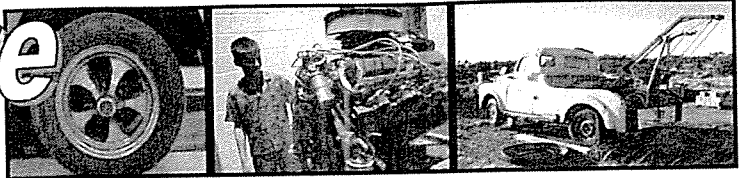


# Buyer beware



So you think buying a vehicle from overseas is a breeze? Can be, if you know your stuff, do the homework. May not be, if you do not. Let me illustrate for you 3 very different actual scenarios, all the details are real and verifiable. One involving family member, one that involves a good mate, and one that involves a mate's brother in law. Let's call them Josh, Joe and Joel.

Josh was going to the USA on holiday and went looking on the internet for a car to buy in the USA, and found what looked OK on Craigslist. He telephoned the owner, asked lots of questions, and requested more photos. More photos came, things still looked ok. Josh then contacted a freelance vehicle inspection company, teed up and paid for a comprehensive vehicle inspection. This added to the car's cost, sure, but the \$275.00 for the inspection could save thousands if the car turned out to be a lemon. Inspection result was very comprehensive and told pretty much as already known, and included many dozens of photos to back up comments in the report. Negotiations on price were concluded, and payment expected by the vendor. Now, as he was already going to the USA, with a bit of explanation he managed to convince the seller that the process of procuring a bank cheque, sending it to him, him banking the cheque, the bank not releasing the funds until the cheque was cleared back here in Australia, then the funds transfer back to his account in the USA would take some weeks. Would he like cash? You bet he would like cash. Well then, if you can wait 2 weeks I will give you cash when I pick up the car. Agreed. Net result was that although he had paid \$275.00 for the inspection, and everything appeared ok, he was not parting with anymore money until he had seen the car for himself. Fortunately all was as expected, and the car is now here in Oz.

Now for my mate, Joe. I have a cousin in New Jersey, and he was looking for an '82 Corvette for Joe through me, the criteria were fairly stringent, it had to be very good etc etc. After only a couple of weeks had elapsed, I get a phone call from Joe saying to stop the search for a Corvette, he had just bought 2 on ebay. No research, no phone calls, no photos, no reports. One car from mid country way up near the Canadian border, the other from Texas. Costs were \$6500.00 paid through ebay and \$17500.00 paid direct respectively. This was the first week in October last. Helped as best I could with leads on transport and shipping etc, and both cars were trucked to a vehicle shipper in Los Angeles, adding to the cost. Once both cars were there, the shipper arranged a container to accommodate the cars for Australian delivery. On checking the paperwork as the cars were being loaded into the container, it was discovered that the VIN on the \$17500.00 car did not match the Title in the paperwork as supplied. Mild panic and pandemonium were the order of the day, for many many days really, with little of help coming out of the good old USA. Remember this car was paid for direct to the seller, so there was no ebay protection. Turns out the seller was a dealer who had bought the car from a Sheriff's auction of goods seized from a convicted drug dealer's estate. The car is a ghost, assembled of portions from other vehicles and using one of those vehicles' VIN to register it. In photos on ebay it looks great, probably is, and should be, having had vast quantities of blackmarket money thrown at it. Long, long periods of inactivity seemed to pass without any resolve on the ownership and likelihood of the vehicle being let out of USA. Meanwhile, the shipper wants storage payment for both vehicles as they have been there a while now, and it is not his fault there is a delay. The dealer concerned was in deep deep manure, as it is both State and Federal offences to sell a vehicle with incomplete or inaccurate paperwork. So he was forced for his own good to resolve this problem. What has saved Joe and the dealer is the fact that the dealer bought the car from the Sheriff's auction .....

(ie the Law) and the people at the Sheriff's department had not checked the paperwork and seen this error. In early January this year an affidavit with ammended VIN data was presented to the shipper and the car released for export. It is due, with the other car, here in Australia mid March. Problem now is, there was no investigation by Joe into the staus of the airconditioning in his vehicles, his shipping agent here in Australia is giving off omni-nous forebodings and bad messages of **CERTAINLY NOT POSSIBLY** trouble with Customs and the Government Department that oversees importation of vehicles fitted with aircondi-tioners. The repercussions of this are, as when dealing with Government bodies, not en-tirely clear or easily resolved. You can be sure of one thing though, it will cost big \$\$\$\$\$. Not bad eh? Spent the money in early October, nearly loose a big portion of it, and the cars are still not here. Could have ended in tears, big big tears. Imagine trying to explain that deficit in the bank account to the better half when she gets a whiff of your great deal. Good luck.

Joel is into drag racing, he has as acquaintances people of dubious income sources, they all appear to be very large men, dress simply in black, and have spent the odd dollar or three keeping the tattoo industry afloat. He found a drag car on the internet in USA, paid the money. It was agreed arrangements were to be made by the seller to get the car to a shipper and sent to Australia. Beaut, no worries. Waiting, waiting waiting. No car comes. No contact to be had back in USA. No help to be found back in the USA. Not one to be known for his good nature when crossed, Joel sends out feelers to find his car. Nothing. Employs a private detective. Much time passes without any information coming through. Then the seller is found, lost, found etc. by the detective. He has seen parts of what may have been a drag car. The seller is of course not helpful and often on the move. Joel by now has built up quite a head of steam, and goes to USA to sort things. He finds the seller has pocketed his money, then sold off the components of the drag car to whoever had the cash. All that is left is the basic frame and not a lot else of use. The seller is not without some large loitering friends that hover nearby, so confrontation is deemed not too smart. Using the detective and getting very little assistance from the Law, Joel ends up with most of the supercharger and a few other pieces. Net result, done his dough.

The moral to the story? Think and think smart. Trust no-one. Do the homework, pay for an inspection (maybe even if you are going your- self), source a reliable shipper with proven links to Australia, establish the costs early (this can be done before you even buy your car) and get them in writing, pay only what you have to when you have to using the most secure method available. Use the protection offered by ebay and paypal if possible. Do all this and at least you will minimise the risks in getting your new pride and joy safely home here to the land of OZ.



## CHIEF OF THE SIXES

