

A salvage vehicle is one so damaged by collision, flood, or another reason that it would cost more to repair it to safe operation than it is worth at fair market value. A salvage vehicle that has been repaired or restored to operation is called a rebuilt/restored vehicle.

Branded Titles

Because of the risks of buying a salvage or rebuilt/restored vehicle, such a vehicle in Utah will be issued a "branded" title. That is, the title will clearly state that the vehicle is either salvage or rebuilt/restored. This makes it difficult to pass off as unblemished an automobile that in fact has been through the ringer and may continue to have problems.

In some cases, a salvage vehicle in Utah can be rebuilt and have the brand removed from the title. This usually happens when the car sustained damage to only one component part and was inspected before, during, and after the repairs?so the Motor Vehicle Enforcement Division (MVED) can make sure the finished work meets Utah's stringent safety standards. But this is rare, so usually a vehicle that has been rebuilt or restored from salvage status will have a branded title.

Out-of-state Salvage Vehicles

Though Utah's laws are strict about when a salvage vehicle can be repaired and have its brand removed, other states' laws may not be so demanding, and this opens the door to abuse. Someone can ship a totaled car to a state with more relaxed standards, repair it (maybe well, possibly poorly), get approved for an unbranded title in that state, and then sell the car to a trusting individual or dealer as though the vehicle had never been wrecked.

Unfortunately, vehicles are branded as salvage for a reason, and an inadequate repair might result in a car that looks nice at first but literally falls apart in a collision.

To protect against this, Utah will not issue an unbranded title to a car that has been salvaged in another state, even if the out-of-state title given to the buyer is unbranded. What would happen instead is that a buyer would receive a clean out-of-state title (on a previously salvaged car) and then have Utah brand it?reducing the value of the vehicle by thousands of dollars.

What to Look For

Technically, auto dealers and private sellers are required by law to disclose to you before you even begin negotiating that a vehicle is branded as salvage or rebuilt/restored. Most buyers will want to avoid a salvage vehicle for fear of major hidden problems that could cost thousands of dollars to deal with and potentially be very unsafe.

Some buyers are fine with the inherent risks and can get a great deal on a car that turns out to be just fine. If you're not a risk taker, though, the Utah Division of Motor Vehicles (DMV) offers a long list of tips for how to avoid unwittingly buying a salvage vehicle on its Buyer Beware page.

To find out more about salvage vehicles in Utah, including how to certify a vehicle as salvaged or have a brand removed from the title, visit the DMV's related information page or use the following contact information:

Motor Vehicle Information

P.O. Box 4000

Salt Lake City, UT 84134

(801) 297-3508