



Does This Stick Shift Make My Ass Look Fat?

How gender can influence your car shopping experience. By Serena Freewomyn

If you're in the market to buy a vehicle and you happen to be a woman, you may be nervous about stepping onto a car lot. You're not alone. Women make or influence 85 percent of car-buying decisions, but we're still treated as junior players. A study by Edmunds.com revealed that women are routinely quoted higher prices on cars than men.

According to a survey by J.D. Power & Associates, women look at safety, reliability and price when they shop for a car, while men are more focused on the look and how it feels to drive the car. Yet dealerships often act under the assumption that women will want to buy a car that matches their purse, and that they don't want to talk about what's under the hood.

But you don't have to accept second-class treatment. By arming yourself with the knowledge that you need to make a decision, you can get as good of a deal—if not better—than any man.

1. Select your criteria. What are you looking for in a car? Is price the most important factor? Or will gas mileage be your decision maker? Are you a staunch believer in labor unions? Or are you only willing to buy cars made in the United States? All of these are important questions that you will need to answer before you do anything else.

2. Do your research. Once you know your criteria, research different brands. There are many sources available to help you—Motor Trend, *Consumer Reports*, and Edmunds are all helpful. AskPatty.com is written from a woman's perspective, and they'll even help you find a woman-friendly dealership. You should also go to the factory websites to look at the True Market Value for the models you want to buy.

3. Decide on a dealership. Do you want something close to home so that it's convenient to get your maintenance? Or are you more concerned with the dealership's reputation?

4. Know your bottom line. Arrange your financing before you go shopping. Know the total amount that you can borrow from the bank in order to avoid high-pressure tactics at the dealership. Be firm about your bottom line, and don't look at cars that are outside of your price point. Ask to see the dealers' invoice, and then use that as a guidepost for your negotiations.

The wheeling and dealing doesn't stop once you shake the salesperson's hand. You still have to go back to the financing department, regardless of whether or not you plan to finance your car. This is the dealership's last chance to make money off of you, and this is when the real pressure starts. My guy was slick. He had visual aids, charts and graphs to convince me that I needed to buy LoJack and OnGuard. If you've got comprehensive insurance, you don't need that.

5. Learn from other people's mistakes. I made two big errors when I was shopping for a car. The first was that I didn't print out the True Market Value from the factory websites. The second mistake was randomly picking a dealership out of the phonebook.

As soon as I walked into the first dealership, I was at a disadvantage because of my gender. I was ignored until I approached a salesperson. The guy took me outside before he even knew where the cars were parked. On top of that, he didn't have the keys with him. When we finally got into the car, the salesman only allowed me to drive the car for one mile, then I was told to get off the freeway and take surface streets back to the dealership.



After "test driving" two cars, I told the salesman I had some questions. The sticker price was almost \$3,000 higher at the dealership than it was on the factory website. When I asked about that, he asked for my proof. At this point, he took an aggressive posture and said that if I was accusing the dealership of marking up the price to rob their customers, I could leave. I told him to kiss off, and I left.

My experience at the second dealership was 100 percent different. For starters, they had a female sales rep. She talked to me like I was an adult, and she let me have an actual test drive. Once we were back at the dealership, we started negotiating. I stuck to my price point and walked away with a brand new car for under invoice.

Buying a car can be a very empowering experience for a woman. I made an educated decision and I'm proud that I did it by myself. I stuck to my guns and didn't allow anyone to talk to me like I was stupid, and you can do it, too. ■