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Safety Tips for Private Party Car Sales

A CarLotz Whitepaper

by Brent Garrett

Buying and selling a used car can be scary, intimidating, and time-consuming. Pricing is not transparent; it's hard to know if you're buying a quality vehicle, and financing options are sometimes limited. And, of course, it's not fun shopping at a dealership full of salesmen in full-length trench coats smoking cigarettes, eyeing you like a kid ready to swing a mallet playing whack-a-mole. That's why a lot of people choose to handle car transactions themselves.

Common strategies in the sale-by-owner market include putting a sign on your car's window, parking alongside a busy street, listing in the newspaper, or posting on listing services such as AutoTrader and Craigslist. Then you wait, hoping and praying that you'll quickly find a reasonable and friendly buyer who will offer you top dollar for your car. Unfortunately, that is not usually how it goes.

At CarLotz, a consignment store for cars, we have helped hundreds of buyers and sellers transact in the private market more safely and conveniently. In our role as an advocate for sale-by-owner customers, we have seen and heard many of the horror stories and have become experts on the scams that exist in the wonderful world of private party auto sales. To help customers navigate these challenges, we have developed the following list of top 10 tips for owners who are selling their cars privately:

- 1) When listing a car, don't provide your phone number or email address until you are comfortable with the buyer. Take advantage of the email anonymizer on Craigslist that lets you stay anonymous until you are ready to lift your veil.
- 2) Provide specific instructions in your listing on how to respond such as, "Anyone interested should email me with their phone number and email address so that we can connect." Don't be afraid to ignore someone who doesn't follow your instructions...they are likely not serious buyers or may be trying to scam you.
- 3) The typical Craigslist scams involve a quick email response to your asking a simple question. Their goal is simply to get your email address. Avoid responses that simply say, "what's your lowest price," or "any accidents?"

Safety Tips for Private Party Car Sales (con't)

or "I'm looking for this exact car," or any other message that doesn't adhere to the instructions that you presented in your listing.

- 4) Check to make sure that the buyer's email address matches the name of the person responding. Avoid responding to "Peter Smith" when Peter's email is "johnjones@hotmail.com."
- 5) If someone's name and email name match, but the email name has either three or four letters before the @, it is most likely a scam. When Peter Smith responds and his email address is "petersmithxhsg@hotmail.com," it is likely a scam.
- 6) If someone's "story" is very unusual, beware. "Hi, I am stationed in Baghdad and want to buy your car for my dad in Cleveland. Please call me at..." Sound fishy? That's because it's a scam.
- 7) When calling a potential buyer for the first time, use your work number or a public phone as opposed to your home or cell number, so the scammer can't snag your phone number through caller ID. If you get a voicemail that is NOT the potential buyer's voice and is just a computerized answering machine, call back a few times until you get a person or just disregard it.
- 8) If you are comfortable enough with the potential buyer to schedule a test drive, plan to meet during the daylight in a highly populated location that is convenient for you. Meet at a place that makes you comfortable.
- 9) Once you agree on a sales price, complete a simple bill of sale signed by both buyer and seller. Examples can be found online and should show vehicle information (year, make, model, VIN), odometer reading, sales date, price, and both buyer's and seller's name. To complete the sale, you will sign over the title to the buyer, including the sales price, date, and odometer reading . Do not let the buyer talk you into modifying the pricing on the contract or on the title so that their taxes are minimized. Don't be a party to tax fraud by helping a stranger save a few tax dollars. Also, accept only cash, a cashier's check, or a bank loan check. The latter two should be verified by calling the issuing bank.
- 10) Common sense is king. If it smells, looks, or feels fishy...run!

We think the private car market is the way to go, as you can find great cars at great values. The hassle and potential danger of the process is real and precisely why we started CarLotz. If you are uncomfortable doing any of this yourself, just give us a call at 804-CAR-LOTZ or visit us at www.CarLotz.com, and we will help assist you. Good luck getting a great car!



Loyal Toldo

Hook Law Center: Kit Kit Kat, can you tell us about the Italian cat named Toldo, who brings gifts to his owner's grave?

Kit Kat: Yes, it is a lovely story. Toldo is a 3-year old black and white cat who lives in Montagnana in northern Italy. His owner has been dead for a year and a half now. His owner, Iozzelli Tenzo, died at age 71 on September 22, 2011, but Toldo has been visiting his grave site every day and leaving small gifts. His "gifts" are things like twigs, leaves, plastic cups, etc.

It started on the day of the funeral. Toldo followed the funeral procession to the grave site. Then, that night it was noticed that he was back at the cemetery, standing watch over the grave. He faithfully brings some "gift" every day. Mr. Tenzo and Toldo were unusually close. Mr. Tenzo took Toldo in when he was 3 months old from a cat colony.

Cats are very discerning creatures. They know when they are loved. While I'll admit Toldo is unusual, there are many cats, and for that matter dogs, that are extremely loyal and loving. There are many beautiful pets that are available for adoption. Just visit your local humane society or animal shelter. Many of the newer shelters have visiting rooms where you can meet the potential adoptee and interact with them, which helps in determining if the pet and owner are a good match. Cats and dogs are as varied as flowers. Each one is lovable in a unique way. (Sarah Medina, "Loyal Italian Cat, Toldo, Brings Gifts to Owner's Grave," [Huffington Post](#), January 4, 2013)



Our New Website is Up and Running AND it has been nominated for an aWWWard-which recognizes the best in web design.

Please visit www.hooklawcenter.com to check out our new site. Then, visit <http://www.awwwards.com/best-websites/hook-law-center?subsection=all> to cast your vote! Thanks!

Upcoming Events

- Hook Law Center is hosting a reception to benefit the Chesapeake Humane Society at Hook Law Center's Suffolk location, 5806 Harbour View Blvd., Suite 203, Suffolk, VA 23435 on **March 14, 2013** at **5:30 p.m.**
- Hook Law Center is presenting a seminar on Estate and Long Term Care Planning to NARFE (National Active & Retired Federal Employees) Churchland Chapter 129 at Dennis' Steak and Spaghetti Restaurant, 3356 Western Branch Blvd., Chesapeake, VA on **April 9, 2013** at **Noon.**
- Hook Law Center will be presenting a seminar on Estate Planning and Long-Term Care Planning to the Portsmouth Area Chapter of the Military Officers Association at the Hilton Garden Inn in Suffolk on **May 9, 2013** at **8:00 p.m.**
- Hook Law Center will be speaking on Reducing Medicare Liens at the Virginia Trial Lawyers Association meeting in Virginia Beach on **May 21, 2013** at **3:00 p.m.**
- Hook Law Center will be presenting at the VSB Trusts and Estates Section - Virginia State Bar - 75th VSB Annual Meeting in Virginia Beach on **June 14, 2013.**



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