

The image that comes to most people's minds when they think of a salvaged vehicle is one that looks like it was pulled up from the bottom of a canyon, after it had flipped, end over end, a dozen times, before it burst into flames.

While that's almost never the case, the salvage laws were written to help the buying public know what it is paying for. A salvaged vehicle is one that has been in some sort of accident or had damage occur and has been declared a "total loss" due to that damage at some point in its history.

These cars are sold to salvage buyers, who in turn sell them to parts yards or recyclers. Sometimes, depending on the type and extent of damage, the salvage buyers will have these cars repaired and will then sell them as a running vehicle.

What Constitutes a Salvage?

If the vehicle:

Has been used as a taxi or other public transportation.

Is less than seven years old and was declared damaged more than 70% of the fair market value.

Was damaged by flood to 70% of the fair market value it will require a separate flood damaged brand.

Has ever been used as a police vehicle.

Was imported without proper U.S. safety certification and emissions standards.

Been salvaged

Rebuilt Salvage

Most people think of a salvage vehicle as being a horrible looking junk car, one that is unsafe, unreliable, and to be avoided. That's not always true.

If you are considering the purchase of a vehicle with a "rebuilt salvage" brand, then you know that the vehicle has been purchased as a salvage, repaired and have passed an inspection by a State Patrol Salvage Inspector, and has been deemed as safe to drive.

Manufacturer's Buyback

If you're thinking of a car with a manufacturer's buyback brand on the title, this means that the vehicle was returned to the manufacturer under the Lemon Law.

State Farm Brand

If you see a title brand of "stfarm not inspected" be aware that this title is not a salvage brand and these vehicles have not been inspected and are not legal for sale in Wisconsin.

Buying a Salvage

In Wisconsin, you'll know you're buying a salvaged vehicle, no matter how good it looks. That's because the DMV requires all vehicles that are deemed "total loss" and sold as salvage to have a note on the title called a "brand" that makes the salvage status public.

Disclosure

As long as the vehicle in question has always been registered in Wisconsin, the "brand" on the title will tell you of a salvage or flood damage status. You'll also know that the vehicle has been subject to an inspection by the State Patrol and has been determined to be safe for use as transportation.

Where the process runs into trouble is with vehicles that have not always been titled and registered in Wisconsin. Since there are no federal guidelines in place for salvaged vehicles, the rules change from state to state, some being considerably stricter and some being alarmingly lax. This can create trouble for automobile buyers, as it can be more difficult to determine a particular vehicle's "history."

Rights and Protection

As a buyer, you have certain rights when it comes to purchasing a motor vehicle. A dealer is required to tell you everything they can reasonably discover about a vehicle's history.

Consumer protection is available. If you purchase a vehicle and begin to have problems with it, check some of the resources for consumer rights organizations. Always buy from a reputable, licensed seller and if you purchase from a private party, be sure to have the vehicle inspected by a licensed mechanic. It may cost you a bit now, but it will certainly save you a lot down the road a ways.