

advertisement

1. Select Your Credit Type

Good

2. Select Your Rate

3.00% - 3.99%

3. Select Your House Type

Single Family

4. Select Your Home Loan

Home Refinance

5. ENTER ZIP CODE

CALCULATE NEW PAYMENT

Learn More

© 2013

LowerMyBills.com

Bankrate.com
Comprehensive. Objective. Free.

WINTER CAR GUIDE



AUTO

5 tips for buying a car in winter

By Lori Johnston • Bankrate.com

Car buying during and after the holidays

1 of 7



If you're bundling up to kick [some tires](#), you may find your pick of cars on the lot and salespeople willing to make deals.

"Between Christmas and New Year's is absolutely a dead, dead time at the [dealerships](#)," says Lauren Fix, author of "Lauren Fix's Guide to Loving Your Car."

Once the holiday season is over, snow days can keep people away from dealer lots, and preparing for tax day keeps others from adding more expenses to their lives.

If you're [buying](#) in the winter, it's important to look at these factors, including the vehicle's cold-weather features, what new models are planned and your budget.

Just like people winterize their vehicles, think about winterizing your approach to buying a car in lower temperatures and the off-season.



<< [Back to the Winter Car Guide table of contents.](#)

Find winter-worthy features

2 of 7

Heated seats make a [car](#) more comfortable on a frigid morning. An electrically heated windshield could help thaw the frost and ice faster, says Mike Quincy, automotive specialist with Consumer



Reports. Such a windshield is a rare option found in luxury models, which might set you back \$1,500 as part of a climate comfort package offered on the car. However, heated seats are more common and usually part of an overall cold-weather package included in mid- or higher-priced levels.

Also, in your conversation with the salesperson, focus more on [tires](#) than you would during the spring or summer. [Winter tires](#) or snow tires can keep you safe if you live in areas with heavy snowfall, Fix says.

"If you're not willing to make that investment, your safety is being compromised," Fix says. Cars with high-performance tires may not fare as well on icy roads. [Snow tires](#) typically cost the same as all-season tires, but there may be additional fees related to their installation when you're purchasing a car.



[<< Back to the Winter Car Guide table of contents.](#)

Decide on buying an older model

◀ 3 of 7 ▶



The No. 1 cost that new car owners face is not gas, maintenance or insurance, but depreciation, Quincy says. If you buy the 2010 model that's still on the lot at the end of year or remaining on the lot at the start of 2011, it's already almost a year old. Even though it's a brand new car, it's already depreciated in value, he says.

"A leftover model, in general, can be a good deal if you're the kind of person who [drives their car](#) into the ground," Quincy says, noting that could be 100,000 to 200,000 miles.

"If you like to buy a [new car](#) every two to three years, the car already has a year's worth of depreciation."

On the other hand, some [redesigned models](#) hitting the showroom floors later in 2011 are not as good as what's still on the lot, which would give you another reason to go ahead and buy a past model.



[<< Back to the Winter Car Guide table of contents.](#)



The slow dealership traffic extends past the New Year and into January and February, making them great months to shop for a car, Quincy says. The dealers are dying to get rid of the 2010 models, he says.

The same negotiating rules apply, regardless of the time of the year. Quincy advises you to know what the dealer cost is and work up from there, compared to down from the sticker price.

"You're just probably going to have a more captive audience for a salesman when you go in

the winter months because they don't see many people," Quincy says. "These tactics should be effective."

If you're thinking ahead to spring and looking to buy a car like a convertible, the pricing could swing in your favor now since those may not be leaving the lot as quickly in winter.

However, if you live in a snowy climate and want a car with winter features, the dealer could have the upper hand. Of course, if you want one of the hot cars in the market, like Nissan's Leaf electric car, you will have less negotiating leverage at a dealership, Quincy says.



<< [Back to the Winter Car Guide table of contents.](#)



If you're buying a used car, make sure the car's components that are most important in winter are working properly. Inspect the battery, which could have its power reduced by up to 50 percent by severely cold temperatures. Also check the belts, hoses and wipers, according to Edmunds.com.

Make sure the four-wheel-drive system is operating properly and that the tires are properly inflated. The heater and any cold-weather features, like heated seats, also should be functioning properly.

If you're buying a used car, don't just trust the word of the seller. Fix says take it to an independent National Institute for Automotive Service Excellence-certified technician to have it checked out.



<< [Back to the Winter Car Guide table of contents.](#)

Remember those after-holiday bills



January and February are typically the highest default months on [car payments](#), says Eric Hoffman, spokesman for Aware, or Americans Well-informed on Automobile Retailing Economics, based in Washington, D.C.

Factor your potential monthly car payment into your budget, and don't forget to include those credit cards and [holiday](#) bills coming due in January and February. If you know you're going to pay hundreds or thousands of dollars during those months on gifts for your family and friends, you may need to adjust your down payment, buy a used car or a cheaper new car,

or hold off on your purchase.

At the same time, you may see your monthly [take-home](#) pay drop during the winter, depending on how you are paid. "The last thing you want to do is to get stretched too thin," Hoffman says.



[<< Back to the Winter Car Guide table of contents.](#)

Additional resources



For more information on cars, check out these stories at [Bankrate.com](#).

[Best crossovers for 2011](#)

[Top 10 movie cars of the decade](#)

[Is a hybrid car right for you?](#)

[7 auto creature comforts](#)

[5 fast cars on the cheap](#)



[<< Back to the Winter Car Guide table of contents.](#)

Posted: Dec. 06, 2010