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You bought THAT vehicle?

Long ago, John Muir's wonderful book "How to keep your Volkswagen alive" recommended sitting cross-legged on the roof of the car and saying "omm" a lot. It may not have helped to read the vehicle's karma, but it sure confused the hell out of the seller. There are perhaps less exotic ways of checking out a used Land Rover and all are strongly recommended.

Do not pass "go" just pay the money

Get a pre-purchase check. Just in case you missed or glossed over this advice, once again "*get a pre-purchase check.*" Also, do NOT get this done by a mate, or the local friendly service station. Land Rover dealers are also to be avoided, for reasons best left unstated. Go to a Land Rover expert shop and pay the money. The cost might seem like a lot, but it is nothing compared to the potential cost if you buy a heap of junk. However, be warned that even the best of specialists cannot diagnose every problem, even if potentially major, so be sure to drive the vehicle in as wide a range of conditions as possible in order to detect potential faults.

No doubt the seller will provide all kinds of reasons why you cannot have the vehicle for a day to conduct the check. His mother is ill. The kids need to be driven to school. He will suffer pangs of anxiety. His dog will bite him. Inventiveness is the key to avoidance. In any of these or similar cases, walk away. It is a buyer's market and if he wants to sell the car, he needs to demonstrate that the sale is not a result of something horrible he does not want you to know.

The value of being suspicious

It is better to be difficult to please, than to be destitute. Assume the worst then whatever actually happens will be a pleasant surprise:

- *Any and every* noise, vibration or misfire is worth serious attention.
- Vibration or wandering steering could be tyre damage, a bearing, worn bushes or a cracked universal joint.
- DO check the door bottoms and frames, also under the carpets for rust and don't believe that Land Rovers are all aluminium. A vehicle that has been driven on sand can be an absolute rust bucket and will literally be un-roadworthy.
- Blowing smoke is not a good idea. If it is black, the injectors need work, or replacement. If blue, a new set of rings and bearings can cost thousands
- Overheating can mean many things, from a viscous coupling on the fan, a blocked radiator, defective thermostat or a blown head gasket (plus several other causes). However, some overheating problems may not be detected until the vehicle is pushed hard, like steep uphill climbs –something a pre-purchase check may not reveal. This is especially true of early diesel engines

that take a long time to get to normal operating temperature. Be sure to test it yourself under these conditions.

- Heater hoses that are hardening, or coolant hoses softening should be considered minor but necessary repair jobs
- Loss of coolant means trouble. It can only go two places – onto the ground via a busted hose, leaking radiator, worn water pump etc OR through the engine. The latter is by far the more expensive fix, usually involving head and/or valley gaskets.
- Water on the floor of the car may be rainwater coming through a sunroof or window but more likely, a blown heater hose or heater core. The parts to fix these problems are cheap, but the labour time to fix them is frightening
- Cutting out at traffic lights could mean several things, mostly expensive to fix. A fuel pump is only a few hundred dollars but a set of injectors might require a new mortgage..
- If the vehicle has air suspension, don't believe it is just a leaking air-spring seal. It could be, but it might also be the valve block, compressor, EAS computer in which case, sell the house and move into the car.
- Braking must be smooth and efficient. Pulling one way might be a worn pad, but it might also be a leaking hub seal or ball joint. If there are nasty noises, assume that the disks (rotators) need replacing or maybe a calliper is broken.
- If the air conditioning doesn't work, it is not as simple as topping up the gas. There has to be a reason. With luck it will be a loose junction or worn O-ring, but it could be the compressor and if it is an old system, it will need a complete overhaul and new parts..

Whassat? You bought the vehicle *without* getting these things checked? Maybe you didn't notice the advice to *get a pre-purchase check*.

Emotion versus science

Be suspicious of massive suspension lifts, ultra wide tyres, roof-bars with a zillion driving lights and so on. These may just be urban-cowboy enhancements, but it might also mean a hard life. That is not a reason to reject the vehicle if it has been well maintained, but once again, assume the worst.

Of course, you will want to customise your new vehicle. However, be careful of spending money on upgrades until ALL of the essentials have been done. Never kid yourself that the purchase price will cover everything that is needed. If you get the vehicle at a reasonable price, it is prudent to spend a bit more money with a professional Land Rover specialist to ensure it is safe and totally roadworthy.

One last time - GET A PRE-PURCHASE CHECK. It will save a lot of angst and money later.