

## Car Shopping Online



The television commercials aimed at college students are actually true—you can buy a car online and have it show up at your doorstep with very little difficulty. That is if you're in the market for a brand-new car and are willing to wait about six weeks.

Shopping online for a vehicle follows a distinct pattern: the more money you spend, the easier it is. However, the Internet is still a great launching pad in your quest for a new set of wheels.

The trick to buying a car without getting suckered is simple: be informed. It's vital to know everything there is to know about the make and model you want before you ever set foot on a car lot.

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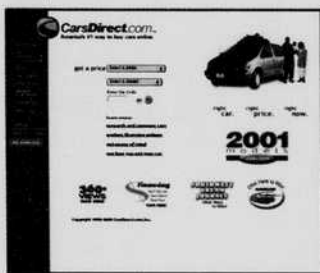
### Getting Started

The first step should be **consumer reports.org**, the grandfather of automobile research. This established magazine offers advice, lists of desirable cars, safety ratings, maintenance tips and pricing guides for both new and used cars. Of course, if *Consumer Reports* doesn't list that 1978 Gremlin you've been eyeing, it's a safe bet that Kelley's Blue Book does at **kbb.com**, where the value of every make and model can be found.



For those in the new car market, shopping online is still an option. Sites like **carsdirect.com** allow shoppers to pick the make, model, options and other features, then view safety and performance reviews. Carsdirect.com will calculate their price, show you the manufacturer's suggested retail price and the dealer invoice price (the published price of the vehicle to

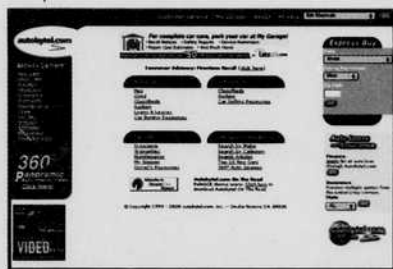
the dealer). **Carsdirect.com** is usually several thousand dollars cheaper than both the MSRP and the dealer's price, an edge it claims is possible because of streamlined operations and an automated purchasing center. Just don't get carried away with the new car showing up at the dorm room scenario—in some cases you'll have to drive to a regional



center to pick up your new ride.

The site also offers financing and leasing information, including calculators that determine your maximum monthly payment.

If you're looking for a used car, try **autobytel.com**, which searches dealerships in your area for the car you're looking for. You can get an idea of how available your car is from the site, but you have to register to find out where these dealerships are actually



located. Other locator sites include **autoweb.com** and **stoneage.com**.

Autoweb.com finds nearby cars listed by local dealers and private parties that fall within your specifications, while stoneage.com lets you into a database to search classified ads.

### Sleuthing

There is one must-go web site for used car shoppers: **carfax.com**. For \$19.95, these guys will serve as your personal snoops and will compile a detailed history of the car in question. Was the odometer turned back? Was the car damaged in a flood, fire or accident? Carfax.com will let you know.

In the end you'll have to decide if you need the thrill of kicking a few tires and haggling with a salesperson, or if you'd rather handle the whole thing in a virtual show room. Whichever way you go, you won't be able to get away with not doing your homework. •

To learn more about buying cars online, go to **Steamtunnels.net** and search using keyword "car."

## Honda and Toyota are leading the pack in producing what will likely be the wave of the future: HYBRID CARS

These sleek vehicles, both of which sell for around \$20,000, run on both gas and electricity, a combination that results in phenomenal mileage—up to 70 miles a gallon. There is no need to plug these things in—the electric motor starts the car, and then the gas engine takes over. The battery supplements the engine, and is continually re-charged while the car is being driven.

The **Insight** can go up to 700 miles on a single tank of gas, and it's not bad looking either. Thanks to Honda's aerodynamic design and lightweight aluminum body, this car is about as environ-



mentally friendly as you can get. It has been estimated that Insight owners save about \$600 a year in fuel costs and reduce pollution by up to 46% compared to other vehicles. For more information on the Insight, go to **honda2000.com**.

The **Prius**, just introduced in the U.S. this year, like the Insight, is the same as any other car out there: it goes just as fast, comes with tons of options, and has all the same safety features. It just happens to get 52 miles per gallon in city driving. Go to **prius.toyota.com** for more details.

