

Totally That Stupid's Guide to Making a Decent Car Ad and Selling Your Car

1. Key Elements of Ad Text

DO include:

1. Year, Make, Model, Sub-model (if applicable) - "2001 Mercedes-Benz E55 AMG"
2. Current Mileage
3. Title Status (Clear, financed/need to pay off/branded and if branded, why?)
4. Transmission - and no, a sequential shift/tiptronic is NOT a manual transmission. A manual transmission has a gear selector and a clutch.
5. A list of accessories (AC, power windows, power locks, sunroof, stereo, heated seats, adjustable suspension, etc.) and their functionality. If it was equipped with something but it doesn't work or is failing, just say so. Don't make that a happy surprise when a buyer shows up or receives the car.
6. Any modifications to the car.
7. Any recent service work/part replacements/upgrades.
8. Condition of wear and tear items - battery, tires, and brakes, primarily.
9. A general description of the car including colors (inside and out), condition, known history, and why you are selling (unless there's really no reason - although in those cases I just tell people honestly that I have a short attention span). If you're a dealer, be upfront about it whether you have a brick and mortar shop or not.
10. Any other condition issues including but not limited to: rust, dents, glass cracks, torn upholstery, sagging headliner, dash cracks, missing parts.
11. Information you have about the car's history, including accidents/floods/ odometer issues. If you have a CarFax or equivalent history report, offer to share it. If you don't have one, seriously consider getting one (post-1980 cars only). If there is something negative on the report, explain it if you can.
12. Availability to make the car available for inspection. There's no reason not to let a buyer or their agent see a car. Likewise, there is no reason someone should buy a car that they can't inspect if they like. MAJOR red flag.
13. Comprehensive, clear photos per sections 2, 3, and 4 below. Also seriously consider shooting video and posting to a free account on YouTube.
14. If applicable, relevant information about accepted payment methods, willingness to assist shippers.

DO NOT include:

1. A complete history of the model, ESPECIALLY from Wikipedia. If I am looking at the car, I have an idea what it is. If I don't know about it but am interested, I can Google it. Extraneous generic text about the car model will quickly make a potential buyer lose interest trying to sort through to find the details about the specific car on the table.
2. "AC just needs a charge" - If it just needs a charge - CHARGE IT. This is one of my key pet peeves. As stated above, just indicate if it works or it doesn't, and if you know anything specific about why it doesn't (no compressor, receiver dryer fell off, etc.) then state that.
3. Blurry photos, pictures of your girlfriend posing with the car, pictures of someone else's car (even if "just for reference"), pictures that are too close or cut off, pictures that conveniently miss major issues, edited pictures.
4. A complete lack of information. Again, I've gotten some great deals this way, but we're trying to help you - the seller - here. A little bit of effort will make a difference.

2. The Five Pictures You MUST Include

1. Front/Quarter
2. Rear/Quarter (opposite side of car from front quarter)
3. Front Seat Area
4. Rear Seat Area
5. Engine Bay

3. Five More Photos You Really Should Include

1. Convertible Top (this is really a MUST if you're selling a convertible)
2. Problem Areas - Rust, damage, etc. (again, really a MUST, but if you don't take pictures you have to describe)
3. Driver's Seat
4. Trunk
5. Modifications

4. Other “Nice to Have” Photos

1. Dashboard
2. Door panels
3. Odometer
4. Undercarriage and hard to see areas like door bottoms, etc.
5. Known Trouble Spots
6. Books and Records
7. Other OEM equipment (tool kits, emergency kits, extra floor mats, repair manuals, third seats, etc.)
8. Tires and Wheels
9. More angles - interior, exterior, engine, undercarriage, trunk

5. Video

1. Exterior walk-around: Point-out any obvious or even subtle flaws in the paint, rust, dents, scrapes, etc. as well as known trouble spots which your car may not have succumbed to.
2. Interior and start-up: Show off the front and rear (if applicable) seating areas, dashboard, and carpets. Sitting in the driver's seat, turn the car to the on position but don't start it yet – show the warning lights on the dash. Make sure the radio is off before you shoot the video. Start the car with the door open so the motor can be heard starting. Show the gauges again with the warning lights hopefully extinguished. Turn on accessories like the fan/ac, radio, open/close the roof (if applicable) and windows. Then pop the hood and get out of the car, walk around, open the hood, and shoot the engine running.
3. Driving video: Ideally you will have a partner or a phone holder, but take extreme caution if you do not. Shoot the car engaging into gear, then driving in a mix of slower and quicker roads. Acceleration is good to include, along with cruising. Again, cycle through things like the fan/ac, radio, use turn signals, etc.

6. The Selling Process

1. Be available and responsive. If someone is looking at spending real money on your car, don't be hard to reach.
2. Answer all of their questions, even the tough ones.
3. Let them have the car inspected by a pro - at their expense. Ideally you may have had a mechanic look it over before you listed it for sale - especially if the price of entry is more than about \$10K. I'm a fan of the buyer coordinating getting it to or from the inspector or the inspector coming to the car, but that's really up to you as the seller.
4. Be willing to sell remotely. The internet means we can see ads all over the world. The ability to purchase should come down to 1) the buyer's ability to pay (and the payment clearing the bank); 2) whether the car meets local requirements (read: US EPA/DOT and 25 year rule); 3) The buyer's ability to have the car picked-up and delivered to them at their expense - but be flexible about working with the shipper on meeting times, etc. Conversely, be willing to pick the buyer up at a nearby airport.
5. For remote buyers or folks who may be in-person hesitant, videos available on YouTube as detailed above can be invaluable. Alternately, consider offering a Skype or FaceTime walkaround with the potential buyer.
6. Accept convenient payment methods. My favorite is bank wire transfer/ACH, but if the buyer is willing to pay the fee I'll take PayPal. Bank checks are okay, but take longer to clear.
7. Offer to express important documents once payment is clear - title and bill of sale primarily. If there is a lot of service history, spare keys, expensive or rare bits - send those separately as well. It's not all the time, but stuff can disappear from a car during shipment.