

Dodgy Dealers

Sharp Practices

Think about it. When you bought your last motor vehicle, how did you feel when you got home? Elated? Satisfied? Or did you come away thinking that you'd been taken for a bit of a sucker? Used-car salesman have always had a reputation for practices which are on the slightly dubious side, but judging by what some of our customers have told us about their experiences, some scooter dealers are unfortunately little different. So how can you protect yourself?

Advertising standards

Let's start at the beginning. The first thing that dealers want to do is attract you into their lair – sorry, showroom - so they advertise. There is significant legislation around advertising designed to protect the public, unfortunately it's not well enforced. Where adverts show prices, the full rideaway price must be shown, or be able to be calculated. The vehicle price can be considerably lower than the rideaway price, which can be different for each dealer. You can only compare the price of products if you know what the final cost of that product is, so if the adverts not clear, then phone up and ask. And if they don't give you the rideaway price directly, ask yourself why. These rules apply to websites too. So whichever media you're using to do your research, work out who speaks with forked tongue before you walk through their doors.

Entering the showroom

So now it's time to see the goods. Well first things first. Is the bargain scooter you saw in the ad actually available? If not, then the dealer may have used bait advertising to entice you into their showroom. Very naughty, highly illegal. What if the bargain scooter that was advertised turns out to only have a rather pathetic top speed of 40kmh, and the salesman tries to interest you instead in a faster, but more expensive model? Well up-selling like this is not illegal, but you've bitten their hook.

The sales process

So you are in the showroom and you're talking. Or are you? Is the salesman actually listening to what you need or is he trying to push you toward certain models. Are you getting the advice you need to buy the right scooter for you, or do you get the feeling it's the one that makes the most commission for them? If you are prepared with a number of questions, then you'll be better able to determine the quality of their advice. If they aren't listening, then you probably won't get what you need.

Comparing models

Remember how we told you that legally adverts need to tell you the rideaway price? Well once you enter the showroom, that is no longer the case, and you may find yourself back talking vehicle price again, and doesn't it sound cheap! Salespeople know that once you have emotionally committed to buying a

particular vehicle and start to write up the contract that you are theirs. So when they stick on the extra charges for dealer delivery and on road costs that they haven't previously discussed, they know you are unlikely to cause a fuss. And chances are you won't because you'll feel that you should have known that beforehand or should have asked. Don't get caught out. Make sure you always talk rideaway price so you can get a proper comparison, and know how much lighter your wallet will be before making that internal commitment to buy.

Testing the promises

So the salesman has told you that this little number hits sixty with ease, guaranteed. Or that this model never breaks down. Well is that true, or just sales talk? You need to find out before you buy, because once the sale is done and the scooter is registered in your name, you are going to struggle to get recompense if it fails to live up to this expectation. Unlike most consumer goods, once a motor vehicle is registered, it's extremely hard to get your money back. Unless performance information is in the literature or the contract you may struggle legally to get any comeback. If you have certain conditions that you absolutely have to have, such as a minimum top speed, and this is not stated in the brochure, you might try to ask the salesman if they will add these conditions to the contract. I doubt they will, but it's a great test of the quality of their "guarantee" and it might be fun to watch them furiously back pedaling!

The close

So you've seen the scooters, got some information, and you now want to go home and think about it. Well you may want to, but believe me, that is the last thing that any salesman wants. Once you are out of the shop your custom is possibly back on the market, so they are going to try to get you to commit there and then. How? Well perhaps that model that you liked so much is suddenly the last one available, or the price that you have been discussing is a special that finishes today. You know how it goes. But it's up to you to decide whether you believe them or not. However if you aren't sure, then my advice is to walk away. Buying a scooter is a fairly significant investment for most people, and making the right choice is paramount. You have the right to make a good one, and a good salesperson should respect that. A good sale is good for both parties, but if one side feels it has been manipulated then the relationship that you have just entered into (because you will need to come back for servicing) will not be a happy one.

On the other foot

Of course, dealers haven't got the monopoly on sharp practices, and most that I have met are simply business people trying to make a living in a highly competitive market. Some customers appear to be of the mindset that if they don't screw the price down as low as possible then the deal isn't a good one. Well let me give some advice. The quality of the after sales support that you will receive will be reflected in how you look after the dealer. If a week after your

purchase you call the dealer for assistance because your scooter won't start, which customers do you think they'll go the extra mile to assist?

A marriage made in heaven

By now you will hopefully have realised that while buying a scooter is about product, it's also about building a relationship. And as salespeople reflect the organisation that they work for, you need to work out if it's a relationship that you want to be in. Sure, you might decide to buy a scooter, and get it serviced elsewhere, but it's not rocket science to work out that dealers look after the customers who bought from them much more than those who bought elsewhere. Loyalty goes two-ways.

So why am I, a dealer, letting you into the "industry secrets"? Because there are a lot of good, honest dealers out there who are tired of being tarred with the same brush as their less reputable competitors, and are always trying to raise the standards of customer services. So if you are tired of getting the feeling that you have been taken for a ride, then find a good dealer and support them with your dollar. You won't be disappointed.

This article was written in 2006 and published in Edition 8 of Scooter magazine. "There is nothing more annoying when buying a new vehicle than having to cut through the bull to get the information that you require. It's no surprise that car salesman are among the most untrusted people in WA! When we started Ace Scooters, we wanted to treat customers as we would like to be treated ourselves. Accurate information, an understanding of the buyer's needs and desires, and no hard sell. Mix that with a good set of products, and the buying process can be a lot of fun! We know that most of our customers have never ridden a scooter before, and don't know the legislation surrounding these products. That makes such customers vulnerable to the unscrupulous. We are in this business for the long term, which means that we don't want to sell you just your first scooter, but also your next one, and every one thereafter. We want to build a long-term relationship with our customers, and we can only do that if they trust us."