

Consumer Buying Tips for Purchasing a **Classic, Collectible, or Special Interest Vehicle**

Written by Jim Van Gordon

Introduction

When you decide upon the model and make of the classic or collectible vehicle you wish to purchase, there are many things to take into consideration when making your final choice as to the precise vehicle you finally bring home.

The first and most important thing to remember is: Don't be fooled by flashy curb appeal! It is vital to overlook the window dressings of fresh paint, new chrome, and popular after-market wheels, and to be able to evaluate the vehicle based on its present condition and authenticity.

Important Questions to Ask the Seller

1. Are you the original owner?

The history of the vehicle is much easier to obtain and trace when the answer is yes. Vehicles that change ownership many times over their history often have little or no paperwork available.

2. Is the original paperwork service history available?

The service history provides valuable information that can help to verify the original mileage, and also permits an evaluation of the type of care the vehicle has received over time.

3. Is this a salvaged vehicle?

If the answer is yes, despite the apparent quality or appearance of the vehicle, the value is approximately half that of a non-salvage vehicle.

4. Has the vehicle ever been involved in a collision/wreck?

If it has, the quality of the repair should not be visible by close examination of the damaged area; also, the service history should reflect the extent and quality of the workmanship. In many instances, a professional quality repair will not significantly decrease the value of the vehicle.

Checking the Condition of the Exterior

Look closely for the signs of body damage from collisions or excessive weathering. Check rear quarter panels for body repairs or replacement. Look inside trunk space for welds or hammer marks, wrinkles from collisions, or rust. While in the area, look under rear window package tray since this area is noted for rust in many models manufactured in mid-sixties to early seventies. This is an expensive repair, and must be considered before purchase.

Check body seams for proper alignment. Door, fender, hood and trunk gaps should be consistent throughout. Inconsistencies could be evidence of poor body repairs or possible clipping.

When a vehicle has been clipped, a major portion of the vehicle has been removed as a result of damage, and replaced with an undamaged section from another vehicle. The signs of clipping are visible through the door jam area and rocker panels, and also in the trunk. The welds at the point of connection are visible by lifting the carpet and trunk mats. Frequently, carpeting and trunk mats are glued into position to deliberately conceal the evidence of clipping.

Rust damage is often evident beneath paint at the front pillar post, the lower rocker panels, drip rails and rear window, lower portion of front fenders directly behind the front wheel, and the rear lower quarter wheel well openings.

Checking the Condition of the Interior

The value of a vehicle is greatly enhanced when the original factory interior has survived over time. Since replacement of portions of the interior is often necessary, care should be taken to choose those companies that produce a high quality product that match the quality of the original factory equipment. Padded dashes, arm rests, door panels, front and rear seat covers, rear package tray, and carpet can be of great concern since the after-market replacements are often inferior quality.

Many mid-sixties and early seventies special interest vehicles have suffered a reduction in value due to the installation of after-market instrument clusters and custom stereo equipment. The methods of installation of this additional equipment often left extreme damage to dashboards. This type of modification is often impossible to correct in some models, or requires replacement of the entire dash.

Finding the Perfect Vehicle

The Thoroughly Original Vehicle: THE SURVIVOR

An example of such a vehicle may be a 1966 Ford Mustang GT Fastback, K Model. The car has been stored in a garage since the mid-seventies and still belongs to the original owner. When questioned, he really admits to keeping all the original paperwork and service records.

A thorough examination of the car reveals the original paint has weathered slightly, the interior is complete but slightly worn and soiled, the glass is not cloudy or pitted, and the chrome of the bumpers is slightly yellowed. All the garnish moldings such as the GT emblems, rally lights, and grill moldings are slightly weathered but in good condition.

The original 271 horsepower 289 cubic inch engine is still intact, with the appropriate engine tag. One slight flaw is readily visible, after-market headers were installed, but the owner has the original exhaust manifold. The most important step in the examination reveals the manufacturer's door tag model numbers and equipment codes verify the equipment of this vehicle.

To the enthusiast, this would be a high value vehicle due to the originality, the paperwork that documents a complete history, and the overall condition of the car that raises no question as to the authenticity of this particular vehicle.

The Professionally Restored Vehicle

In many instances, the vehicle has experienced too much wear and tear and the choice was made to professionally restore it to its original, showroom condition. When this process is successful, the vehicle appears as good from the underside as it does from above, and it is evident this is a show quality vehicle that is rarely, if ever driven, and stored in a controlled environment. To complete or enhance its value, the original paperwork should accompany such a vehicle. To the enthusiast, this is also a high value vehicle.

The Average Vehicle

In comparison, the Mustang in this category has new paint, not the original color but one that was available for that year vehicle. The interior has been replaced with after-market original replacement fabric and the workmanship is good. Some paperwork of recent repairs is available. The original K Model trim options are still in the car, are weathered, but in fair condition. The bumpers are original, but had been straightened and reconditioned.

The original engine has been replaced with a 289 cubic inch engine with an after-market four-barrel carburetor and intake that was not the original 271 horsepower 289 cubic inch. However, the owner has retained the complete original engine. The door tag is present, painted but still legible, and verifies the authenticity of the car.

The Low Value Vehicle

Before locating the survivor, an earlier search uncovered another 1966 Mustang GT Fastback. The car has fresh paint, but poor preparation of the body reveals this was not the original color. The interior is new, but is customized and not of the original pattern or design. Popular after-market wheels have been installed as well as some after-market instruments.

Although the owner had stated over the telephone that this was a K Model vehicle, the engine was obviously a later model 302 cubic inch with after-market trim. The door tag was missing and the GT emblems were present but not in the proper position on the lower fender. Close examination showed the front wheels were not a five-lug pattern, but a four-lug pattern, raising questions as to whether the vehicle had originally been a 6-cylinder fastback that had been modified. And finally, there was no paperwork other than the original title, which was available. To the enthusiast, this is a low value vehicle, but the car may have value to a buyer looking for a flashy hot rod.

Final Tip

In conclusion, a buyer should be knowledgeable about the particular model he or she wishes to purchase. When all the available options are known, a buyer is then able to make a qualified appraisal of the authenticity and relative worth of the vehicle in question, and make an educated purchase.