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Certified pre-owned vehicles are commonly presented as being a better buy, or more likely to be reliable, than your average used car. Of course, this additional reliability comes at a premium, which some consumers are willing to pay. However, once you see what “certified pre-owned”™ actually means, it may not seem like such a great deal.

The only thing that separates a certified pre-owned vehicle from any other vehicle is that it has very low miles (probably has some original warranty left on it) and has been thoroughly inspected by the dealership’s mechanic (this is done to every used vehicle regardless) and deemed fit for a warranty package, which is added to the price of the car.

Essentially, the warranty comes with the vehicle, whether you want it or not. Although the vehicle inspection may be somewhat more rigorous when it comes to a certified vehicle, it is still done by the dealership’s mechanics, which some may say constitutes a conflict of interest.

Despite the newness of certified pre-owned vehicles, it is still a good idea to have them looked at by an independent mechanic to ensure there are no signs of abuse or neglect.

Remember, pre-owned is a euphemism for used, the same way collateral damage is a euphemism for deaths. Pre-owned vehicles, no matter who certifies them, are still used vehicles, and should be treated accordingly.

It is also good to consider where most certified pre-owned vehicles come from.

They are usually not trade-ins from customers who drive a vehicle for ten thousand miles and trade them in. Most of them are “program cars,”™ which means they were leased to rental car companies like Enterprise or Avis. Although program cars have low miles, there is no telling how they have been driven or how frequently the oil was changed.

Many people buy certified pre-owned vehicles because “it has a warranty,” but you can get a warranty for any used vehicle. However, some used vehicle warranties may be much better than others, including those that are part of a certified pre-owned package. For this reason, it is important to read the paperwork and find out what is covered, and how things will work if you do need repairs. Some warranties provide a loaner vehicle, while others require you to pay for necessary repairs and submit the bill for reimbursement.

No matter which path you choose, do not overlook the power of negotiation and the possibility of getting the dealer to throw in some extra perks in order to make the sale.

It is also a good idea to compare the price of a certified pre-owned vehicle to a similar unit without the added warranty to see how much that warranty actually costs.

Many car buyers spend more than they intended because of the allure of the warranty and the certified pre-owned designation. However, looking at vehicles that are slightly older, with a few more miles, and adding a warranty, can oftentimes be a much cheaper alternative and be just as reliable as a certified pre-owned vehicle.

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