

## How to Buy a Car to Restore Without Getting Burned

If you are you thinking of buying a car to restore, here are some helpful tips regarding what to look for, and sometimes more importantly, what to look out for.

If this is going to be your first restoration, take a knowledgeable person along to help you size up your prospective purchase. It would also be a good idea to join a club for your make of car in order to meet new resourceful friends and find good sources for parts and services.

A restorer's number one enemy is rust. It is expensive and hard to fix. In extreme cases, it can compromise a car's structural integrity. Unless it is a priceless classic and you have a ton of money, don't even consider a vehicle that have serious rust problems.

When you go out to look at a possible restoration candidate, take along a magnet. People have been known to patch extensive rust with plastic filler or Bondo, which is not magnetic. Pass your magnet over kick panels, door sills and under trunk lids. If it doesn't stick, the filler is too thick. You would probably be better off looking for another car.

Next, check along the body panels to see if they are flat and smooth. Look for the tell-tale bumps and dips of bad body work and overworked metal. Also, look along the edges of the body parts to check for proper fit. If a car has been in a collision or has been reassembled improperly during restoration, the fit may not be good.

### Key areas to check with a magnet:



Kick Panels



Rear Fenders



Around the Back Window



Under the Trunk



Around the Headlights



Rear Doors

You should take a detailed look under the hood.

The engine room of an old car will tell you a lot about the vehicle as well. First, check the coolant. If you find rusty muck, you'll have to go through the cooling system if you intend to go very far in the car.

If the oil is thick and black, it means the car has been neglected. If you find coolant in the oil or oil in the coolant, it means you're probably facing a blown head gasket or even a cracked block.

The best way to check the health of an engine is with a compression tester. Look up how to use one in a motors or shop manual. You can also just follow the instructions that come with the gauge.

Next, take your prospect for a little drive. There should be no slop in the steering. When you take your hand off of the wheel, the car should continue to go straight, providing the road is flat. If the steering is sloppy, you may be looking at a front-end rebuild.

Try the brakes. The pedal should be firm, and the car shouldn't pull to one side when you try to stop. If the pedal is mushy or the car pulls to either side, the brakes will probably need some work.

Glance in your rear view mirror. If you see a pall of light-blue smoke as you pull away, the engine is burning oil. This could be due to leaky valve guides, bad rings or even a cracked block. When there is blue smoke present, it could mean an overhaul is in store or maybe even a new block will be necessary if you buy the car.

Finally, look over the glass and upholstery. New interiors can be expensive. They can sometimes cost thousands of dollars. So if the upholstery is still good, you're in luck. Flat glass isn't usually much of a problem, but curved glass such as a windshield or rear window can be expensive.

There isn't much that can't be fixed on an old car if you have the skills, time and money. As we said before, if a restoration candidate is seriously rusty, chances are it won't be worth taking home even if the owner gives it to you. Take your time, be patient and know what you're looking for. Then you won't go wrong.