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Consumer Advisory Bulletin- July 2003

Prevent Odometer Fraud

Make Sure the Mileage is Accurate When you Buy a Used Car

The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration estimates that odometer fraud costs Americans more than \$1 billion a year in inflated car prices. Odometer fraud occurs when someone illegally rolls back or misrepresents the mileage reading on a vehicle.

Odometer fraud is costly for consumers. According to a federal study, consumers pay an average of \$2,336 more than the vehicle is worth when an odometer has been rolled back, and others calculate the loss as much higher than that. There are other costs, such as higher payments for financing and insurance, unexpected repair costs - and the risk that the car is less safe than expected.

Digital odometers have made it harder for some scam artists to roll back miles, but others use computers to do it quickly and cheaply. Any vehicle can be the target of odometer fraud, but hot-selling vehicles often are targeted, especially sport utility vehicles. Odometer fraud appears to occur most frequently with fairly new vehicles that accumulate high mileage in a short time, such as rental cars, company cars and leased vehicles.

Follow these tips to avoid becoming a victim of odometer fraud:

- Have the vehicle inspected by an auto technician you trust, and ask the technician to look for signs of odometer fraud.
- Look for signs of odometer fraud yourself, such as more wear-and-tear than you'd expect for the mileage (for example, excessively worn gas and brake pedals.)
- Get a title history from the Iowa Department of Transportation and check whether the mileage records are consistent. Check mileages with prior owners, if possible.
- Check with independent vehicle history database services, such as Carfax.com or autocheck.com, which will research vehicle histories for a fee. (But be aware that these services might not discover all mileage discrepancies.)
- Read the mileage disclosure provided by the seller. Federal law requires sellers to list the mileage and state whether the reading is actual miles or not, or if the reading exceeds the mechanical limits of the odometer (the odometer has "rolled over.")
- To file an odometer fraud complaint, contact the Iowa Attorney General's Consumer Protection Division, 1305 E. Walnut, Des Moines IA 50319. Call 515-281-5926, send e-mail to Consumer@ag.state.ia.us, or see web site at www.iowaAttorneyGeneral.org.

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