

Buying, selling cars on the Web can be rewarding



John Deans

Last summer we were all paying around \$4 for a gallon of gasoline, and I was really stressing driving my Dodge truck that was getting 13 miles per gallon.

Racing from client to client all day long I was racking up an \$800 monthly fuel bill with rumors of even higher oil prices in the fall.

In order to get a handle on my rising costs I purchased a Honda Civic Hybrid boasting 40 mpg city and 45 mpg highway driving.

With the hills around town I averaged 38 mpg around town and 42 mpg on U.S. 290 between towns. I monitored my mileage consistently with the iPhone app mpg and have entered mileage and gallons purchased at every fill up since I bought the car.

That little iPhone app mpg began to show a diminishing fuel efficiency just after the end of May, when it got hot. As June rolled in and 100 degree temps arrived, my mpg averaged dropped from 38 down to 32, and I was bummed about it. After doing some research on the Web I found other hybrid owners with similar problems in hot environments.

Not only did I have decreased fuel mileage during those hot days, the battery assistance would peter out quicker which meant all propulsion came from the under powered gas engine rather than the joint effort with the electric motor.

Now I had a slow car that got poor gas mileage. On top of that when the batteries ran

low, the air conditioning did not cool the car as well. Great, by the end of June I had a slow, hot nerd mobile that did not even get the mileage I bought it for.

I was so frustrated I went on e-Bay and bought a 2006 VW Jetta Turbo Diesel (TDI). It looks great, moves fast, AC runs very cool, I get 33 mpg in town and 40+ on the highway problem fixed. That was the first time I had bought a car on the Internet and I learned quite a bit.

After deciding on the exact model and year I wanted, the search began for it via Craigslist.com and eBay.com. Craigslist.com is a great place to find stuff for sale mostly by private individuals in your area.

I began my search using the key-

words "2006 Jetta TDI" under the Houston instance of Craigslist which has the simple URL of Houston.Craigslist.com.

Quickly I found a nice 2006 TDI in blue with low mileage for sale from a guy down in Clear Lake. I e-mailed him through the anonymous Craigslist email portal and he called me that evening. The next day we met up and struck a tentative deal.

The problem was he could not sell it for at least a week which gave me time to look for other car deals on the Web.

Sure enough I found a better value with a black Jetta with leather, moon roof, lower mileage and in even better shape for sale on e-Bay.

The owner was located in Richmond, Texas and he had a reserve amount on the bid. I put my bid in at \$15,100 and it turned out to be the winner, but it was still under his reserve price.

Determined, I e-mailed and asked him to call me to see if I could still purchase the car. After some online negotiating away from Ebay (they don't like after-bidding deals), we reached a price of \$16,500 via text messaging and e-mail.

Then he drove the awesome looking Jetta TDI here to Brenham and we

closed the deal. Later that day I pulled out of the original deal for the blue Jetta from the Craigslist guy in Clear Lake. Hey, you snooze, you lose.

Now I had a great car that got good gas mileage, looked cool and ran fast, but I had that golf cart of a car called the Honda Civic Hybrid to get rid of now. So, I used Craigslist.com and AutoTrader.com to advertise it so I could hopefully sell it to an individual rather than taking the big hit at a dealership.

The first thing I learned was how important taking the digital pictures of the car was in order to sell it on the Internet. This was accomplished by viewing dozens of other car ads on e-Bay, Craigslist and AutoTrader. After having the Civic Hybrid detailed I took over 50 shots of the car in every angle possible of both the exterior and interior.

Those pictures were done in landscape mode with 800x600 pixel resolution to be easy to upload. Craigslist.com allows you to only upload four pictures so I picked the best looking ones with two of the inside and a couple of the outside of the car.

AutoTrader.com cost \$44 to run the ad for eight weeks and or \$59 to run it

until it sells. They also charge you for the number of pictures you upload.

I implemented the ads on both Craigslist and AutoTrader the same day just to see which online service worked the best. I got several calls from individuals through the Craigslist.com ad the first couple of weeks, but no one bought the car. I got a few calls from the AutoTrader ad but they were all from automotive dealerships.

Getting close to the month time lapse I started getting worried I may have problems selling the golf cart, I mean the Civic Hybrid. Then out of the blue, a dealership near Austin called me to offer me just \$500 from my asking price —

Sold! I was just glad to get rid of it. The car did not have any specific problems that needed to be fixed, it just does not perform well under intense Texas heat. Last time I ever buy a hybrid.

Bottom line: Buying and selling cars on the internet can open many opportunities to find you a cool ride.

Next week's column: CCleaner.

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