

BUYING AN LBC - Control the Event

There has been talk on the news about rip-offs in used cars with odometer roll backs so I thought a few words on buying a used LBC may be in order. First, the odometer is most likely wrong either from being broken or the speedo being replaced so do not worry about what is shown. If you are looking to buy one, follow these few guidelines and they can tell you more about the condition than the odometer will.

Insist that the car be cold when you go look at it. The engine makes all kind of noises when cold and you can tell a lot. If there is a rattle deep in the engine until the oil pressure comes up, expect bad rod bearings. If the engine has hydraulic lifters, they could tap for a minute or so. This says they are bleeding down over night and may need replacing. Is the cold oil pressure high? Watch it as the engine warms up, it should stay above 50psi at 2,000 rpm when the temp is normal. If not, could be worn main bearings.

On Triumph TR6 and Spitfire engines, always take a screwdriver with you so you can pry the crank pulley back and forth. You want no more the .008" play. This is about 1/2 the thickness of a match book cover, not much. Any more and you will need thrust washers.

Check the clutch operation when cold also. Cold trans fluid creates a lot of drag on the gears and a weakish clutch may cause a little grind going between gears. If there is overdrive, test it cold and hot, it should work about the same at both temps. If it works cold but not hot, there may be wear in the internals that cost a lot to fix. Listen to the diff when cold and hot. No noise when cold but clunky when hot could be worn spider gear thrust washers or too much backlash in the gears.

If the seller insists on having the car warmed up when you get there, ask why or just pass on it. Cold temps. say a lot about condition and driveability. This morning would be a great time to go look at one. Not everyone is out to rip you off so be careful and ask if you do not know. Try to take it to a mechanic who knows the type car you are looking at. Even if you do not intend to do so, the sellers reaction may be very telling.

Or buy a Miata, they never seem to break (I have never owned, driven or sat in a Miata). The difference is when you drive your Miata to the gas station, you just get gas. When you drive your LBC to the station, you get gas and conversation with the person next to you. It seems 95% of the people have had an experience with British cars and are willing to tell you about it. Embellished of course!