

CONSUMER ALERT

by
Jim Mattox
Attorney General

Selecting A Used Car

If you're in the market for a car, chances are you'll be looking at used vehicles. That's because the average new car costs about \$13,000, while the average previously owned car costs only about \$5,000. But used cars vary a lot. Do you know what to look for when buying a used car?

FIRST STEPS

Attorneys in my consumer protection division recommend that you check first with *Consumer Reports*, a national magazine found in most public libraries. This magazine can give you data on specific models and years of various automobiles. The authors will tell you which brands and year models to be careful about, based on frequency of repair records.

If you know exactly what kind of car you want, your best bet may be to buy from a private seller. You will want to ask the owner questions about the condition of the car, whether it has ever been involved in an accident, and why the car is now for sale.

CHECKING THE CAR

You should always take the car for a test drive and have the car carefully inspected by a qualified mechanic. There are some things you can check yourself. Check tires for uneven wear, which may indicate an alignment problem. If the tires are heavily worn, but the odometer reflects low mileage, something is probably wrong—maybe the dealer has rolled back the odometer. This problem is more common than consumers realize.

To check shock absorbers, push down hard on each corner of the car. If you see that it continues bouncing after the first rebound, it may need new shock absorbers.

Also, check the seat covers and seats. If the inside is extremely worn and the odometer says only 15,000 miles, again, there may be something wrong with the odometer reading.

WHAT THE LAW SAYS

Under state law, the buyer and the seller must both sign a notarized statement describing the sale and the amount of sales tax due. This form includes a notation of the odometer reading. When this is filled out, the seller must give the form to the buyer, with the Certificate of Title. It is extremely important to remember to get the certificate. It is illegal to sell a car in Texas without transferring title to the buyer.

FOR MORE HELP

There are many other facts to consider when buying a used car. The more you read and look before buying, the more likely you are to make a good choice. We will be glad to send you our free brochure "Buying or Selling a Car," just one of many publications available at our Consumer Protection regional offices in Austin, Dallas, El Paso, Houston, Lubbock, McAllen, and San Antonio. The Attorney General's office is the people's law firm. We're here to help you.

Special work incentives for disabled people

The old concept that a disabled person required special treatment because of pity for her or his suffering is being replaced by a more realistic approach. The definition of "pity" sometimes connotes a slight contempt because the person is regarded as weak or inferior. And, nobody wants that.

Disabled people want to be regarded as normal person capable of being productive and useful to their families and to society. Most would like to go back to work, but two main concerns hold some of them back. These are fear of failure and losing their disability checks, and fear of losing their Medicaid coverage.

Social Security has tried to meet these two concerns by creating incentives for disabled people who work.

One of the incentives that has proved to be very effective for people getting Social Security disability checks is the trial work

period, which assures disabled persons that they can continue receiving disability checks for up to 9 months while testing their ability to work. Those 9 months need not be in a row, but can be separated by months or even years when the person doesn't work at all.

Generally, only months in which an employee earns over \$75 gross wages count as trial work months. For self-employed people, net earnings over \$75 a month or more than 15 hours with the business count.

After the trial work period, a decision is made as to whether the disabled person can perform substantial gainful work. If the person can, benefits will end after a 3-month adjustment period.

If you are an employee and your monthly gross wages average over \$300, your work is generally considered substantial and gainful. "Substantial" means doing

significant and productive physical or mental work. "Gainful" means work that is done for pay or profit.

If you are self-employed, not only your business income counts as substantial and gainful but also the kind and value of your work, including management of the business.

After the trial period ends, the workers have special protection for at least 15 months. During this period, they will receive benefits for each month of disability in which substantial gainful activity (SGA) is not performed. They must tell Social Security about these months, but do not have to apply for benefits. If they engage in activity after the 15-month period and later must stop because of their condition, generally they must apply again. But, if within 5 years of being off the disability rolls, they again become disabled, benefits can start right away.

The supplemental security income (SSI) program works differently. Once a person is on the rolls, his or her level of earnings does not affect the status of being blind and disabled. SSI payments are reduced in proportion to increases in income, including earnings. However, an individual's disability status stops when the person medically improves or has been ineligible for any SSI payments for 12 consecutive months.

There are special incentives for working disabled people whose SSI

cash payments stop because their earnings have reached the limit.

Two of these incentives are provided under section 1619 of the Social Security Act, introduced as a demonstration project by the Social Security Amendments of 1980. Last October, President Reagan signed the Employment Opportunities for Disabled Americans Act which makes the provisions of section 1619 permanent.

Section 1619(a) allows special SSI payments for disabled SSI recipients who do substantial work and (b) continues Medicaid coverage for working disabled or blind people who are no longer eligible for SSI cash payments because their earnings and other income are too high.

Under the new law, trial work period and SGA determinations no longer will be factors in determining 1619 eligibility for SSI.

When determining the amount of earnings that count, the cost of certain impairment-related services and items like wheelchairs, prostheses, pacemakers, drugs and medications, and other items or aids a disabled person needs in order to work is deducted from total income.

Additional information about this and other special work incentives for disabled people can be obtained from any Social Security office. They are in the telephone directory under Social Security Administration.

It's time to pay back college loans

by Congressman Martin Frost

There are some people in this country who think they still can get something for nothing. The latest example involves people who were given government guaranteed loans to finance their education, but have yet to pay them back even though they are long past due.

Perhaps you have heard the stories of doctors, lawyers and other professionals who are now enjoying prosperous careers but have not bothered to pay back the student loans that helped them get through school.

And they're not the only ones, almost 3.4 million student loans have ended in default because borrowers didn't pay them back. In most cases they don't have legitimate reasons why they can't repay their loan; they just have elected not to do so.

Many college students have participated in the Guaranteed Student Loan (GSL) program since it was established in the 1960's. It provides low interest loans to help finance the high cost of a college education. Banks liked the idea because the federal government vowed to pay back the loan with interest if the student didn't fulfill his financial obligation.

When the government is called on to pay for a defaulted student loan, it does so with the money that it should be using for such things as feeding hungry children, building better highways and shrinking the federal deficit.

Many of us in Congress have recognized this problem and are doing something to correct it. We have instructed the Internal Revenue Service to stop sending tax refunds to those who have defaulted on their loans. Instead, their names are being forwarded to credit bureaus, where they will be marked as bad risks for the future loans; and, if they are federal employees, the debtors are being forced to repay their loans through salary deductions.

The Department of Education has announced that it will be reviewing the records of learning institutions

across America who have high default rates. Education Secretary William Bennett has stated that by 1990 those colleges, universities and trade schools that have a student loan default rate exceeding 20 percent will have their participation in the GSL program reduced or terminated because their students will be considered financial risks.

At a time when the status of higher education in our state needs to be protected as much as possible, it is the responsibility of those who have been fortunate enough to receive loans in the past to pay them back so students in the future will also have the opportunity to afford a college education.

Hill's Bridal Registry

Connie Jezek, bride-elect of Scott Miller

Hill's Jewelry

Downtown

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INS further clarifies I-9 filing

The Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) has made a further clarification regarding I-9 form recordkeeping (employee documentation) for producers of perishable commodities.

An earlier interpretation was that I-9 forms need not be filled out for persons hired in the production and harvesting of perishable crops until December 1, 1988. This interpretation has now been somewhat modified, points out Dr. Richard Edwards, economist with the Texas Agricultural Extension Service, The Texas A&M University System.

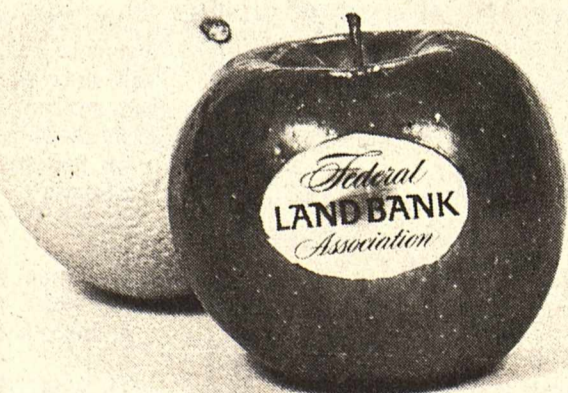
"Producers of perishable crops will not be penalized for hiring production and harvesting persons who cannot present proof that they have the legal right to work in this country," notes Edwards. "This is

not a change from the earlier interpretation; the change relates to filling out and filing an I-9 form."

According to the INS, perishable crop producers must fill out an I-9 form within three working days and ask for qualifying documents. If documents are presented, the I-9 should be completed. If acceptable documents cannot be produced, the employer simply writes SAW (Season Agricultural Worker) on the I-9 form.

When the employee obtains an employment authorization card, it must be shown to the producer, who then should complete the previously incomplete I-9 form.

"This process is to continue until November 30, 1988," says Edwards. "At that time, no persons should be hired unless they can present proper employment documents."



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