How To Buy A New Car

Rampant inflation has changed automobile prices. In the past considerable amounts of money could be saved by waiting for year -end -clearance sales. All this has changed. Here are some new -car - buying tips.

By Edward J. Julian

Are you thinking about buying a new car?

If you are, should you buy now or wait for next yeat's models?

Should you look for a bargain in a dealer's so-called end-of-the-year clearance sale?

Do you need a two-door, a four-door, or a station wagon? Should you buy a four-cylinder engine, a six or an eight?

Should you get air conditioning, power steering, power brakes, or any of the dozens of other options available?

Here are some tips which should make your task easier.

First, decide just how big a car you need. The fact that you might have to haul several of the neighborhood kids to little league baseball practice once or twice a week during the summer doesn't necessarily mean you should buy a station wagon. You should select a car that will coincide with the type of driving you do most of the time.

Let's say you have decided that an intermediate-sized car is best suited for your particular needs. You must decide how much you can reasonably afford to spend. Intermediates start at around $4,000 and can cost as much as $7,500 for a fully-equipped model.

How about the drive-train? Do you need a V-8 engine or can you get along with the standard six? Keep in mind that most intermediates perform sufficiently with a six-cylinder engine. An eight will cost about $250 more and will use more gas.

Do you need automatic transmission which costs about $300 more, or can you manage a manual shift? Surprisingly, the difference in gas mileage is minimal unless most of your driving is on the highway where the manual does have a distinct advantage.

Power Accessories

What about options? Air conditioning, for example, adds weight to the car and draws up to 10 percent of the engine's power. As for power steering and power brakes, they are becoming less of a necessity as cars become increasingly lighter and easier to drive.

Other "vanity" type options include power windows, power seats, power door locks and AM-FM stereo radios with tape player and CB units.

Two less expensive options which you may want are the limited slip differential which concentrates power on the driving wheel with the most traction, and the electric rear-window defogger.

Once you know what you want in a car, go to the various showrooms in your area. Gather brochures on every car you like and think you can afford.

Also check the window stickers for the base price and for the cost of the various options that strike your fancy. Then, sit in the car to see if it is comfortable enough for you. Also check the instrument panel and the view from the rear-view mirror.

Although styling should be considered, the looks of the car shouldn't really have that much of an influence on your final decision. You should be more concerned about the operating efficiency of the car.

Having done all this, you should now have a pretty good idea of what the list price plus options would be for each car.

A Guideline

The sticker price on a car can best be described as a guideline suggested by the manufacturer. Most new cars are sold for less. However, keep in mind that a new car dealer is an independent businessman. To stay in business he must make a profit. How much, is up to you.

The average new car today has a list price of about $6,000, about 20 percent more than the cost to the dealer. Few dealers will sell a car for less than $300 profit, leaving the average new car buyer with about $900 to dicker over, less for a cheaper car, more for a luxury model.

Next, you should test drive each of the models you're interested in. Also insist that a salesman go with you to answer any questions you might have. And during your test drive, drive up hills as well as over bumps and railroad tracks. In other words, give the car a real workout.

Test driving should eliminate all but one or two cars. But should you buy immediately? In the past, car buyers could save a considerable amount of money by waiting for year-end clearance sales. All that has changed, however.

With today's rampant inflation, there are up to five price increases a year. And it's not unusual for a leftover to cost more in October (even with a discount) than it did the previous January.

Of course, it should be pointed out that the next year's model will be even more expensive.

At this point, you should go to as many nearby dealers as possible who handle the model you're interested in. Tell the salesmen you're ready to buy but that you will deal only with someone who has the authority to close the deal. (Most salesmen don't have that authority.)

Price on Paper

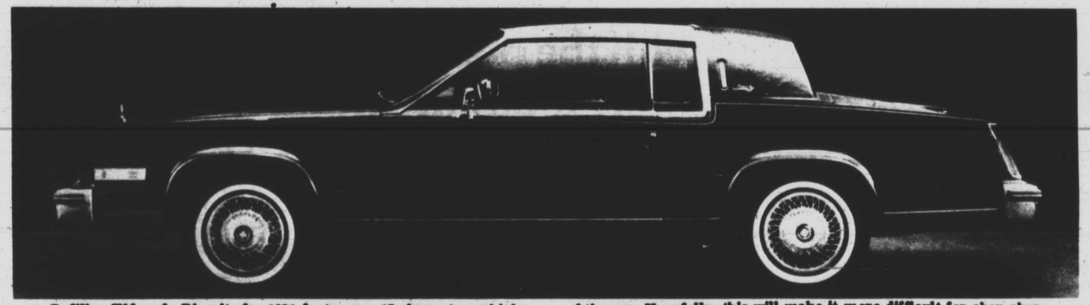
Get the best prices you can — on paper — with all the options and extra charges itemized.

(Continued on Page 39

At top, the Mazda RX-7 sports car for 1981. Standard are a five - speed manual transmission, front and rear anti - roll bars, power - assisted breaks and power radio antenna.

In the middle is the 1981 Pontiac Gran Prix. Aerodynamically, it is reproportioned in a new modern, wedge - shape with a low front and raised rear deck.

The Jeep Cherokee Chief 4-door model is a part of the expanded line of Cherokee and Wagoneer Jeeps. Still featured is the popular 4-wheel drive.



Cadillac Eldorado Biarritz for 1981 features a 17-character vehicle identification number printed on special security labels for all parts of the car. Hopefully, this will make it more difficult for chop shop operators to strip stolen vehicles, then resell the parts illegally.

Sporty model Firebird by Pontiac is the Formula A. All 1981 Pontiacs feature the new GM Computer Command system to meet stricter emission standards.

The AMC Spirit with improved powertrain for added fuel economy is a feature of the 1981 American Motors car. The Spirit models utilize 100 percent one - side galvanized steel on all exterior body panels.