

Be Careful Buying a Used Car on Okinawa

By Rudy Wartella

Welcome to Okinawa! You have taken your driving test and are ready to start driving on the left side of the street. Are you ready to buy a car and start exploring this subtropical paradise? There are many used car dealers on Okinawa, and there are also some "lemon" lots. There are some advantages and disadvantages to both.

Lemon lots offer a wide selection of vehicles sold by private owners. Some of these private owners maintained their vehicles while others didn't even change the oil. One thing is almost certain. When you buy something at the lemon lot, you are buying it "AS IS." There are many good deals to be found at the lemon lot, but there are also some bad ones. If you buy a car at a lemon lot, you may want to have a mechanic inspect it before you close the deal. Most of these lemon lot agreements are irrevocable. You could really be buying a lemon. Your legal remedies are very limited should you become a victim of a dishonest private owner.

Used car lots also offer a wide selection of vehicles at comparatively higher prices than the lemon lot. Unlike the typical private seller, used car lots usually offer warranties. Unlike some used car lots that prey on servicemen near CONUS military bases, the used car lots on Okinawa are usually reputable and will honor their warranties. There have been some bad apples, but these are the exceptions. Notwithstanding the good reputation of most used car lots, there are still some things you should look for. As mentioned above, used car lots offer warranties, but what does the warranty cover, and for how long? Some of these warranties can be negotiated. What does the contract say? These contracts are relatively simple, but feel free to call the legal assistance office to have an attorney review your paperwork before you sign. In addition to warranty information, the typical contract states the payment terms; including information about default, repossession, and contacting your supervisor if you are delinquent. Historically, the military has taken an interest in service members staying current on their car payments.

Most newcomers are excited to get their own car, but it may be more prudent to take your time and get the right vehicle and right deal for you. My final advice is to ask a few people who have been on Okinawa for awhile before you sign on the dotted line. Of course, if the engine is smoking, you probably don't want to buy it.

If you are buying a car, you may come to the Torii Station Legal Assistance Office to sign the required Japanese Letter of Attorney. Please note that we are located in Building 214 across the parking lot from the 10th SG Headquarters. Our phone number is still: 644-4332.

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