We'd like to thank you for making our site one of the most popular automotive sites on the Internet.

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Why we wrote this eBook

Our website [Where Can I Buy A Car Online](#) came into being as a direct consequence of Michael Korican's frustration with the search for online information about purchasing a car in the summer of 2000. His family was looking for a new car and after hours spent going to mediocre websites and following false leads delivered by search engines he was no further ahead in terms of decision making or knowledge about this "big ticket" purchase.

That was nearly six years ago and although online resources are more common and of better quality now, researching, buying, financing, insuring a car using the Internet is still time consuming and confusing for the uninitiated.

That's why we decided to write this eBook: to help you get the most out of the Internet in the least amount of time when you begin your online car shopping process.

Unlike other books (whether hard copy or eBooks) our book focuses solely on the Internet approach to car research and shopping.

Finally, another difference in our eBook from both traditional and other eBooks is that we are involved with online car research and buying sites on a daily basis and our eBook will be updated frequently to reflect changes in online resources.

We encourage eBook users to let us know of errors or omissions in our eBook. When we release a new version we'll notify users via e-mail of its new download location.

About [Where Can I Buy A Car Online](#)

I've already told you a little bit about our website but here's some other stuff that you might like to know:

- We attempt to update the site completely every 6-9 months by revisiting all the sites listed (although this is becoming more difficult to accomplish as the site grows ever larger)
- We link check the site monthly for broken links so that you don't end up clicking into dead space (presently we have outlinks to over 2,500 pages)
- We have a very popular 'just for fun' page that we call [Driversions](#) – here you'll find car wallpaper, downloadable games, branded merchandise and more
- We list online resources for car shoppers in the UK, the USA and Canada
- Our site is completely free for visitors to use – we make our money through affiliate marketing and by selling advertising on our site
- We use no bandwidth intensive techniques on our site and we keep graphics to a minimum making our pages quick to load even on slower connections

We attempt to be responsive to legitimate queries, comments and complaints about the site and we encourage you to alert us to sites that you think we should review by using our suggestion form.

Lastly, we try to balance our site's purpose – providing the visitor with free information to assist them in the online research and purchase of a car – with our need to earn revenue. Most sites do not pay to be reviewed and no site can pay to have its reviews improved. It is a difficult balancing act to maintain editorial integrity while still making money but we think we do it quite well. As always, we rely on our visitors to let us know how we are doing.

How to Use this eBook

The rest of this eBook is dedicated to helping you research and buy a car online.

How you use the book is up to you. If you find it easier to work with hard copy you can print out the whole book or simply the pages that are of interest to you. We've included two copies of all of our worksheets – one copy in the 'natural' place in the book where we refer to it and another copy in a 'Tables' section at the end of the book. That way you can simply print out any tables you need by going to the back of the book and selecting them. For some sections of the book you may want to work with it open on the screen so that you can link to the websites mentioned.

If you're new to the idea of using the Internet to buy things or if you're at the early stages of planning your car purchase you may want to read the whole book over and then work through it step-by-step.

We've tried to arrange the book in what we think is a logical order but some sections may not apply to you. Sections of the book are independent from each other and you should be able to start at any point it and still understand the information presented.

Internet URLs may be spelled out or only appear as underlined, blue words within the text. In the latter case, you'll need to click on them while connected to the Internet for them to open in a browser window.

Let's get started!

“The rise of online car buying will radically alter the automobile and retailing landscape.”

James L. McQuivey, Senior Analyst
Forrester Research Inc.
February 1999

Buying a Car in the 21st Century

The Internet has changed many shopping experiences drastically but there are few that have been impacted as strongly as car buying.

After all, many items – from clothing to house wares to toys – have been sold from mail order catalogues for many years. And although the Internet has added more features to this shopping experience, it hasn't really uncovered any previously unavailable aspects of the 'mail order' buying process or provided you with radically more information than you had previously.

But online car shopping is very different than the offline process. First of all you can now find information about virtually any car instantly. You can learn about a car's fuel economy, safety ratings, options, color choices and even consumer ratings at no cost, 24/7 without ever leaving the comfort of your home (although you may have to pay for certain information, such as that from Consumer Ratings).

Secondly you can find out what's hot and what's not, giving you bargaining power and helping you understand whether your desired car is going to be easy to find and priced lower than MSRP or difficult to obtain and significantly more than MSRP.

You can also find out via online forums and buying sites what the going price is for a vehicle. You never again have to wonder if you're getting a 'good price' or being taken for a ride. And you can also find a ballpark figure for the value of your used car so that you don't get ripped off when you trade it in. You can also ensure that you know about incentive, rebate and [holdbacks](#) (although the last one can be difficult to find reliable information about) available on your car of choice.

Will you ever know as much as the dealer – especially about holdbacks, recently introduced incentive programs and other 'behind the scenes' costs? No. But the Internet will allow you to bargain from a much stronger position than consumers had previously. You can walk on to a dealer's lot armed with information that simply wasn't available to the consumer of ten years ago.

So who's buying online? Of the approximately 17 million new vehicles sold in 2001 only about 6% were bought online (versus 4.7% in 2000) and this percentage seems to be holding steady (not rising dramatically to the 20% as predicted by Gomez Advisors in this [1999 article](#)). It's hard to find out exactly who these buyers are without paying big bucks for the closely guarded information (for example, J.D. Powers Automotive Shopper report costs \$15,000 US). However, several news items suggest that the majority of online car researchers and buyers are relatively affluent, younger and that the higher the price tag on the car the more likely that the buyer will have researched it online.

Whether the car is actually bought online or not, researching cars online has become nearly universal with 64% researching new car purchases online in 2003 (versus 54% in 2000 and 40% in 1999). Interestingly third party sites such as Kelley Blue Book and Edmunds score highest in terms of usefulness and user-friendliness over manufacturer sites.

So who is selling cars online? Unfortunately (for consumers but not for dealers) the legal system in the United States means that no matter how you buy a car it is actually coming from a dealer's lot. And unless you have the car delivered, you will have to set foot on that lot to get your vehicle. It is presently against the law for manufacturers to sell cars directly to consumers and naysayers say that it will never happen – that manufacturers are simply too big and complex to ever be able to custom produce cars to order for millions of consumers.

Many dealerships are participating in both direct selling and third party buying sites. For example, if you wish to buy a new Chrysler PT Cruiser you can go to [CarsDirect](#) or [Autobytel](#) to buy it or simply go directly to the Chrysler site. All three sites will allow you to configure the vehicle as you wish (but to varying degrees – the Chrysler site will, not surprisingly, offer you the best ability to customize your vehicle). The [CarsDirect](#) site may supply an upfront price (depending on which state you live in) while the [Autobytel](#) and Chrysler sites will return a quote on your configured car via e-mail or telephone.

At this time there is no mechanism to allow you to configure, order and purchase your desired car directly from a manufacturer without dealer involvement. Will that ever happen? I don't know. Certainly the large and politically powerful dealership lobby does not want to see this happen and industry pundit Art Spinella of CNW Marketing Research seems to think it's unlikely it will ever occur. (Did you know that the National Automobile Dealer's Association has over 19,700 member dealerships and that last year the top US dealership made \$487 million in gross sales?)

Why do people want to buy cars online? There are lots of reasons — the first probably being convenience. It's much more efficient to design your car online and see an upfront price or request a price quote than it is to drive all over town looking for a car that matches your requirements and then stopping and asking for a price on it.

The second reason is eliminating hassle. Is there anyone – even including former car dealers – that doesn't have a nightmarish tale of hassles encountered during a new car purchase? Demeaning, rude and aggressive techniques are legend in the car sales business and many people are happy to do whatever is necessary to avoid haggling over prices and being subjected to salesmen's mind games.

The third reason is one that is only coming to light as more people use the Internet to buy cars. Internet car shoppers save money. A recent article on the Edmunds site had Internet shoppers paying the same as or less than traditional shoppers – and all without the hassle of in-person shopping.

Choosing the right car for you

How much can you afford

I've put this criterion first because I believe this should be the most important factor in deciding which car is right for you.

I also have some pretty radical concepts to present around figuring out how much you should spend on a car.

First of all, have you considered whether you need a car of your own at all? Car share co-ops are springing up in towns and cities all over the United States (for an up-to-date list see <http://www.carsharing.net/>). If you only use a car occasionally and get around most of the time using other methods (bus, bike or on foot) check out the car share option.

My next suggestion is that you buy as little car as you need as possible. Let me explain using a housing analogy. If you're buying a home, do you look for one with six bedrooms and four bathrooms just because your house fills up with relatives at Christmastime? Or do you look for a place with 2-3 bedrooms and 1 1/2 baths for you and your spouse. Unless you're enormously wealthy you probably do the latter. Apply this same logic to choosing how much vehicle to buy.

Don't go for a more expensive or larger model or more costly brand based on the off chance that you'll buy a cottage in the mountains and need four-wheel drive to get there or that you'll get that big raise and be able to afford the top-of-the-line choice.

So how do you work out how much you can afford? This [article](#) will help you decide and you can try out this [basic calculator](#) from Nolo, this more sophisticated [calculator](#) from Bankrate.com. or this [loan calculator](#) from WFS Financial (use the first link to an affordability calculator).

Alternately you can simply get out a piece of paper and list all your monthly expenses and deduct them from your monthly income to see what you can afford. No matter whether you use an online calculator or pen and paper, remember to budget in annual expenses that may not be amortized on a monthly budget (such as house taxes or income tax). If you're like most people you'll probably see that the numbers say you can't actually afford a car at all! Then what are you going to do?

If you have a car now and the numbers indicate that you can't afford to get a new (or used) one then perhaps you will have to find a way to get some more use out of the old one. If that's the route you decide to go why not start a savings regimen right now so that by the time your present car packs it in for good you'll hopefully have at least some money put aside to help pay for a new one?

If you simply must get a new vehicle (by new I mean new to you – it could be a used or new car) then you will have to take out financing to buy it. This is not necessarily a bad thing as there are some very attractive deals available right now for those with good credit. Obviously though the money to pay for the vehicle will have to come from somewhere and you need to look at your expenses meticulously to see what can be reduced or eliminated so that making payments on your new vehicle doesn't cause you too much financial hardship.

New or Used

For most people the choice of whether to buy new or used is simply a budgetary choice. New cars are simply so much more expensive than used – for example a 2006 Honda Civic coupe has an MSRP of around \$14,400 while a 2003 Honda Civic coupe, similarly equipped and with less than 20,000 miles on it can be found for around \$11,000.

Also new car prices are much more influenced by consumer demand. If a car is popular and in limited supply you're not going to be able to get it for anywhere near MSRP and even when you pay more you may be looking at a long wait before it's available.

Although this situation also applies to used cars with certain brands and models being popular and fetching premium prices the market is not as heavily influenced by consumer demand as the new car market.

Another consideration between new and used is insurance costs. New cars are favorite targets for car thieves (see the [Top Ten List of stolen cars](#)) and because of this insurance rates can be exorbitant for some makes and models (check out this [article](#) for which cars are cheapest to insure).

There also comes a point in many people's lives when it makes economic sense to go with a new car because the old one has become too costly to maintain, too inefficient to run or simply too unreliable.

To help you make the decision whether new or used is right for you check out these resources:

[Used Car Buying Quiz](#) – it's a little bit tongue in cheek but this article is helpful and informative

[How to Get a Used Car Bargain](#) – be sure and read all three parts of this excellent article

Choosing the Right Technology

The automotive industry is at a turning point. As supplies of cheap fossil fuels are depleted and concerns about climate change grow, new technologies are emerging to power cars that don't rely on traditional hydrocarbon fuels or make use of these fuels in innovative and more efficient ways.

So now another choice is thrown into the mix – what technology are you going to buy and conversely, if the technology you favor is still too costly or experimental for consumers, what are you going to buy as a compromise? Here's a review of the major alternative technologies coming up (some are already in use) and our recommendations for today's car shoppers.

Current Non-Standard Fuel Choices

- **EV (Electric Vehicles)**

Largely a response to California's tough emission standards, there are some electric vehicles actually available ([Corbin Sparrow](#), ZENN from Montreal's [feelgoodcars.com](#)). Not much speed or range but quiet and non-polluting. (You do need a long extension cord, though.) Now that emission standards are relaxing, development dollars seem to be moving to other technologies.

Our recommendation: steer clear unless you want an urban commuter car(t) and a clear conscience.

- **Hybrids (Gas/Electric Hybrids)**

The imports were first to market with gas/electric hybrid cars, such as the Toyota Prius. Honda now has a hybrid Civic available. The Big Three will counter in 2006 with more hybrid options including hybrid SUVs (which kind of seems like an oxymoron to us).

Our recommendation: a good idea if you are buying new (but don't even think about getting something that takes truck tires).

Other Fuel Choices still on the Drawing Boards

- **Clean Diesel**

Diesel fuel can be up to four times as dirty as gasoline, particularly at low engine temperatures. Westport Innovations is developing a diesel engine that emits virtually no pollution.

Our hope: this would go along way to making SUVs acceptable - now if they could only make them safer for the people in and around them.

- **Hydrogen**

Fuel from the most abundant element on the planet that only has heat and pure water as by-products - would this be nirvana or what? The only pesky problem is that creating hydrogen currently consumes almost as much hydrocarbons as burning it in cars. Oh yeah, and the fact that there are no hydrogen refueling stations built yet.... However, all the manufacturers and energy companies are spending billions on this. Stuart Energy and Ballard Power are two names to watch.

Our hope: this would be very nice, especially if Jeremy Rifkin's idea of the Energy Web came true (everyone owns mini-Hydrogen plants, networked like the World Wide Web).

Online Tools for Choosing the Right Car

There are a number of tools available for choosing a car and each tool has different strengths and weaknesses. To see our top picks go to our [Help me Choose page](#).

I suggest you use two or three of the tools on this page to create a list of your top ten choices. Then look at your top ten choices from each tool and pick the top five cars by choosing the five cars that appear most frequently on your list. An example is shown below:

#	Help me choose tool #1 – top ten cars	Help me choose tool #2 – top ten cars	Help me choose tool #3 – top ten cars
10	Honda Civic LX	Hyundai Accent	Pontiac Sunfire
9	Toyota Camry	Ford Focus	Saturn Ion
8	Dodge Neon	Kia Rio Sedan	Suzuki Aerio
7	Ford Focus	Isuzu Rodeo Sport	Chevrolet Cavalier
6	Chevrolet Cavalier	Kia Spectra	Nissan Sentra
5	GMC Sonoma	Mazda Protege	Kia Rio Sedan
4	Ford Ranger	Nissan Sentra	Toyota Camry
3	Hyundai Accent	Mitsubishi Lancer	Ford Focus
2	Hyundai Elantra	Honda Civic LX	Dodge Neon
1	Isuzu Rodeo Sport	Dodge Neon	Hyundai Accent

Table I

Top five cars derived from above table:

Car Make and Model	Score
Ford Focus	19/30
Hyundai Accent	14/30
Toyota Camry	13/30
Chevrolet Cavalier	13/30
Honda Civic LX	12/30

For a full explanation of how to use the table above and for a blank example see the Tables section at the back of the book.

Comparing your Top Choices

Once you have five cars picked out go to any one (or as many as you'd like to use) of the Car Comparison Tools listed on our [Car Comparison Tools](#) page.

Obviously you will first compare characteristics displayed (i.e. cost, features, fuel economy) to assess each car's suitability. But if you are having trouble choosing between similar cars try this exercise – on a piece of paper list your top five wants in a car and your top five 'don't wants' (an example is below). Then use this list to score each car on your top five list. This may help you choose between very similarly equipped cars.

Wants	Don't Wants
Fuel economy > 27 mpg	Wheelbase greater than 120"
Side airbags	Cargo volume < 11 cubic feet
Manual transmission version available	Trunk mounted CD player
Sunroof option available	Total weight of more than 2,300 lbs
Available in mustard yellow	Maximum front leg room of < 40 inches

Table II

Making the Final Decision

Hopefully after following the previous steps you will have arrived at a choice of one or two cars. But if you can't choose among your final five choices then simply carry all of them over to the next step in the process. After all as you research your choices further you may find something that 'disqualifies' one of your top choices or causes you to consider a different car altogether.

Now, on to researching your chosen car(s).

Researching your Dream Car

At this point I'm going to suggest using old-fashioned techniques to keep your information organized. Get a 3" three-ring binder and a set of dividers. You might also want to buy some of those plastic-pocket pages (3-hole punched) to go in the binder – these pages are good for storing newspaper and magazine clippings. Remember to date and put the source on any material you cut from magazines and/or newspapers.

Create a section in the binder – using the dividers – for each of your chosen cars. Within the section for each car, again using dividers, you are going to create several subsections. Instructions on each of these subsections follow.

Specifications* – using the manufacturer site or the [specific model page](#) review the specifications for your chosen car(s). Print out any of the specs that are important to you (for example perhaps fuel economy is important but dimensions are not – you could print out the former but not the latter).

Options Available* - again, by looking at the [manufacturer](#) or [specific model page](#) determine if options that are important to you are available. You may wish to create a simple list (see example below) to track whether each car has the options you want or simply print out the applicable web page information.

Description of option	Available?	Price
Manual Transmission	Yes	\$1,325
Heated front seats	No	N/A
Sunroof	Yes	\$675

Table III

Safety* - go to [NHTSA](#) and pull up results for your chosen car. If none are available look for the previous year's model and if it is similarly configured and doesn't seem to be drastically different from this year's model use those safety results.

Reliability* - read over this [article](#) to learn about reliability and use this section of the [MSN Autos site](#) to look for reliability information on previous years' models. Print out any reliability information that is pertinent.

Insurance Costs* - check out [this Money Central](#) article for information on what influences insurance costs and how to lower your insurance premiums. For actual costs go to any (or all) of the sites on our [Insurance](#) page. Print out copies of your quotes.

Ownership costs* - these are difficult to quantify but reading [this article](#) may give you some idea how your selected car rates in terms of overall ownership cost.

Also create sections for Anecdotal Information, Test Drives, Current Deals and Quotes. You'll put information in these sections later.

Gathering Anecdotal Information

The Internet has made it possible for individuals to share their opinions on a variety of issues freely and easily and this certainly extends to the world of new or used cars. There's a lot to be learned online from owners of the car you are thinking of buying.

Check out the following sources for anecdotal information* on your chosen car. You could create a single document by cutting and pasting material from a variety of these sites (always making sure than anything you cut and past has the URL, car make and model and date included so you can go back to it should you want to). Or you could simply print out everything that you think is relevant.

[Epinions](#)

[CarReview.com](#)

[ConsumerSearch](#)

You could also use our [specific model page](#) to produce a report that contains user reviews of your selected vehicle.

*Make sure that all material you print out contains the exact make and model of the car that the information refers to as well as the URL that the information was taken from and the date.

Re-evaluating your Choice

It's possible that you may now, after having gathered more information on one or more cars, have changed your mind about which car you want to buy.

If you have changed your mind you'll need to go back to the '[Help me choose](#)' tools and repeat that step. Try to identify what factors about the car you chose (and have now discarded) do not meet your criteria and try and eliminate them from the next car you choose.

If you have arrived at a single car choice then you're ready to move on to the next step – not buying the car but taking it for a test drive to 'seal' your decision that this is the right car for you.

The Test Drive

A test drive can be used to not only assess your chosen car for suitability but also to get a feel for the different dealerships and salespeople in your area.

Enlist a friend to go with you and drive the same car at two or three different dealerships if possible. Do two drives yourself (driving) and two as a passenger. Remember to check out both front and back seats from a passenger point of view.

Each drive should last about twenty minutes and should allow you to test acceleration and handling on both flat and hilly terrain. Test parking and abrupt cornering. If you're lucky perhaps it will be raining and you can see how the car handles on a wet road.

Here are a few sites that offer good tips on how to get the most out of a test drive:

The [Secrets of a Test Drive](#)

Edmunds – [How to Test Drive a Car](#)

Intellichoice – [Test Drive Like a Pro](#)

Record your impressions during the test drive by dictating them to your friend or making notes immediately after the test drive finishes (if alone). Add your test drive notes to the appropriate car subsection in your binder.

Ready to Buy

So are you one hundred percent sure that your chosen car is right for you? If you are, it's time to move on to the next step in the process, which is getting prices.

If you've got a trade in read the next section – if not skip directly to “Buying Your Dream Car Online”.

Your Trade In

How Much is Your Current Car Worth

Using online tools it is much easier to get a good idea of how much your trade in is worth – check out the following sites (why not use all three – they’re free) for a value on your used car:

[Edmunds](#)

[Kelley Blue Book](#)

[NADA guides](#)

We suggest you not only use the sites listed below but that also refer to used car sites such as [AutoTrader](#) and [eBay Motors](#) to assess how cars similar to yours are priced.

Disposal Strategies

We would suggest that you try selling your present car yourself unless you either don’t care whether you lose money on the deal and/or you simply don’t have the time or inclination. Women may wish to think very seriously about whether or not they want to attempt to sell their car privately as it may expose their contact information and address to strangers. If you can locate the car at a friend’s house rather than at your house that may be a possible solution.

You can list your car online with any of the sites listed on our [Used Classifieds Scorecard](#) page. You can also, of course, list your car in the traditional outlets such as newspaper classifieds or by simply putting it on your front lawn and putting a For Sale sign on it.

There is a helpful article on preparing [your car for sale](#) from MSN Autos

If you decide to sell your trade-in to the dealership that is selling you a new car go prepared with all the valuation information you can find and be ready to bargain HARD. If you manage to get the lowest value shown online for your car you will have done well.

Finally, if your car is simply such a wreck that no one will pay anything for it consider donating it to a charity – learn more at <http://www.donate-car-for-charity.com/>.

Buying Your Dream Car Online

Online buying sites for new cars basically fall into two general categories – quote request sites (like [Autobytel](#)) and sites that provide an upfront price (like [CarsDirect](#)).

In the quote request model you configure a car as you wish and e-mail the configuration details to a dealership or third-party (the latter if you're using a site like [Autobytel](#) for example). You'll receive a response via your preferred method (phone, fax or e-mail) with a price quote and availability information.

In the upfront price model you'll configure a car as you wish and see a price and availability information instantly without surrendering any personal information (in the quote request model you'll have to surrender at least your e-mail address and/or phone number).

However you should be aware that depending on which state you live in and what brand of car you are buying you may find that even [CarsDirect](#) does not offer you an upfront price option. Certain brand/location combinations only offer purchasers the quote request option and you may have no choice but to deal with a dealership.

The quote request sites have two major approaches – you'll either be able to configure your chosen car and ask for a quote on it ([Autobytel](#) and [CarSmart](#)) or simply search available inventory for a car that matches your requirements ([NADA](#) and [AutoNation](#)). In the latter model MSRP will be displayed but you will probably have to request a quote to get the actual selling price.

No matter which quote request model is in use, you'll usually have to surrender personal information – often on a non-secure form. You'll also only typically be allowed to request a quote from only one dealer. Because of these factors and the lack of the upfront price, the quote request method is not our favorite, but it can be useful for comparison shopping.

Finally there is a site that doesn't fit the mold – [MyCar.com](#). MyCar.com is a reverse auction site where you indicate that you are looking for a specific car (make, model, year, features etc) and dealers in your area submit prices for your consideration. If at the end of your auction you don't have a price that suits you then you are not obligated to buy (but you will be out the auction fee). Check them out to see if their approach to online car buying is one that interests you.

Making the System Work for You

Obviously you want to get the optimal combination of low price and availability. It's no good getting a rock-bottom price quote only to be told you'll have to wait three months to get your car (unless you've planned for that wait).

Once you are ready to buy your first step should be to return to the manufacturer's site for your chosen car and configure it the way you want. This will allow you to establish if the MSRP has changed (from the previous configuration that you printed out) and also to see what financing deals and incentives are available.

Then use all of the upfront pricing sites - those with a B in the first column in the [New Car Online Buying Site Scorecard](#) - to get a price on your chosen car.

Then use three or four of the Quote Request Sites – marked with a Q in the first column of the [New Car Online Buying Site Scorecard](#) – to get price quotes from dealerships in your neighborhood.

Finally, if you wish, you could fax, e-mail or telephone a few local dealerships with the details of your chosen car and ask for pricing and availability. If you are immune to sales pitches you could even visit dealers' lots in person to gather quotes.

Once you've decided on where you're going to buy the car from go ahead and firm up the details by putting down a deposit or calling back the dealer. If you can't pay for your car with a big wad of cash – and who can these days – check out the next section on financing.

Getting the Best Financing

The ads on television make financing your car seem pretty straightforward. After all what could be easier to understand than 0%? What you must realize however is that zero percent is only for people with exemplary credit. Some experts also feel that by agreeing to take manufacturer financing deals you may be obliged to pay the sticker price (usually MSRP) with no opportunity to haggle. The writer of this [article](#) disagrees with that premise – give the article a read over, it's got great advice. Either way – if you don't have great credit or you want to be able to haggle, keep reading.

Probably the best advice we can give is to have financing in place before you shop. Whether you buy online through an upfront pricing outfit or a quote request site, you can bring your own financing to the deal and make sure that you don't end up spending more money than you can afford.

Start your search for financing at your local bank or credit union. Remember you may have equity in your home that you can borrow against via a line of credit. If you are unsuccessful arranging a financing at a traditional bricks and mortar institution you may want to try one or more of the sites on our [Financing page](#).

Warranties

Whether or not to get additional warranty coverage on a new car is a personal decision. To make your choice look at the warranty – if any – being offered by the manufacturer and couple that with research into reliability information on your chosen car and knowledge of your personal driving habits. Consider such things as:

- Annual driving distance
- What kind of driving you do (highway? Offroad?)
- Climate conditions where you live and do most of your driving
- How much of the time of the car will be exposed (do you have a garage or does your car stay on the street?)

Here are some resources you may find helpful in deciding whether or not to get an additional warranty on your car:

Edmunds – [understanding extended warranties](#)

If you decide to purchase a warranty we recommend [Warranty Direct](#).

Insurance

The Internet makes it easy to get immediate quotes for insurance any time of the day or night. Compare what you can get online to policies available from local insurers. If the difference between an online policy and one available from a local insurer is small ask if they will match the online price. Ask too if you can get a better price if you buy other types of insurance - for example, house insurance – from them as well.

You may find the Edmunds – [10 Steps to Buying Insurance](#) – article helpful.

To get instant online quotes we suggest that you try any (or all) of the sites on our [US Insurance page](#).

Last Minute Checklist

You're ready to go and pick up your car at the dealership tomorrow – what do you need to do before you set foot on that lot, put the key in the ignition and drive away in your new vehicle. Make sure that:

- Your financing is in order and insurance is in place
- Your drivers' license is current and bears your correct address
- Any required documentation from your department of motor vehicles is in order
- You have a checklist prepared that you will review with the delivery person when you pick up your car (to make sure the car meets your expectations)

Here are some resources that you might find helpful:

CarClicks [delivery guide](#)

Woman Motorist – [taking delivery](#) of your new car

You've Got your Dream Car – What Happens Now

Once you've got your new car home you have two goals – to get as much use for the least money out of your car as possible and to preserve as much resale value as you can.

To this end buy yourself a pocket calendar, hard-cover notebook and 3-inch binder. The pocket calendar will go in the glove compartment and be used to track service appointments. Use the hard-cover notebook to track gasoline expenditures and mileage (keep both the pocket calendar and notebook in a zip lock plastic bag in the glove compartment). Use the 3-inch binder to keep photocopies of all original receipts and manuals associated with the car.

Research new car maintenance – especially as it pertains to your particular car – and make a schedule in the pocket calendar for any recommended servicing or tasks (such as washing, fluid replacement or seasonal preparations). Here are some resources that you may find helpful:

Woman Motorist – [general maintenance](#)

Edmunds – [Technical Service Bulletins](#)

Edmunds – [where should you get your car serviced](#)

Edmunds – [Tires, Traffic and Safety tips](#)

Special Considerations for Used Cars

Used Car Histories

If you're going to buy a used car it is advisable that you obtain a used car history on the vehicle (unless it is a certified used car where a dealership has already obtained this information for you). Used car histories can bring to light many problems with a car ranging from liens against the vehicle, odometer rollback, unrecorded accidents and much more.

You can do a cursory free check using the used vehicle's VIN – this will confirm that the vehicle you are looking at is what it seems to be (a free check will confirm that the make and model of the vehicle corresponds with the VIN) and may alert you to problems with the vehicle.

You can purchase a used car history from any of the sites listed on our [Used Car History page](#).

Used Car Valuations

If you are going to sell your used car – whether privately or as a trade-in to a dealership – it's a good idea to get at least a ballpark idea of how much your car is worth. Try any of the sites on our [Price Guides](#) page to get a current value on your used car. We suggest you not only use the sites on the Price Guides page but that you also refer to used car sites such as [AutoTrader](#) and [eBay Motors](#) to assess how cars similar to yours are priced.

If you are shopping for a used car use a similar procedure to determine if the price you are being asked to pay is reasonable.

Used Car Online Buying Sites

Use our [Used Car Online Buying Site Scorecard](#) to get a quick overview of sites selling used cars online. You can read in-depth reviews of all the sites on our [Used Car Online Buying Site](#) page.

Warranties

You should do some fairly in-depth analysis to decide whether or not a warranty is cost-effective and advisable for your particular used vehicle. Use reliability information from the [MSN Autos site](#) to determine if there are particular issues associated with the used vehicle you are going to purchase (or have purchased already). Based on what you find out and typical repair costs you can decide whether or not you wish to purchase a warranty for your used vehicle.

If you decide to purchase a warranty we recommend [Warranty Direct](#).

Buyer Beware – Avoiding Rip Offs Online

Anyone buying a used car online should use caution. It is strongly advised that you obtain a used car history on a vehicle you are considering buying. This will allow you to make sure there are no financial complications, hidden accidents or other problems with the vehicle. Here are some helpful resources on used car test drives:

[Used Car Test Drive](#)

[Used Car Test Drive Checklist](#)

An added complication with used cars is making sure that all the paperwork transferring ownership to you is completed properly. Obviously this will differ from state-to-state but you may find the [iDMV](#) site helpful. You may also want to check with your state's automobile association website to see if they have helpful resources regarding transferring ownership.

Finally you should be aware that there are several scams being perpetrated in which used car purchasers are being targeted. A variant of the 'Nigerian letter scam' has been reported by used car purchasers (see <http://www.wivb.com/Global/story.asp?S=1203644&nav=0RaiEtug>) and new and ingenious schemes are being cooked up all the time. Remember, if a deal seems too good to be true, it probably is.

If you're buying a car on an auction site such as eBay use due diligence to investigate the seller. If something doesn't seem right to you consider checking with the Better Business Bureau, your local automobile association or even your local police department.

A used car history should alert you to a stolen vehicle or one that has been in unreported accidents. By checking with consumer watchdogs and performing due diligence you should be able to avoid scams or bad deals.

Selling your Old Car

There are many approaches to selling your old car and you should pick those that work most effectively for your location and type of car. If you live in a small, rural town with little Internet penetration you are probably not best served by using online classifieds. However if you live in an urban center with high Internet penetration or have a collectable car, the online classifieds may be perfect for you.

Keep in mind too that if you are female you need to be careful about selling your car. If you live alone consider locating your car at the home of a male friend rather than having people learn where you live. No matter whether you live alone or not, arrange viewing times so that there will be others around when people come to look at the vehicle.

Online Classifieds

You can find a list of the major online classifieds sites on our [Used Classifieds Scorecard](#) . If you'd like a quick overview of the classified sites we've reviewed see our [US Used Classifieds](#) page.

Offline Classifieds

Many of the traditional classified-type car selling productions now offer online versions as well — taking out an ad in the print version will get you an ad online (and vice versa) but this is not always the case. So you'll want to check out that option when you look for a place to list your car. There will also be small, local newspapers that will not have an online version and these can be cost-effective if they're well-known for car classifieds in the community and have sufficient circulation.

There are also all the traditional ways to advertise your car from parking it in your driveway with a 'for sale' sign on the dash to posting a notice on local bulletin boards (but not on telephone poles — that's against the law in most places).

Dealers

While selling a car through a dealership is going to get you the least proportion of the car's value, it may be worthwhile if you simply don't want the headache of selling the car yourself. Learn what your used car is worth and haggle hard for the best trade-in price you can get. Good luck!

Accessories, Parts and Maintenance Resources Online

Check out our [Accessories](#) category for information on parts and accessories for your car. Even if you don't buy items online you can use the better sites to learn about car repairs and accessories and compare prices.

Here's a list of helpful resources regarding ongoing maintenance of your new car:

[Maintaining your new car](#) – from About.com

[Maintain your Car Like New](#)

[Maintaining your Car](#)

Conclusion

Why Using the Internet Makes Sense

Even if you don't go the whole way and buy your car online, the Internet is now an incomparable resource that every car shopper should take advantage of. You can quickly and easily learn about all the vehicle options available and then drill deeper for in-depth information on individual vehicle reliability, safety, economy and pricing. You can talk with other car buyers in online [forums](#), use sites like [CarsDirect](#) to get up front pricing and use sites like [Epinions](#) to learn how others assess different vehicle models.

A few hours spent in front of the computer can save you from making costly and possibly dangerous mistakes when buying a new car. And this guide and our site, [Where Can I Buy A Car Online](#), make the process easier to understand and complete.

Help us Make this eBook Better

We hope that you found this eBook useful and that you'll take the time to e-mail us at ebook1.2us@where-can-i-buy-a-car-online.com with suggestions, corrections and complaints.

We especially want to encourage you to let us know of broken links within the eBook. If clicking on a link within the eBook doesn't take you to where you expect to go please let us know by sending an e-mail to ebook1.2us@where-can-i-buy-a-car-online.com . We'll investigate your reported problem, solve it and e-mail you a link to the corrected eBook which you can then download.

Everything you ever wanted to know about buying a car online in the USA*

Tables

Everything you ever wanted to know about buying a car online in the USA*

Table I

Put the top ten cars into the squares in the table below. Put the car that matches your needs best in the top spot (#10).

#	Help me choose tool #1 – top ten cars	Help me choose tool #2 – top ten cars	Help me choose tool #3 – top ten cars
10			
9			
8			
7			
6			
5			
4			
3			
2			
1			

Use the example of a completed table below to understand the scoring system.

#	Help me choose tool #1 – top ten cars	Help me choose tool #2 – top ten cars	Help me choose tool #3 – top ten cars
10	Honda Civic LX	Hyundai Accent	Pontiac Sunfire
9	Toyota Camry	Ford Focus	Saturn Ion
8	Dodge Neon	Kia Rio Sedan	Suzuki Aerio
7	Ford Focus	Isuzu Rodeo Sport	Chevrolet Cavalier
6	Chevrolet Cavalier	Kia Spectra	Nissan Sentra
5	GMC Sonoma	Mazda Protege	Kia Rio Sedan
4	Ford Ranger	Nissan Sentra	Toyota Camry
3	Hyundai Accent	Mitsubishi Lancer	Ford Focus
2	Hyundai Elantra	Honda Civic LX	Dodge Neon
1	Isuzu Rodeo Sport	Dodge Neon	Hyundai Accent

Everything you ever wanted to know about buying a car online in the USA*

To score the different cars get another piece of paper and write down each UNIQUE car from the table (in the table above there are 18 unique cars). Then for each car write down its score – for example in the table above the score for the Honda Civic LX is 12 (score of 10 in the first column and 2 in the second column). Take the top five scoring cars as your top five to put in the next table. There's a blank copy of the table after the completed one below.

Car Make and Model	Score
Ford Focus	19/30
Hyundai Accent	14/30
Toyota Camry	13/30
Chevrolet Cavalier	13/30
Honda Civic LX	12/30

Car Make and Model	Score

Everything you ever wanted to know about buying a car online in the USA*

Table II

Use a table like the one below if you are having difficulty choosing from between several cars. There is a blank table where you can enter your own Wants and Don't Wants below the example given directly below.

Wants	Don't Wants
Fuel economy > 27 mpg	Wheelbase greater than 120"
Side airbags	Cargo volume < 11 cubic feet
Manual transmission version available	Trunk mounted CD player
Sunroof option available	Total weight of more than 2,300 lbs
Available in mustard yellow	Maximum front leg room of < 40 inches

Fill in your own Wants and Don't Wants in the table below.

Wants	Don't Wants

Table III

Description of option	Available?	Price
Manual Transmission	Yes	\$1,325
Heated front seats	No	N/A
Sunroof	Yes	\$675

Use the blank table below to create your own option availability profile for your chosen car.

Description of option	Available?	Price