

The Active Consumer

How To Buy A Used Car—Without Feeling Used

(NAPSA)—When it comes to buying any of the more than 13 million used cars sold between private parties each year, you can feel like you're driving a real bargain if you heed a few hints.

Experts on automobiles have come up with a few signs to look for when you look over a used car:

- **Be Sure VIN Numbers Match.** Just as people have Social Security numbers to identify them, cars have individual numbers that identify them. See that the VIN number on the dashboard matches the ones on the driver's side door panel and the vehicle's title.

- **Look at the Vehicle's Title.** Watch out for the words: "Salvage" or "True Mileage Unknown." Salvage means that the vehicle was declared totaled. True Mileage Unknown suggests there's a discrepancy between the odometer and mileage.

- **Check Front End Damage.** Open the hood and look at the "core support" or the piece of metal along the very front of the car connecting the left and right sides of its inner structure; the paint, bolts and welding should be perfect. If the welding is bad, paint is missing or bolts have been moved, it may be a sign of front end damage.

- **Check for Repainting.** "At vehicle auctions, you'll see dealers running their fingers along the



Knowing what to look for when buying a used car—like matching VIN numbers—can help prevent you from driving away with a salvage or chop-shop vehicle.

interior of the wheel wells," said Mark Brueggemann, editor at Kelley Blue Book. "They are checking to see if the car has had body work or been repainted. If it's been repainted there must be a reason." Run your fingers under the well and feel for a line where it was taped in preparation for painting or a ridge where one layer of paint overlaps a second layer.

- **Check Rear End Damage.** Open the trunk and remove the carpet or other covering. Look at the caulking in the seams. It should be a perfect, uniform raised bead. If not or it's flattened,

there could have been some kind of rear damage.

Additionally, you can check out a vehicle's ownership and damage history by obtaining the VIN, going online and running a CARFAX Vehicle History Report. Brueggemann also recommends you never buy a car at night, in the dark or in the rain. "You are less likely to see mismatched paint or other vehicle damage when it is dark outside."

For more information on buying and selling used cars, vehicle values or CARFAX Vehicle History Reports, log on to the Kelley Blue Book Web site at www.kbb.com.