Ex-salesman has some advice for car buyers

by **MARK STEWART**
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Balance needs against wants. Know the market. Remain rational. Have patience.

These are a few of the tips that Emery Albertson, a former car salesman, says can be used to help save you money on your next car purchase.

Albertson has taught classes on car buying at several Portland-area community colleges.

"It's a negotiating business," he says.

In his two years at one of Portland's largest new car dealers, Albertson saw all types of buyers. "I saw one guy pay $3,000 too much for his car and saw one hot selling model sell for $200 over dealer cost on a slow Sunday," he says.

With a little work, a buyer can end up saving hundreds of dollars on a new car purchase.

As a first step, Albertson recommends the potential buyer read three books — "How to Negotiate Anything," by Herb Cohen, "Drive Until It Drops" and "Cherries and Lemons," both by Joe Troist.

Next, strike a balance between the type of car that is needed and that which is wanted. "You have to buy a car that fits your needs," he says.

Once several models have been selected as candidates for purchase, get information about their repair records from books, magazines or mechanics.

If a trade-in is involved, determine its market value, he says. This can be done by checking classified advertisements in newspapers and talking with private parties and dealers. Also, consult a Blue Book, but beware — Albertson says the book often is incorrect during unsettled market periods.

When it is time to begin shopping, determine the difference between the what the dealer paid for the car and the manufacturer's suggested retail price. Albertson says dealers often pay 10 to 12 percent below the sticker price for small cars and 20 percent below the sticker price for large cars.

Determining the car's market is important. More money can be saved buying a slow-selling model than one which is a strong seller, he says.

Try to line up financing before purchasing, he says.

Choose the proper time to strike a deal. The best time is a rainy weekend night near the end of the month, preferably near or after the end of the model year, Albertson says. Often dealers near the end of the month will make a good deal in order to meet a sales quota or help with a team sales contest.

Negotiating a deal for a new car is not for the faint of heart. Many dealers pull out all the stops and resort to a variety of tactics to close a purchase. If one doubts his ability to negotiate, Albertson advocates taking a wheeling-dealing relative along or perhaps hiring another salesman to do the dirty work.

Use homework on the market price in determining the initial offer, Albertson says. Cars with a weak market can be purchased for as little as $100 to $200 over dealer cost. However, some additional dealer profit may have to be paid for some of the best selling models. Do not make a low offer on a hot seller and expect much respect from sales personnel.

Before making a deal, consider whether the car will be taken back to the dealer for service. It's best to pay a bit more for a car if it will be serviced at the same dealer, he says.

Once an offer is made, the psychological battle begins. Be patient, Albertson warns. "I've seen people get stuck in an emotional tissy because they have to have a car today."

Buyers can either offer one price and stick to it or revise the initial offer up. "It's not best to bluff unless you're good at poker," he warns. Once the salesman begins slowing price movements to the $25 range, the lowest price soon will approach.

For the most part, use common sense and patience, Albertson says. "Most people get trapped on their own greed."