CAR-BUY-RATER Help

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Buying a used car can be a difficult task. You may have to examine dozens of vehicles and try to determine which is the best deal. Car-Buy-Rater allows you to analyze and compare vehicles with different mileages, features, age and wear. Car-Buy-Rater evaluates each vehicle and gives it a numerical rating of its value. This makes it very easy to choose the best deals.

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1.1 How It Works

Car-Buy-Rater works by evaluating how much useful life a car has. If you know how much useful life a vehicle has, it easy to calculate how much that life costs and this makes it easy to choose the best vehicle.

There are two basic measures of car life. One is Age and the other is Mileage.

Age. The average car lasts about 15 years. Even if it is never driven and just sits parked at the curb, time will slowly take it toll. The sun, rain and air pollution slowly deteriorate the paint, chrome and rubber. Even if the car is stored in a garage, the value always depreciates over time. Thus, one measurement of how much life is left in a vehicle is to find out how many years are left. For example, if the car is five years old, it will have about 10 years of life left.

Mileage. Most cars can be driven about 150,000 miles before major repairs have to be made. As a vehicle is driven, mechanical parts of the car slowly wear out. The most expensive mechanical parts of a car are the engine and transmission. The combined average life of these two components is about 150,000 miles. Mileage also depreciates the cars monetary value, thus making it less valuable with each mile driven.

Combining Measurements. The average car is driven about 10,000 miles a year. This means that most cars have about 15 "years" worth of mileage. This fact allows us to combine "mileage life" and "years of life" into a single unit of measurement. In other words, a typical car has 15 year of life and 15 mileage units of 10,000 miles each. Thus, a brand new car has 30 units of life.

As a car ages and is driven, these units are used up. If you divide the number of units left in a vehicle by its price, you have the cost per unit. This makes it easy to measure the value of that vehicle. Car-Buy-Rater takes into account the mileage, age, engine condition, body condition, transmission/drive train condition, tire condition, consumer ratings, and the value of accessories.

The program uses this information to calculate the cost per unit. This make it easy to compare vehicles of different makes, models, mileages, years and features. Click Here for more information

on the rating values.

Depreciation Rate. The rate at which a car depreciates is not even from year to year. For example, the impact of mileage on a cars values is greatest during the first few 50,000 miles. Like wise, the impact of age is greatest during the first five years of a cars life. Car-Buy-Rater takes this into account when it calculates units of life left in a vehicle. In other words, units of life are used up more quickly during first five years and 50,000 miles.

1.2 Getting Started

As soon as you are ready to buy a car, you can begin using Car-Buy-Rater to evaluate vehicles. Normally, people begin by entering information from newspaper adds. This will give you a preliminary evaluation and help you zero-in on the most interesting prospects.

After you have selected the best prospects, you can gather more information and refine the evaluation. For example, you can take the best cars to a mechanic to evaluate the engine and transmission. As you add new information, the evaluation will become more and more precise. This will enable you to zero in on the best deals. Click here for useful tips on using Car-Buy-Rater.

Using Car-Buy-Rater to evaluate vehicles consists of five steps.

1. Creating A New Project. If you are using Car-Buy-Rater for the first time, you will want to create a new project. When you start Car-Buy-Rater it will show you the "Welcome Wizard." The "Welcome Wizard" will allow you to create a new project.

2. Entering Vehicle Data. Once the "Welcome Wizard" has created a new project, it will walk you through the process of entering data. You can enter information for additional vehicles by clicking on the "Add Vehicle" button.

3. Sorting Data. Once you have entered the data, it will be displayed in the "Data Grid". The items in the list are color coded so it is easy to pick out the best deals. The best deals are colored green and the worst deal are colored red. At this point you should sort the information. Sorting the information causes the best vehicles to come to the top of the list so they are easy to find.

4. Saving Data. Once the data has been entered and sorted, you should save the data. This way, the data will not be lost if the power fails or the computer has a problem. Saving the data will also allow you will to recall the information at a later date for review and refinement. To save the data, click on the "Save Ratings" button on the tool. Be sure to choose a file name that will be easy to remember and make sure the data is saved in a directory.

5. Printing Data. Once you have entered data for several vehicles, you can print out the information. This will allow you to carry the data with you as look at the vehicles. It will also give you a place to take notes as you refine the information. You can print the data by clicking on the "Print Ratings" button.

1.3 The Welcome Wizard.

When you first run Car-Buy-Rater, the "Welcome Wizard" will appear on top of the main screen. The "Welcome Wizard" helps you get started by making it easy to choose typical Car-Buyer-Tasks. Here is a list of the tasks you can perform from the Wizard:

1. Open Your Last Project. Car-Buy-Rater remembers the last project that you worked on. Selecting this option causes the program to read and display the most recent project. If this is the first time you have used Car-Buy-Rater, this option will be disabled.

2. Create New Project. If you select this option, the program will create a new project and walk you through the process of entering the first vehicle using the "Vehicle Entry Wizard" in the project.

3. Open An Existing Project. If you select this option, the program will display a standard Windows dialog box that allows you to open a Car-Buy-Rater file.

You also have the option of disabling the the "Welcome Wizard" so that it does not appear each time you run Car-Buy-Rater. You do this by checking the "Don't Show This Screen Again" check box. If you have disabled the "Welcome Wizard" and you want to re-enable it so it runs whenever you start Car-Buy-Rater, select "Options|Program Options" from the menu bar.

1.4   The Data Grid

The main window in the Car-Buy-Rater consists of a grid that holds and displays all the information about the vehicles you are evaluating. As you enter information it will be displayed in the grid. Not all the items will fit on the screen, but you can use the scroll bars on the side and bottom of the grid to scroll the items into view.

The information in the grid is color-coded to make it easy to see the best values. The color green indicates that the vehicle is in the top one-third of the vehicles entered. The color yellow indicates that the vehicle in the middle third of the vehicles entered. The color red indicates that the vehicle is in the bottom third of the vehicles entered.

The grid contains twelve different data items. Eleven of these items are explained in detail in the "Car Entry Wizard" section of this document. The twelfth item is "Value Rating" of the vehicle.

1.5   The Status Bar

The status bar is the band across the bottom of the window that gives you information about the data. There are four items on the bar. Here is a detailed description of each item:

1. Cars. This item displays the total number of vehicles that have entered.

2. Best. This item displays the Rating value for the best vehicle.

3. Worst. This item displays the Rating value for the worst vehicle.

4. Modified. This item tells you if the data has been modified since the last time it was saved. If the data has been modified, you Save the data to protect you from losing your work.

1.6   The Tool Bar

The tool bar is the band across the top of the window that contains six large buttons. The buttons allow you to do common tasks without searching through the menus. Here is more information on how to use each button:

1. Add Vehicle Button.
2. Edit Vehicle Button.
3. Delete Vehicle Button.
4. Sort Ratings Button.
5. Print Ratings Button.

1.6.1   The Vehicle Entry Wizard

The Vehicle Entry Wizard allows you to enter detailed information about one of the cars or trucks you are thinking about buying. This information is used by Car-Buy-Rater to evaluate the value of a vehicle. The Wizard is divided into 10 pages, each one for each different item of information.

You can move from one page to another by clicking on the "Back" and "Next" button. When you reach the last page, click on the "Finish" button to put the information into the "Data Grid."

Here is a list of all the data items. Click on them to get a detailed description.

1. Vehicle Description.   6. Tire Wear
2. Vehicle Make And Model   7. Body Condition
3. Vehicle Year   8. Engine Condition
4. Vehicle Price   9. Drivetrain Condition
5. Vehicle Mileage   10. Accessories

1.6.1.1   Vehicle Description

You should enter a simple description of the vehicle here. There is not a lot of room, so keep the description simple. You will be able to enter the make, model and year on other pages; so you should enter something that helps differentiate this vehicle from others. For example, you might enter "Red 4X4 with chrome rims."

Click Here to view all specifications. Click Here for more information about the Entry Wizard.

1.6.1.2   Vehicle Make and Model

This option allows you to select or enter the Make and Model of the vehicle. The easiest way to do this is by scrolling through the "Make List" and selecting the appropriate Model. You do this by moving the mouse cursor to proper item and clicking the left mouse button.

When you do this, a list of Models that match the selected Make will appear in the "Model List." Now you can simply select the appropriate Model by clicking the mouse cursor on the item.

If you know the vehicle model, but not the make, you can search the whole list by model. Just enter the model in the "Model Name" text box and press the "Search By Model" button. The program will search through all the models and display the closest matching make and model.

If the Make or Model are not in the lists you can manually type the information. Just click on the "Model" or "Make" edit box and type the appropriate name. As you type, the program will continuously search the lists and highlight any matching names.

Click Here to view all specifications. Click Here for more information about the Entry Wizard.

1.6.1.3   Vehicle Year

This option allows you to enter the model of the vehicle. You can use the "up" and "down" arrows next to the box to increment or decrement the year. You can also type the year directly into the box by clicking the mouse on it and then entering the information.

Click Here to view all specifications. Click Here for more information about the Entry Wizard.

1.6.1.4   Vehicle Price

This option allows you to enter the selling price of the vehicle. You can use the "up" and "down" buttons to increase or decrease the price by $500. You can also type the price directly into the box by clicking the mouse on it and then entering the information.

Click Here to view all specifications. Click Here for more information about the Entry Wizard.

1.6.1.5   Vehicle Mileage

This option allows you to enter the mileage of the vehicle. You can use the "up" and "down" buttons to increase or decrease the mileage by 500. You can also type the mileage directly into the box by clicking the mouse on it and then entering the information.

Click Here to view all specifications. Click Here for more information about the Entry Wizard.

1.6.1.6   Tire Wear

This option allows you to specify the amount of wear on the tires. Car-Buy-Rater uses this information adjust the value of the vehicle to reflect expenses you will have in the near future. You can estimate the wear by measuring the tread depth on a new tire and comparing it to the tires on the vehicle. For example, if the tread depth on a new tire is one inch but there is only one-quarter inch left on the vehicle, the tire life remaining is 25%. (You may be able to use the spare tire on the vehicle in place of a new tire.)

In many instances, you may not be able estimate tire life or wear. For example, you may be entering information from a newspaper add. If this is the case, simply select 50%. You can always revise the tire wear later on as you get more information.

Click Here to view all specifications. Click Here for more information about the Entry Wizard.

1.6.1.7   Body Condition

This option allows you to specify the condition of the body, paint and trim. Car-Buy-Rater uses this information to help estimate the value of the vehicle.

You can estimate the condition of the body by examining the condition of the paint, body and trim. Here is a rough guide:

New/Restored. The paint should perfect with no scratches and scrapes. There should be no dents in the body. There should be no rust, no damage to the trim and no missing trim pieces.

Good. The paint can have very minor scratches, but no scrapes. There should be no dents larger than a dime. There should be no rust, only minor scratches to the trim and no missing trim pieces.

Average. The paint can minor scratches and scrapes. No dents larger than two inches in diameter. There can be minor rust in nooks and corners of the body. Trim pieces can be scratched with minor dents.

Fair. The paint is scratched, faded, and scraped. There are larger dents, spots of rust, dented and missing trim pieces.

Poor. This rating for vehicles with major body problems. The paint is extensively scratched and faded with primer showing through. Large dents are present, with major body damage and missing trim pieces.

In some instances, you may not be able estimate the body condition. For example, you may be entering information from a newspaper add. If this is the case, simply select 50%. You can always revise the body condition later on as you get more information.

Click Here to view all specifications. Click Here for more information about the Entry Wizard.

1.6.1.8 Engine Condition

This option allows you to enter the condition of the engine. A mechanic should be able to evaluate the condition of the engine for you.

In some instances, you may not be able estimate the engine condition. For example, you may be entering information from a newspaper add. If this is the case, simply select 50%. You can always revise the engine condition later on as you get more information.

Click Here to view all specifications. Click Here for more information about the Entry Wizard.

1.6.1.9 Drive Train Condition

This option allows you to enter the condition of the drivetrain. Drivetrain means the clutch, transmission, universal joints, drive shaft and differential. A mechanic should be able to evaluate the condition of the drivetrain for you.

In some instances, you may not be able estimate the condition of the drivetrain. For example, you may be entering information from a newspaper add. If this is the case, simply select 50%. You can always revise the drivetrain condition later on as you get more information.

Click Here to view all specifications. Click Here for more information about the Entry Wizard.

1.6.1.10 Accessories

This options allows you to enter a list of accessories that add to the value of the vehicle. For example, you can enter the value of things like stereos, specialized rims, roll bars, campers, hitches, etc. Car-Buy-Rater uses this information to help set the value of the vehicle.

Click Here to view all specifications. Click Here for more information about the Entry Wizard.

1.6.2 Editing Cells

You can edit the data in any of the cells in Data Grid. You can do this by clicking on the cell you wish to edit. Then click on the "Edit Button" on the Tool Bar.This will take you to the Vehicle Entry Wizard. The Wizard will be set to the page that matches the cell you have selected.

1.6.3 Deleting Vehicles

You can delete any vehicle in the data grid. You do this by clicking on the row you wish to delete. This will highlight one of the cells in the row. You can delete the selected row by clicking on the "Delete Button" on the Tool Bar or by selecting "Edit|Delete Vehicle" from the menu bar.

1.6.4 Sorting Data

As you enter information about various vehicles, some will be rated better than others. As the vehicles appear in the Data Grid they are color-coded according their quality. Sorting moves the best rated vehicles to the top of the list and the worst rated to the bottom. You can sort the rating by clicking on the "Sort Button" on the tool bar or by selecting "Edit|Sort Ratings" from the menu bar.

1.6.5 Printing Data

Car-Buyer-Rater allows you to print a listing of all the information in your project. This will allow you to carry the data with you as look at the vehicles. It will also give you a place to take notes as you refine the information. You can print the data by clicking on the "Print Ratings" button or by selecting "File|Print" option from the menu bar.

1.7 Options

At this point, there is one option setting available in the Car-Buy-Rater. This option allows you to turn on or off the display of the "Welcome Wizard." To change this option, select "Options|Program Options" from the menu bar.

1.8 Vehicle Specifications

Car-Buy-Rater evaluates vehicles based on eleven criteria. This information is entered using the Entry Wizard. The following list contains detailed information of about each specification:

Vehicle Description   Body Condition
Vehicle Make and Model   Engine Condition
Vehicle Year   Drive Train Condition
Vehicle Price   Reliability Ratings
Vehicle Mileage   Accessories
Tire Wear

1.9 Rating Values

The rating values gives you the relative value of a vehicle. This enables you compare car or truck values and choose the best deals.

The rating value is based on how much useful life remains in the vehicle. The useful life is represented as a combination of the amount of mileage and years left. These are represented as "Units," where each unit equals one year of life or 10,000 miles of life.

By dividing the price of the vehicle by the number of units, the program gives you a cost per unit. For example, if a vehicle costs $5,000 and it has 10 units of life left, the cost per unit is $500. If you have another vehicle whose cost per unit is only $400, it is obviously a better deal.

This then is how the rating system works. The program uses 14 different pieces of information to analyze the number of units left in the vehicle. The rating for each vehicle appears in the Data Grid and the color coding and sortingoptions are based on this rating value. Click Here for more information on the how the ratings are derived.

1.10 Creating A New Project

You can create a new (empty) project by selecting "File|New" from the menu bar. The program will ask if you want to save any changes that you have made to the existing project. It will then clear all

the information, preparing the way for the new information you are going to enter. Finally, the program will present the "Vehicle Entry Wizard" which will help you enter all information about the first car in you project. You must save the new information that you have entered to a new file when you have finished.

1.11   Reopening Files

Car-Buy-Rater remembers the last five files you have worked with. This makes it easy to work on any of your current projects. To open a recently used project, select the "File|Reopen" option from the menu bar. You will then see a list of the last five files you have used. Simply highlight the file you want to use and the program will open that file.

1.12   Saving Files

Car-Buy-Rater saves all your vehicle information in files on your hard drive. The program saves files in three different ways:

1. Saving A New File. If you are working on a new project and you want to save the data, click on the "Save Ratings" button on the Tool Bar or select the "File|Save" from the menu bar. Since the file will be new, the program will prompt you for a name. The last three letters of a Car-Buy-Rater filename should be set to "CAR". The first eight letters can be anything you want. For example, a typical Car-Buy-Rater filename would be something like: "PICKUPS.CAR".

2. Saving Existing Files. If you modify the data in an existing file, you will want to save the changes. Since the file already exists, clicking on the "Save Ratings" button or selecting the "File|Save" from the menu bar will save the changes without prompting you for a filename.

3. Saving As. Sometimes you want save existing data into a new file. This can be useful for creating a new project based on existing data. You do this by selecting the "File|Save As" from the menu bar.

1.13   Tips For Using Car-Buy-Rater

1. Buying Strategies. The objective of using Car-Buy-Rater is to buy the best car for lowest price. The best way to do this is to start with a long list of possible candidates and then gradually narrowing the field by zeroing in on the best candidates. You can start with newspaper adds, car newsletter adds, and even internet net adds. During this early stage of shopping, it is not necessary to fill-in all the detailed information about mechanical condition or tire wear.

Once you have narrowed the choices down to a few of the best buys, you can gather more detailed information. At this point, you probably want to set up an interview with seller so you can look at the cars to do visual evaluation of the condition of the vehicle. As you do this, you can enter more precise information into Car-Buy-Rater. Also, you will probably want to delete the poorer rated vehicles from your list to help you zero in on the better buys. After you have deleted the worst rated vehicles, you save the result in a new project using the Save As option. This will will keep all the old vehicles in the old project while you work with a new project with fewer vehicles. All of this will give more precise information about the best buys.

Finally, after you have narrowed your choices to two or three vehicles, you take the best prospect to a mechanic to evaluate the engine and drivetrain.

2. Don't Compare Apples And Oranges. Since Car-Buy-Rator compares the price against the useful life of the vehicle, it is important that you compre similiar vehicles. For example, if you compare Cadillacs against Volkwagens, the Volkwagens will alway be rated higher. This is because a Volkswagen's initial low price means that it always cost less for a given useful life.

3. Intangibles. One of the reasons for choosing one car over another car is intangibles like paint color, styling etc. There are several ways to deal with intangibles. If they are not very important to you, save them for the final part of your evaluation process. If they are very important to you, factor them into the process early. For example, if you have to a purple car, don't enter any non-purple cars.

Part II

2 Reliability Rating

The option allows you to enter reliability information for the vehicle. Generally, you can get this information from magazines like Consumer Reports, Car and Driver, etc. You can also find this information on the World Wide Web.

If you can't find reliability information or you are just doing and initial entry, select 50%. You can always revise the tire wear later on as you get more information.

Part III

3 Opening Files

You can open an existing Car-Buy-Rater file by selecting the "Files|Open" option from the menu bar. The program will present the standard Windows dialog box which allows you to select a file. Car-Buy-Rater files always have the extension "CAR" and only these files will be displayed in the window. Just select the file you want to work with, and click on the OK button.

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