Bargain Hunting
Getting a great car deal is easier than you may think.

The Insider’s Guide
to Buying a New or Used Car
By Burke ’59, G’64 and
Stephanie Leon ’62, G’65
$9.95

Few people truly enjoy car shopping. The experience is typically stressful and often torturous, particularly when pushy salespeople begin their this-car-is-you spiel followed by their I-can’t-go-any-lower tales of woe. Buyers want a good deal, yet most are entering an arena where they have little expertise or confidence.

Car buying doesn’t have to be so daunting.

“If you know what you’re doing you can save a lot of money and come out feeling good,” says Burke Leon, who, with wife Stephanie, co-authored The Insider’s Guide to Buying a New or Used Car.

“It’s everybody’s dream to drive into a dealership in their old car, toss the keys to a salesperson, point to a fully loaded dream car, pay the asking price with a roll of hundreds, and drive out 15 minutes later with all the paperwork done,” write the Leons. “Well, that happens only in your dreams; it is never so simple.”

Buying a car is like haggling over the price of a yard-sale couch, only on a larger scale, write the authors. Getting a deal simply requires some negotiating, and the Leons, both of whom have two degrees from Syracuse University, provide numerous how-to-examples.

The Insider’s Guide to Buying a New or Used Car, now in its second printing, is the Leons’ first book.

“While I have developed an interest in being savvy and coming out a winner in negotiated settlements, I did not spend my life preparing to be an auto dealer, an auto salesman, or a consumer auto expert,” says Burke Leon, a used-car-lot owner who earned a bachelor’s degree from the College of Arts and Sciences in 1959 and a master’s degree in chemistry in 1964. Stephanie Leon earned a bachelor’s degree from the School of Education in 1962 and a master’s degree in English in 1965.

Their 192-page book covers every possible concern when buying a new or used car, including whether to buy foreign or American, what to do during a test drive, and various tactics and counter tactics for dealing with salespeople. Also included are checklists on what to ask when buying or selling a used car through a newspaper, and how to respond to a newspaper ad.

The book concentrates on negotiating techniques. Helpful questions and examples of buyer-dealer dialogues provide readers with the necessary tools to survive this sometimes grueling process.

“Most of us grow up with only one negotiating style: ‘Take it or leave it,’” write the authors. “Hard, rude, brutal, face-to-face negotiation is foreign and frightening to us.”

The Insider’s Guide presents clear, tangible negotiating examples and sprinkles them with humor. When visiting a dealer, the Leons suggest bringing along another person, whom the Leons call “a third baseman.” This person’s goal is to bother the sales staff by asking questions that may distract a salesperson and give the buyer additional time to think.

 Buyers must remain in control during negotiations, write the Leons, and can do so with statements such as this: “If I find the kind of car I want, I would like to buy a car today. Do you understand? I really want to buy a car today.” This sets the tone the buyer uses throughout the dialogue, and it can help keep salespeople on the defensive.

The best form of negotiating, write the Leons, is a “yes, but” conversation between a buyer and a salesperson.

“The list price for the car is $17,750 and at that price these cars are flying off the lot,” a salesperson might say. A buyer should respond, “Yes, I understand how you might want to get full price for your car, but I won’t pay that much money.”

“We wanted a very practical book,” says Stephanie Leon, who also admits “part of the reason for the book’s success is the economy.” She says people today are doing more research before buying such big-ticket items as cars. To that end, The Insider’s Guide is a very good investment. —JOHN McCUNE
American-Jewish Filmmakers, Traditions and Trends
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