

**WHAT WE DID...**

WE'VE done the hard work for you, contacting dozens of dealers to show that getting the best price is a matter of perspective and persistence.

Our mission is to provide you with the best possible advice when it comes to purchasing a new car. So for this issue of the magazine, we decided to go shopping undercover to find out how to get the best deals going on new cars.

We set out as a mixed double to get a sense of balance, with Becky Wells and Hugo Griffiths posing as potential customers at 10 franchise dealers each. In order to build a comprehensive understanding of the modern car-buying landscape, these visits were then followed up with an additional 20 phone calls and 60 e-mails to different new-car retailers.

Although our duo were posing as potential customers, to make the experience as realistic as possible, both behaved just as they would when negotiating a deal for real. That meant first-time buyer Becky went in with an open mind and armed with plenty of information, while seasoned haggler Hugo made it clear from the outset he was after the best price possible, and was willing to walk away from a deal if this wasn't offered.

**Rules of the game**

FOR consistency, we went for the same specific model of car at each dealer and looked to finance it on Personal Contract Purchase (PCP). While we went down the traditional route of main franchised dealers, it's worth noting online brokers such as our sister company BuyaCar.co.uk can also net you big savings.

**BECKY WELLS**

Production editor

**"I've not had the pleasure of buying a new car from a dealer before, so I approached the matter just as I would for real. Rather than go in demanding discounts straight away, I asked about the car, told them what I was after and sought their recommendations. I then went through finance options and finally went to look for what deals and discounts they could offer me."**

**HUGO GRIFFITHS**

Senior content editor

**"Like most people, I've overpaid for things in the past, but a few years ago I realised how important it is to be assertive when negotiating for anything. I'm always polite, but recognising salespeople actively want your business is fundamental to getting the best deal, as is knowing what to ask and how many times to ask it. At every showroom, I made it clear from the outset I was visiting a number of different dealers and simply wanted to know what the best possible price was for a specific car."**

Savings	Hugo	Becky
E-mail	£3,355	£3,900
Phonecall	£12,429	£5,400
Face-to-face	£15,259	£9,388
<b>Total</b>	<b>£31,043</b>	<b>£18,688</b>



# Bargain hunt

**The Carbuyer guide to a great car deal**

We headed out to the forecourts and showrooms of the UK to find out what car buying is really like

## Around the dealerships

### FORD

**HUGO:** After a couple of minutes wandering around outside, a salesman invited me in with a friendly welcome. He showed me the three-door Fiesta I said I was interested in, offered a test drive and talked about the merits of ST-Line trim and the engines available. After asking for a discount, I was immediately offered a £1,500 dealer deposit and a further £500 off if I bought before the end of the month, although this would be for a then-current 66-plate car, not a 17. The salesman had a professional and friendly manner, and I felt a deal could be done quickly and efficiently, but without much undue pressure.



### Window shopping

We evaluated a number of dealers on their showroom experience and general customer service – not just how much money they would take off

**BECKY:** A receptionist found me a salesman after just a little wait, and we talked about what I was after. He started our chat a little bluntly, perhaps wanting to prove he knew what he was talking about. He quickly softened up though, helping me choose a spec, showing me around the car and talking me through products on offer, including demonstrations of the protection products that most other dealers had added to my quotes automatically. He mentioned the £1,500 dealer contribution, plus the £500 road test offer, and also agreed to throw in some floor mats and a tank of fuel.



### VOLKSWAGEN

**HUGO:** I wasn't even allowed to look at a car before I was taken to the dealer's desk, where the sales pitch quickly began. Although I was offered a drink and the salesman was friendly, I felt I was being pushed into a deal. Only by stressing I wasn't ready was I able to extricate myself. A £1,400 deposit contribution was offered, with two years' servicing thrown in if I bought that weekend – but I didn't feel I was getting a particularly good deal. A summary e-mail of the offer arrived before I had even left the site, with another following later that same day.

**BECKY:** After a little wait with the receptionist, a dealer found me and chatted to me about the Polo. He didn't show me around the car and seemed a little uninterested, zoning out when I turned down his test-drive offer, although he did build me a finance quote quickly. There was a Polo special offer being shown, but I had to ask him about it and he didn't know all of the details.

### TOYOTA

**HUGO:** Despite being on the same site as VW, the experience at Toyota couldn't have been more different. A friendly, relaxed salesman talked me through the Aygo, letting me look around, and he was clear a new car would be a better buy than a nearly-new model if I took out finance. I managed to negotiate a free sat-nav upgrade worth £600, although the salesman initially told me there was a significant deposit contribution available, which had been replaced by a 0% interest finance offer.

**BECKY:** Upon entering, one salesman said he'd get someone straight away, while the scary female receptionist told me I'd have to come back if I didn't have an appointment. When I did get seen, he showed me around the car, but became fixated on my part-exchange and wouldn't even give me a quote until he'd evaluated my MINI. They said to come back, then the sales director told me a "second visit is a serious commitment". It was safe to say I didn't return!

### KIA

**HUGO:** Once inside, I was approached pleasantly and felt relaxed throughout the meeting. The dealer was keen to get the right car for me and didn't try to push me into a higher trim level after I explained I was happy with an entry-level Cee'd. Although I was told he couldn't throw in any options, I managed to negotiate three years of free servicing, worth £329. This dealership experience was a little 'no-frills', but I felt at ease with the salesman, and got the impression they'd work hard to get my business.

**BECKY:** I felt like the salesman was nervous talking to me as I was a woman – he was keen to apologise after asking me for my date of birth, budget, or even whether I was Miss or Mrs. The meeting was interrupted a few times, too, and parties were very keen to be overly apologetic for interrupting. He explained an older model might be more beneficial, due to 0% finance offers, but did start showing me a Rio instead of the Cee'd I was after, which became confusing.

### Doing the deal

We made it clear we were shopping around various dealers and wanted the best price possible



### MERCEDES

**HUGO:** I was offered a drink almost immediately, but it took an age for a salesman to appear. Despite being quite clear about the engine and trim level I was after, the dealer advised me to come back when I knew what I wanted. He even advised me to come back in a month or two so I could get a 17-plate car, but quickly realised his mistake. After pushing for a deal and questioning some spurious figures, I got a £900 deposit contribution with a further £500-1,000 off if I bought one of their unregistered stock cars.

**BECKY:** A warm welcome meant I was seen to straight away, but they said I'd have to wait 15 minutes for a quote as "their systems were running slow" – although they used the time to show me the car. I was there for nearly an hour, but they had listened to my requests and offered a deal that fitted what I wanted. The salesman even offered to bring the car to my house to test, rather than having to return. I was told a 7% discount and a £160 dealer deposit would be possible.

### BMW

**HUGO:** The dealer was somewhat blunt in his manner. Still, that meant a deal was quickly put together when I said I'd just come from Mercedes, even if BMW's offer wasn't all that good: a £750 deposit contribution with 5% off the car's cost price, with a further 0.5% or so off once I was ready to actually sign for a car. I was offered a drink but not a test drive and left with a price list but not a business card. Efficiency is all very well, but I didn't get the impression my business was all that important.

**BECKY:** A bright receptionist greeted me and found me a salesman straight away. He seemed uninterested, and proceeded to make decisions for me, picking a spec rather than discussing what options would be best. He kept addressing me by name, too, starting sentences with 'Well, Becky', which I found to be patronising. He said there was no dealer deposit on the model I'd picked, but didn't discuss other options, and said deals would only be on the table when I was ready to sign.

CITROEN

**HUGO:** I initially felt pounced upon by the dealer, who spotted me outside and instantly whisked me into a C3. He quickly eased up, though, and once I told him I was after a quote, we headed over to his desk, where he efficiently put together an offer. This comprised a £1,125 discount (not bad for a recently launched car), as well as free mats and fuel. He was refreshingly honest about his need to meet quarterly targets and struck a good balance of being keen for a deal without being pushy. A follow-up e-mail arrived shortly after I left.

**BECKY:** I had to wait 20 minutes for a salesman, although they were apologetic for it. When I did get seen, the salesman waffled when talking about the car, although was perfectly polite. He showed me around the car, talking about every little detail, and praised "my homework" after talking about the recent road-tax changes. He wouldn't talk about any deals or discounts until I was sure I wanted to buy the car, and when I mentioned I'd want my other half to come with me for a test drive, he was persistent in repeatedly mentioning "when he's here" and "when he sees it".

NISSAN

**HUGO:** Nobody saw me loitering on the forecourt, but once inside I was approached quickly and genially. The dealer showed me around a Qashqai on display, and then immediately asked if he could set up a test drive. A £1,500 deposit contribution was mentioned when I asked about discounts, and a further £500 off was offered if bought during a forthcoming sales event. When I enquired about getting metallic paint thrown into the package, I was told there were "always deals to be done" and it was important that we could come to a mutually beneficial deal – although the specifics of this were a little thin on the ground.

**BECKY:** The salesman showed me around the Qashqai, but did enquire as to why I needed such a big car. He went through the specifications and got out an iPad for me to enter my details – but even commented on how little he bothered using it. Then he mentioned an upcoming dealer sales event, although he said specific details of this hadn't been confirmed. He continued to make discounts to my quote, but just said they were "secret changes to help you".



"Citroen's salesman was honest about his need to meet targets and was keen to make a deal, without being overly pushy"

RENAULT

**HUGO:** Despite four members of staff being free and the dealership being small, not one person said hello or approached me and after five minutes I asked for assistance. Fortunately, the young salesman who came rescued the situation with his relaxed and knowledgeable approach. He steered me away from the basic 1.2-litre Clio, pointing out that the extra £10 or so a month a more powerful engine cost would be largely offset by lower running costs. A £2,000 dealer contribution was highlighted and when I pushed for his best possible price, was promised a further £250 off. I was offered a test drive, a business card and a coffee, and left feeling impressed.

**BECKY:** I waited a little while to be greeted, but was seen by a helpful salesman who listened to what I wanted and advised a different trim to the one I asked for, highlighting the inclusion of features such as sat nav. He showed me around the car and proceeded to assemble a quote. He pushed a dealer event where a £500 hotel voucher would be included in every sale, and spoke about the £2,000 deposit contribution. He also offered to include reverse parking sensors for the price, as that was the only accessory I'd been keen on.

VAUXHALL

**HUGO:** The only female salesperson I came across all day was quick to spot me once I was inside, and welcoming in her approach. When I told her I was after the best deal possible, she steered me away from Design trim into a model that would qualify for 0% APR and an £1,800 deposit contribution, and highlighted an upcoming sales event that weekend – although she wouldn't know exactly what this would involved until it started. I was able to get floor mats and a tank of fuel thrown in, but not metallic paint. The secret nature of the weekend sales event would have annoyed me if I had taken a day off work to go car shopping, though.

**BECKY:** I was seen straight away by a salesman who took all my details and requirements. He did ask why I needed a five-door car, but was engaging and knowledgeable. He felt more like a typical 'car salesman', with lots of "you'll shake my hand when you see these figures!" type of negotiation, and did add products to my quote without asking. But he assured me that "if you want a deal – you'll get a deal!" and bumped up my part-ex value by £500, saying there'd be another £1,000 off at a weekend event, plus more extras when I was definitely ready to buy.



**Persistence pays off**  
Our experiences showed that in the current highly competitive market, driving a hard bargain nearly always pays off



WHAT ABOUT E-MAILS?

WE couldn't believe how reluctant most dealers were to do business over email. In fact, while we initially planned to message just 10 dealers apiece, the recalcitrance and unwillingness to deal we encountered led us to send another 20 messages each to check this wasn't a fluke. Even after contacting 60 dealers, discounts were around £7,000 – less than achieved in an hour on the phone. Whatever approach we attempted, the story was almost always the same: dealers wanted us to come in and talk to them, or at least speak on the phone. Although almost every dealer got back, one reply was just a single sentence with a telephone number and a name. We tried the live chat feature offered by a number of dealers, but these seemed to be conducted by off-site personnel who lacked key information. In fairness, there are regulations concerning finance offers and distance selling, so it's understandable dealers are unwilling to put numbers in writing. It's also fair to say that one of the dealers who engaged with us over e-mail put together an attractive offer on a physical car he had in stock. Even so, of the 60 e-mails we sent, only nine yielded offers. We could have pursued things further, pushing for specific numbers, but it was clear that dealers want you to come to their showrooms, or at least make a call.

IS IT WORTH PHONING AHEAD?

UNDOUBTEDLY yes. If you're short of time, phoning around a few dealers and asking for their best possible price is well worth it. Some may not want to play ball and want to get you to the negotiating table, but others will be happy to tell you what they can do. We were able to negotiate more discounts in person than over the phone, but it took us a lot of time and shoe leather to go around 10 dealerships, while our phone calls only took a couple of hours and still yielded significant savings. When it comes to picking up the phone, be just as clear and forthright as you would be in person. Hugo's direct approach and repeated questioning netted him over £12,000 worth of savings, while Becky's more genial enquiries yielded under half of that number.

SHOPPER INSIGHTS What we learned from the forecourts...

HUGO GRIFFITHS:

"I went to each dealer with the simple aim of getting the best possible price, and some seemed pleased I knew what I was after and wasn't afraid to ask for it. There were a few take-home messages for me: firstly, just because a dealer says something isn't possible, doesn't necessarily mean it can't be done. On a couple of occasions I was given a flat 'no', but this quickly turned into 'maybe' on asking again, and putting my jacket on to leave yielded a positive 'yes'. I also found being honest about being after quotes helped get numbers on the table, while mentioning visits to rivals had one dealer telling me he'd 'smash' their prices."

"Just because a dealer says something isn't possible, doesn't mean it can't be done"



BECKY WELLS:

"I was expecting to feel intimidated and nervous speaking to salesmen, but I felt comfortable and welcome in almost all of the showrooms. I didn't notice any obvious patronising behaviour from staff due to the fact that I was a woman, or even because I was a younger customer. All were keen to offer recommendations and show me the best finance deals. I do think that some dealers were too keen to add products and make decisions on my behalf, and I still don't know if I'd be ready to proceed with any purchase after my brief chats. I'd also have liked to see more female advisors. But I'd feel comfortable returning to any of the dealers to chat further."

"Some of the dealers were too keen to add products and make decisions on my behalf"

