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Feature Article

Buyers' Guide

Part III

It is not every day that one invests in owning a vehicle. Thus, when one decides to secure one, he/she anticipates to get the best value for money.

Since we have a growing market for second hand vehicles in Fiji, many consumers aim to buy at least a used-vehicle. But, many a times, the vehicle one ends up with has problems such as the age of the vehicle is questionable, the engine is old, gear box is leaking, no back up service or spare parts are available and in some cases, the vehicles are nearing being written-off.

When it comes to purchasing a second hand motor vehicle, word of mouth is not enough and consumers should not rely on it. Gauging from the number of complaints handled by Consumer Council of Fiji and Fiji Commerce Commission regarding the sale of second hand vehicles, there is a need for consumers to tighten their purchasing power. They should not fall prey to the misleading advertisements or deceptive conducts used by some traders.

The Fiji Commerce Commission formulated Self Regulating Guideline for Sale of Second Hand Motor Vehicles (SRG) outlines a checklist which, buyers of second hand vehicles are encouraged to follow when purchasing a second hand vehicle.

Some points to note from the SRG checklist are:

- is the vehicle battery new
- oil filler neck is not coated with thick black deposits
- oil dip stick is free of dark/black oil
- are there any cracks in the engine belts or hoses
- exhaust pipe emissions are neither blue (indicates engine burns oil) or black (indicate excessive oil consumption)
- are there any visible loose wires
- the engine is free of fluid, oil leaks, corrosion
- check the bottom of engine for any leaks
- check the fluid tanks for any leakages
- are the mileage, age and appearance of the car consistent
- any sign, like, worn screws that the instruments might have been tampered with

- has the motor vehicle been inspected by LTA
- check recorded mileage on service records, LTA fitness documents and other documents
- check the copy of the Export or Cancellation Certificate
- if service history and repair records are available
- does motor vehicle have owner's manual
- is the motor vehicle inspected by an independent mechanic
- was the motor vehicle involved in accident
- was the motor vehicle reported as stolen (if known)
- does the motor vehicle have any financial interest from third parties
- does the motor vehicle have any warranty/guarantee (if yes, please state and provide documentation)
- any defects whether mechanical or physical in the vehicle (if yes, please state and provide documentation)
- has the motor vehicle gone through any damages through natural disaster like flood or cyclone
- are the immediate consumable spare parts readily available

Once a consumer is content with the vehicle according to the checklist, he/she should always enquire about the supply of facilities for repairs should the need arise.

Often some unscrupulous traders fail to mention the important fact that the vehicle sold may not have its spare parts readily available in Fiji. As a result, consumers are given a run around when their vehicles are in need of repairs. Some of them have to wait for months to get the spare parts from the manufacturers/suppliers overseas.

Such information is important **during the point of sale** and the SRG clearly states that a trader must disclose to the consumer on the availability of facilities for repairs or parts before the sale of vehicle **in writing**.

Traders must ensure that supply of facilities for repairs or parts including consumable parts, must be readily available. These parts should be provided to the consumer upon request in a timely manner.

If the consumable parts are not available with the trader who imported the motor vehicle, then the trader is liable to provide the spare parts to the consumer. The parts should be sold at the market price if they are supplied outside the warranty period.

**Next Week, read on *conditions and warranty and trader/consumer responsibility under the SRG.***