IRVINE USED CARS

FREE PRINTABLE

Questions to ask a private seller.

Ask the first group **by phone or text** before you drive anywhere. A seller with nothing to hide answers them easily. Write the answers down and compare them with what you see.

Seller's name _____ Phone _____ Asking price _____

1 Before you go

PHONE OR TEXT

- [ ] Is the car still for sale? Why are you selling it?
- [ ] Is the title in your name, and do you have it in hand?
- [ ] Is there a loan on it? Who is the lienholder?
- [ ] Can you text me the VIN and a photo of the odometer?
- [ ] How many owners has it had? How long have you had it?
- [ ] Has it been in an accident, a flood, or been rebuilt?
- [ ] Is any warning light on right now?

2 History and care

AT THE CAR

- [ ] Do you have service records? Where was it serviced?
- [ ] When were the tires, brakes and battery last replaced?
- [ ] Any repairs coming up that you know about?
- [ ] Has it had any recall work done?
- [ ] Any leaks, noises or quirks I should know about?
- [ ] Was it smoked in? Used for rideshare or towing?

Red flags

- Title isn't in the seller's name, or the VIN doesn't match
- No title in hand, or “I'll mail it later”
- Won't allow an inspection or a cold start
- Asks for a deposit by wire, gift card or app before you see the car
- Price far below similar cars, with a story about being out of town
- Says the buyer has to get the smog check

Notes

3 Paperwork

CALIFORNIA

- [ ] Will you give me a **smog certificate** from the last 90 days? (In California the seller provides it on most transfers.)
- [ ] Will you sign the title and fill out **REG 262** (odometer) and a **REG 135** bill of sale?
- [ ] If there's a loan: how will the lien be released, and when do I get the title?
- [ ] Will you file the **Notice of Transfer and Release of Liability** (NRL) after the sale?
- [ ] Do you have both keys, the manual and the spare tire tools?

4 Inspection and test drive

BEFORE MONEY

- [ ] Can I take it to a mechanic of my choice for a pre-purchase inspection?
- [ ] Can I drive it on city streets and the freeway?
- [ ] Can I see the car with a cold engine?
- [ ] Can we meet in daylight at a busy, public place, or at the mechanic's shop?

5 Price and paying

CLOSING

- [ ] Is the price negotiable? What's the lowest you'd take?
- [ ] How do you want to be paid? (Cashier's check at your bank or theirs is common.)
- [ ] Can we sign everything and pay at the same time, in person?

Good to know: a private-party sale is usually **“as is”**. California's 3-day right to cancel under the CARS Act applies only to dealers, and the lemon law doesn't cover private sales. You pay use tax and fees to the DMV when you register the car; estimate fees with the DMV Fee Calculator at dmv.ca.gov.

General information, not legal advice. Check current rules at dmv.ca.gov.

Questions to ask a private seller · CC BY 4.0 — free to print, copy and share with credit