

First-time buyers: Research vehicles and dealers

BY NANCY SUNDSTROM

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For most people, buying a car is the second largest purchase they'll ever make, next to a house. It's not a simple process either, as the options for acquiring one are as plentiful as the makes, models and colors that exist. There are a number of decisions, such as whether to buy a new or used vehicle, and whether or not to lease.

Auto industry professionals say that whatever your final decision, take the time to do some research.

"With the great amount and availability of information that's out there, especially on the Internet, there's no reason not to learn as much as you can," said Bill Ebert, sales manager at Cherry Capital Olds & Subaru in Traverse City.

"It's changed the car buying

business dramatically, because consumers can do research on everything," said Ebert. "We'll help with any part of the process, of course, but for most people, doing some homework really pays off in both speeding up the process and making for more satisfied customers in the long run."

For first-time car buyers, here's some advice:

■ Rule number one is to be as prepared as possible. It often

helps to visit a sales lot with someone you trust. Avoid impulse buying or feeling uncomfortable or pressured.

■ You may also want to visit several dealers for comparison shopping, unless you feel strongly about a vendor.

■ When you're ready to make a deal, read everything thoroughly, ask questions and have a complete understanding of the financial terms of the agreement.

Local car dealers say that sales of new cars have been fairly brisk for 2003, primarily because there is a sense that the economy is beginning to rebound and there have been a number of incentives for consumers.

Sales Manager George Jorkasky at Dan McCormick's Kalkaska Auto & Truck said that if you're in the market for a new car, you should begin by having a firm idea of your budget.

Jorkasky said to ask as many questions as you need to based on your needs and then look at — and drive — perhaps five or six cars. Once you decide on a vehicle, then you can begin the process of looking into financing.

"There are so many options out there right now," said Jorkasky, "that you may be able to step up and get more car than expected, but the bottom line is just that — know your budget."

Jamie Marsh of Bill Marsh Chrysler-Plymouth-Dodge and Bill Marsh Price Point Used Car Center of Traverse City said that he sees a number of buyers who have already done some research and shopping on their own, and come in prepared with a good idea of what they're looking for.

"Start by identifying what the real needs are that you have for a vehicle, what type best suits you and then put your budget into play," advised Marsh. "If you have a good idea of those, then you've started off in right direction."

Sometimes it's not a make or model that brings someone into a dealership, but the testimonies of trusted friends or relatives — both good and bad.

"It may be a factor in your deciding where you want to do your buying," said Marsh. "And if you're sure about what you want, then don't be afraid to simply make a decision. We see a lot of customers who come in ready to buy a car, versus the more impulsive or emotional buy."

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