

[New](#)[Used](#)[Appraise](#)[Reviews](#)

[Home](#) / [Sell Car](#) / [How to Safely Sell Your Car](#)

How to Safely Sell Your Car

Common Sense and Planning Can Keep You Out of Trouble



by **Edmunds**
May 1st, 2020

Share:



We've all likely heard a horror story of a vehicle sale gone wrong on Craigslist, resulting in stolen cash, car theft or worse. And while these stories show the potential danger of private-party used car sales, don't let these extreme cases deter you. You can safely sell your used car — and maximize its value — by taking the right preventive measures.

[Craigslist](#), one of several sites that facilitate private-party car sales, says that its buyers and sellers complete billions of transactions with an extremely low incidence of violent crime. Still, meeting with strangers to sell your car does put you at risk of [fraud](#), scams, robbery and possible physical attacks.



This safety advice comes from the police and our personal experience selling more than 50 cars from Edmunds' [long-term test fleet](#). There's also another knowledgeable but less obvious source of good tips: real estate agents. They often meet strangers to arrange showings and sales and sometimes their work puts them in vulnerable positions. Just like private-party car sellers.

4 Tips for Car-Selling Safety

1. Vet callers thoroughly. When Steve Goddard, former president of the California Association of Realtors, takes a call from someone he's never met, he makes sure the caller is serious about buying a property and isn't trying to lure him into a trap to rob him. "I ask them lots of questions about what they are looking for and what their needs are," he says. "The more I engage them in conversation, the more you get a feel for them."

2. Don't go to a meeting alone. It's that simple, says Rico Fernandez, a lieutenant with the Long Beach Police Department in California. "Take someone with you. People are less apt to harm you if there is someone else there."

3. Meet in a public place. Goddard says that when he meets someone for the first time, he does so at his office. While you can't do that when you're selling a car, you can arrange to meet would-be buyers in a public place, such as a shopping mall parking lot.

4. Trust your gut. Evaluating callers requires a combination of intuition and experience, Goddard says. And if you're not comfortable meeting with potential buyers under any circumstances, you should turn the sale over to an auto broker or trade in the vehicle. You'll have to accept that you might not get the best deal, but peace of mind is priceless. So is your life.

If you want to avoid taking any chances with a private-party sale, there's an alternative here on Edmunds. [Appraise](#) your vehicle to get an instant offer, which is good for seven days.

Screening Potential Buyers 101

If you do a good job [screening buyers](#) before you meet them face to face, selling your car will go much more smoothly. Listing your car on Craigslist, Facebook Marketplace or Autotrader will bring emails, text messages and calls from interested parties. Use your intuition to spot anything suspicious about these potential buyers:

- Don't be overly eager for a sale or you might miss a warning sign. If a caller seems suspicious to you, simply hang up.
- Only schedule a test drive with serious buyers you are able to reach by phone. Invite questions when you talk with them. This strategy helps prevent you from showing the car to someone who isn't really interested or someone you'd rather not deal with. If the caller doesn't seem to know what to ask, volunteer the basics about the car: year, make, model, color, number of doors, number of miles on the car, and its key features.
- Beware of professional buyers who just want to flip cars, which means reselling them quickly at a profit. Flippers or "curbstoners" bargain aggressively. You can usually identify these callers because they quickly want to get to your lowest selling price. If you have doubts, ask them if they're buying to resell. While flippers might not pose a hazard to your personal safety, they're tough negotiators and it's better to avoid dealing with them.
- Ask who is coming on the test drive. Evasive answers might indicate that the caller is setting up a trap.
- Tell the caller you will want to see a driver's license before the test drive. This request might discourage anyone with criminal intentions from going any further.

On the Test Drive

- When you ask to see the buyer's driver's license before the test drive, snap a photo of it and text it to a friend.
- Have a friend or family member come along with you. If no one is available, at least let someone know where you are going and who you're meeting.

- Share your location with a loved one on your smartphone in case anything goes wrong. If you are suspicious and don't want the would-be buyer to know that, arrange a code word beforehand with a friend or family member. Using the code word will be your way to tell your friend you need help.
- Meet prospective buyers during the day in a public area such as the parking lot of a mall. Park the car in a high-traffic area where people can see you.
- Don't leave any valuables in the car on the test drive. Don't leave your wallet in the center console.
- Accompany the buyer on the test drive. For one, the buyer may be unfamiliar with the area and need directions. But this step also ensures the person can't just drive off with your car never to be seen again.
- If for some reason you can't ride along, don't give your only car key to the prospective buyer. If the "buyer" decides to take a joy ride and abandons your car, it'll be easier to retrieve if you have an extra key.
- Keep the test drive short and go through populated areas. Most buyers don't expect a long test drive. If your buyer wants more time, let him ask you for it.

Negotiation and Handling Payment

If the person is serious about buying the car, he will want to negotiate the price. This merits its own discussion and isn't really safety-related, so we'll refer you to [this article](#). When it is time for cash to exchange hands, here are a few safe ways to make sure the transaction goes smoothly:

- Refuse any unusual requests, such as driving the would-be buyer to another location. Often, such a request is framed in terms of getting the money or arranging a loan to finish the sale. Instead, tell the buyer to
- Cash is best, but if your vehicle is worth more than, say, \$10,000, for example, the buyer may not feel comfortable carrying that much and will likely want to pay via a cashier's check.

- Instead, arrange to meet the buyer at the person's bank, to either witness a cash withdrawal or verify funds on a cashier's check you're being given.
- There are potential scams with cashier's checks to be aware of, so make sure you witness the buyer getting it from the bank or call the bank to verify its authenticity. Follow these tips for [avoiding cashier's check fraud](#).
- If the test drive begins and ends at your home, don't let the prospective buyer into the house. Conduct the transaction at the curb. Have the paperwork ready beforehand and keep the car's title, often called "pink slip," unsigned and out of sight until you have full payment.
- Avoid escrow services, even ones that seem to come from Edmunds. We do not offer any escrow service and it is likely a [scam](#).
- Once the deal is complete and the car is out of your hands, immediately file a "release of liability" form with the department of motor vehicles. Then, if the car is used in a crime or gets a parking ticket, you won't be held responsible.

Final Thoughts

Remember that it is best to deal with car buyers in person and trust your intuition. If something feels off, back away. Good luck out there and stay safe.