Not long ago when a group of guys talked about speed, it referred to horsepower and cars—not RAM and computers. Times change, and although today more people tinker on computers than on car engines, most people probably still dream of owning that perfect car. Fortunately, you can now use your fast computer to help you find a fast car.

If you’re in the market to buy or sell a car, few resources are more helpful than the Internet. For example, consider this hypothetical situation: You walk into a car dealership and fall in love with a certain car. As the salesperson shows you the features of the car and quotes a price, you try to act as if you understand everything he or she is saying and are aware of the true value of the car. In reality, you have no idea if the price the salesperson is quoting is a good deal or not, and you say you need to go home to think it over.

As you agonize over the decision to buy or not to buy the car, you turn to the Internet. You look up the make and model of the car, read reviews, and check out prices. After all this research, you may think, “Hey, I’m getting a good deal.” Or you may realize that you need to talk the price down before you buy this car—way down. Either way, when you return to the dealership, you are now informed and empowered by your newly gained information.

To me, this “hypothetical situation” is not actually hypothetical. I recently bought a car, and the Internet was a lifesaver. I was grateful for the web sites that armed me with information to help me make a good decision. A few hours later, I learned some of the tricks of the trade yourself. For example, car salespeople often employ what Edmunds.com calls the good cop/bad cop tactic. When you and your salesperson finally agree to a deal, he or she will return looking like the manager reamed him or her out for offering the car at such a low price. A salesperson is often the manager reamed him or her out for offering the car at such a low price. A salesperson is often tolerated, if it goes on for too long, Edmunds.com recommends that you take the salesperson to a different car.

Browsing this web site, I learned some of the tricks of the trade car salespeople use. For example, car salespeople often employ what Edmunds.com calls the good cop/bad cop tactic. When you and your salesperson finally agree to a deal, he or she will take it to the manager. A few hours later, the salesperson will return looking like the manager reamed him or her out for offering the car at such a low price. A salesperson is often tolerated, if it goes on for too long, Edmunds.com recommends that you tell the salesperson that you are ready to begin looking some place else.

The good cop/bad cop is just one tactic the dealerships can use against you. Read what Edmunds.com has to say and the next time you go car shopping, keep your eyes open for the little tricks the car salespeople use. In addition, you can use the Edmunds.com web site to determine the value of your new or used car.

WEB SITES

The most popular web site for cars is Carpoint (www.carpoint.msn.com). This web site is great for researching your next purchase. One of the best features of Carpoint is the ability to access reviews from several car experts. You can get the lowdown from three different sources on one web site. In addition, if you want to find out about used cars, you can see what current owners have to say about their cars and how they rate them.

Carpoint can also help you with the upkeep of your car. If you’re like I am, you often forget to change your oil every three months, but Carpoint can help by sending you maintenance reminders via e-mail. This service can also notify you of any manufacturer recalls on your car.

If Carpoint is the premier web site for researching cars, then Autoweb.com (www.autoweb.com) would be the premier site for actually buying and selling cars. When I searched cars for sale in my area, a veritable plethora of automobiles appeared for my surfing pleasure. Carpoint also provides this service, but I tried three searches for three different cars and all three showed no cars available in my generous area radius of two hundred miles.

In addition, at Autoweb.com, you can enter your zip code and request a specific car in which you are interested. If you’re in the market to buy or sell a car, few resources are more helpful than the Internet. For example, consider this hypothetical situation: You walk into a car dealership and fall in love with a certain car. As the salesperson shows you the features of the car and quotes a price, you try to act as if you understand everything he or she is saying and are aware of the true value of the car. In reality, you have no idea if the price the salesperson is quoting is a good deal or not, and you say you need to go home to think it over.

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Dave Castleberry
Lemon Alert

You can benefit financially from buying a used car. Although you miss out on that new car smell, you save literally thousands of dollars that otherwise would be lost to depreciation. As a general rule, a new car will depreciate about 50 percent in the first four years. In other words, if you buy a U.S. $25,000 car and maintain it well, the car may be worth only U.S. $12,500 four years later. A three or four-year-old, however, it depreciates much slower.

If you buy an older car, that slower depreciation rate means thousands of dollars saved, assuming you don’t end up with a lemon. No one wants a lemon, but how can you be sure that the previous owner really was that nice old man who loved his car and only drove it to church and back on Sundays?

Carfax (www.carfax.com) enables you to check the history of a car you want to purchase. For U.S. $14.95, you can enter the Vehicle Identification Number (VIN) of the car, and Carfax will list the complete history of the vehicle, including salvage titles, flood damage, stolen vehicle record, and more. For U.S. $19.95, you can purchase the same service with unlimited use for 60 days. I used this service when I bought my car, and knowing that my car had not been stolen, on fire, or in a flood brought me much peace of mind.

Now I Need a Loan

After you have found your dream car, you will most likely need to find a loan. And if you’re like I am, the need to get the paper work in order, have the loan officer inspect the car, get more paper work in order, and maybe even find a co-signer causes headache after headache. Luckily, you can avoid much of the pain by visiting PeopleFirst.com (www.peoplefirst.com). At PeopleFirst.com, you can calculate your monthly payments in relation to your proposed loan amount. In addition, if you know how much you want to spend each month on a car payment, you can calculate the loan amount.

The interest rates at PeopleFirst.com are very competitive. For example, the interest rate they gave me for my loan was only 7.69 percent. Even with Alan’s Im-Member (a regional credit union) rate of 6.69 percent, I had the peace of mind of knowing that my car was protected. The best part of PeopleFirst.com’s process is that you can be approved in only 15 minutes.

SONY XM SATELLITE RADIO RECEIVER

When you’re travelling in your car away from home, you listen to the radio as long as you can, knowing that your favorite stations will sooner or later fade away into static. Then you’re back to the same old CDs and books on tape again for the rest of the trip. The Sony XM Satellite Radio Receiver now allows you to receive a wide range of audio channels no matter where you go on the planet.

With this little radio, your car’s technology literally becomes space-age technology. This car radio, which is due to be released this summer, can tune in to one hundred different channels that are beamed from space directly to your car.

You’ll never feel out of contact with the rest of the world on those lonely, endless desert highways again, and you won’t have to reset all of your radio stations if you’re vacationing out of town for a week or longer. You can now be constantly and clearly connected to satellite broadcast channels of music, news, sports, talk, and children’s audio programming.

The device is about the size of a portable CD player and comes with a cradle that you can install in your home entertainment system or in your car. The radio is also portable. You can slide it out of your car and take it into your office or home. The radio costs $399 for a custom car installation, and subscription fees are less than U.S. $10 a month. For more information about the Sony XM Satellite Radio Receiver, visit www.sony.com.
some of the dunks are eerily similar to dunk-on-your-head realistic. (In fact, ingly realistic—in-your-face, let-me-2001 was the graphics. They are amaz-

NBA Live 2001 from EA Sports

web site (www.onstar.com) shows the features that OnStar can offer to regular people like you and me. From tracking a stolen car to reporting the exact location of your accident to the police, OnStar offers many great safety features. OnStar's services can also get you tickets to entertain-ment events or can help you find your way through unfamiliar streets.

Most industry experts agree that the automobile as a voice-activated portal will be the industry's standard in the near future. Soon you will be able to buy a new car online from the comfort of your own car. But until the voice-recognition technology is improved, checking e-mail messages and surfing the web using voice commands is still an automotive feature on the drawing board. A cor-

GAME OF THE MONTH

With the NBA regular season winding down and the play-offs beginning this month, game-of-the-month honors ap-

incorporate other moves into your
game. To do this, you have to set the
movements yourself on the keyboard, and it's very difficult to make the mul-
tiple keys ergonomically correct.) My

For more information, visit
www.ncmag.com/advertise.html.