



PHOTO: AMRAN HOSSAIN

Things to consider before buying your first car

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Deciding to buy a car is one of the first steps to making your commute easier. With an increasing number of models to choose from, it becomes quite a challenge to pick the right one. How do you know which car is the best for you? Here are a few tips to keep in mind when buying a car, whether reconditioned or brand new.

"Usually, people think reconditioned cars are cheaper than brand new cars but this is a misconception. The market is very competitive and the prices are pretty much the same. Buying a car leads to social status," says Md. Shadiquul Mostuk, DGM and HOD, Mitsubishi Motors.

Choice of region: The primary stage of buying a car is to realise there are many regions which import cars. Masud Karim, Executive Director, Multibrand, says, "The buyer needs to first decide on the region of import. Some buyers prefer cars from Japan whilst some prefer cars from the US, and some may prefer European cars. It's important to do your research on which region your choice of car comes from."

Brand choice: The second step would be to decide on your brand. Masud Karim says, "Japanese cars are usually preferred in Bangladesh, like Toyota, Nissan, and Mitsubishi. Cars from the US such as Ford, Dodge, and Chevrolet can also be a good choice. But if someone has a fascination towards European cars such as Mercedes-Benz, Porsche, or Audi, these are also available in Bangladesh."

The different models have different price ranges. Some cars can be for daily use while others, such as luxurious cars, aren't advisable for the same use."

Family size: The most basic thing you want to consider first is family size. If you have a big family, it is sensible to go for a big-sized car, like a Multi-Purpose Vehicle (MPV). But if you have a small family or are making the purchase solo, a normal sedan is a good option for you. Of course you can opt for big cars if you want to buy one. "The choice of car depends on the gender, age, and occupation of the owner. For example, you simply can't go to office in a howling car, it doesn't look appropriate," says Masud Karim.

Tax on cars: Different cars have different tax rates applicable to them. To be specific, a car with 1500cc capacity will have lower tax compared to a car with 2000cc capacity. It is important to analyse which car will be cost-efficient since a car is a big investment.

Mileage matters: If you are opting to buy a reconditioned car, knowing the mileage is significant. This means you must know how many miles the car actually ran in the city of import. The lesser the mileage, the better for you. Also, if you want to buy a brand new car, the mileage should be zero.

Kilometres per litre: The next thing under mileage that matters is the distance that the car can cover per litre. A car that runs fewer miles per litre would definitely be an overall costly purchase. An efficient car would travel more miles per litre. On this matter, Masud Karim says, "A car with a higher

cc means it has more power and consumes more fuel. This is a very important factor to consider."

The look book: We all want to buy a car which looks good. Let's start with the colour of the car! You can never go wrong with light colours. White, silver and other light colours are easy to take care of (due to dust, etc). On the other hand, metallic colours have a more difficult upkeep. Masud Karim says, "Flashy colours like black stand out pretty significantly. But this also depends on the owner's comfort zone. I would advise buying light colours as our streets are pretty dusty."

Resale value: No one wants to buy a car only with the intention of selling it. But this is actually an important factor to consider. You would want to buy a car which has a good resale value. If you ever decide on selling your car, you do not want to face the problem of not being able to sell it just because it isn't efficient enough. Buying a car is an investment and just like any other investment, you, as a buyer, should consider the resale value too. Md. Shadiquul Mostuk says, "Brand new cars have better resale value than reconditioned cars." This is one point to keep in mind while considering the resale value.

Car parts: Another important thing that buyers overlook is car part availability. Most cars look attractive but if something happens to your car or you want to make a modification, the availability of the car's parts is important. The hassle of having to import car parts if they are not available in Bangladesh readily can be quite costly. Car parts

of luxurious cars usually face lack of abundance in Bangladesh. "Most parts of my car, Mitsubishi Lancer, are difficult to find. Hence I have to get them imported," says Ashiquul, 24, a car enthusiast.

Fuel emission: You might also want to consider the environment for a change. If you are actually concerned about the environment, you might want to pick a hybrid car for purchase. Hybrid cars are more beneficial than normal gasoline-powered cars. They have better mileage and run on twin-engine. This means they have a gasoline engine and electric motor, which reduce its fuel consumption.

Car documents: And lastly, you must be aware of the fact that papers need to be reviewed every year. This includes insurance papers, tax token and fitness papers. Your car needs to be up to date with the required documents or else you'll be stuck on the streets dealing with police officials. On the topic of car documents, Md. Shadiquul Mostuk says, "When you buy a brand new car, the registration cost and road tax are less."

Buying a car can make you feel independent and make travelling easier. "I was always into cars! People who are thinking of buying a car are making the right decision given they have considered all the factors. While travelling on the streets of Bangladesh, having a car, whether reconditioned or brand new, is necessary. However, I wish the traffic system was better," says Ashiquul.

These tips should give one good insight into the factors to be considered when buying a car.

A spike in women drivers

ANKA MALIK

"The driver is not here. Who will take the children to school?" asked Tahmina's husband. "I will drive them today," she says, surprising the whole family with the news that she has been secretly learning how to drive.

Tahmina, 65, former school teacher, shares her story about learning to drive when she was 33. For her, it was more of a challenge to be overcome than a necessity. "My chauffeur would teach me how to drive our jeep and within eight to nine days I was on the road driving confidently. I would take my children to school, do the groceries and go to work," says Tahmina. She further mentions how the roads back then were safer and easier to navigate compared to recent traffic and congestion-filled conditions.

Dr Zareen Khair, 60, country manager of an NGO, talks about how she was inspired to drive. "I would watch a Pakistani drama and watch the main actress drive her own car. I felt driving my own vehicle would give me a sense of empowerment and confidence," she shares. "I learned to drive in a driving school in Dhanmondi. The first day I started to learn, I wanted to give up that very second, but I saw a much elderly woman driving in front of me and that inspired me to continue."

These stories of women who started driving 20-25 years ago fascinated everyone back then.

But with time, Bangladesh has seen an increase in the number of women drivers. Although it is increasing at a slow pace, it is good to note that Bangladeshis have been showing a more positive and accepting attitude towards these changes. There are both women learners and instructors at driving schools these days – a sight that was uncommon even a few years ago.

However, some problems still do arise. Zoya Rahman, 23, a university student, acquired her driving license recently, after waiting for a long time. She shares that the lengthy process makes it undesirable for drivers to try and get a license. Although she learned how to drive in Dhaka, she prefers to drive when she is out of Bangladesh.

"My whole family was very happy when I learned to drive. Usually, I prefer to not depend on my chauffeur and drive myself to meet family and friends. But most of the time it becomes a hassle for me. Male drivers give me awkward stares and this disrupts my concentration while driving. The other day, a chauffeur tried to overtake my car while passing comments on me. Now my mother restricts me from driving alone," says Zoya. She expresses further concerns regarding safety issues. She once got into a situation where she was followed by a car at night which caused her mother to prohibit her from driving at night. She believes if more women drive cars in Bangladesh, it would normalise the situation.



PHOTO: RASHED SHUMON

Whilst this remains an alarming issue, Tahmina adds that she never faced any sort of harassment from drivers on the streets. "Rather I am respected and drivers let me pass through as soon as they see a woman driving," she shares.

More and more women are seeking out schools to learn driving. One of the training centres, Dhaka Driving Training Center in Mohammadpur, provides a 30-class course to learn how to drive. Although all of their instructors are male, they still have 10-12

women enrolled who learn driving. "We provide all the facilities needed to make women feel comfortable," says Mohammad Mizanur Rahman, Director, Dhaka Driving Training Center.

Another driving institution, BRAC Driving School, currently has two women instructors. Instructors in this school have to undergo a strict process of learning for three months and later complete an internship under BRAC to fully qualify as an instructor. The school enrolls

about 30 women every month and about 25 percent of them are professionals while the rest learn driving for personal use.

"I always felt as though driving liberates a woman and boosts her confidence. That confidence definitely reflects in your work. I remain stress-free when I go to work as we have special facilities for self-driven cars but I worry when I go shopping or run errands. The possibilities of my car parts being stolen scares me," shares Dr Zareen Khair. Her husband and parents supported her throughout her journey of self-empowerment. "In fact, when we would have family events, I would be the one driving the car and always receive awkward stares from passers-by," she adds.

"Previously, I used to drive every day, but now I rarely drive. I can barely find any parking space these days. Parking is a big hassle for not just women drivers but for everyone. Besides, if the construction works in Dhaka were better planned, it would free up more space for parking. Moreover, I feel driving is a waste of time because I will eventually be stuck in traffic for a long period of time," says Tahmina.

Women are now more encouraged to drive cars for both professional and personal use. They have always been into driving although it was not as widely highlighted before. If you are a woman and are having second thoughts about driving, don't fret as Bangladesh is stepping up its driving game!

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