

REAL WORLD GUIDE TO BUYING A BMW 8-SERIES

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Buying an 8-series is an exciting and challenging experience. For most, it's a labor of love - looking for just the right car in the right condition along with plans for personal touches.

There are several Internet resources which provide buying advice, some specifically for BMW's. In them I found several points tainted by online group-think and in need of "real world" relevance:

- 1) Service Records
- 2) Pre-Purchase Inspections
- 3) Condition vs. Price

Rule #1: Never buy an 850/840 without complete service records.

This advice sounds good but in my experience is completely unrealistic. I spent almost 18 months shopping. After test driving several cars and speaking with sellers around the country, I couldn't find even ONE with service records.

Maybe sellers are afraid they'll scare prospective buyers by keeping records that reveal expensive repairs or lax upkeep. Who knows? Just employ good sense and do your own homework. Utilize the CarFax service, independent inspections (which themselves have limitations, see below), and study online resources.

All warranties on these cars have now expired, so don't waste time looking for one.

It's been said that any 8-series without service records will warrant an "automatic \$5k deduction off the price". If you follow this advice you'll be shopping for a long time. 5K is simply too large a penalty and few sellers will agree to it. More realistic is a figure of \$1,500 – \$2,500. Again, do your own homework and accept that some remedial maintenance is a fact of life with any older car.

Use Kelley Blue Book online for valuations (or others). Note that few cars are worthy of the "excellent condition" rank. Most will be "good condition" with the no-records deduction.

Many consider BMW dealers a good source for service records. This may be true only if the car was recently maintained by a dealer. Most 8's had dealer work performed early in their life (while under warranty) but not since then. If available at all, service records may simply be too old to be of much value (for instance, the record of an oil change performed in 1993 is mostly irrelevant).

Even worse, dealers usually do not release service records to the general public. Only *owners* may request service records. So pursuing records here is usually a waste of time.

Of course, if you buy from an enthusiast you're more likely to find a car with current records. But this is an exception. Many 8's are indeed owned by car nuts, but not all car nuts are BMW nuts and even fewer are 8-series enthusiasts.

Rule #2: Get a Pre-Purchase Inspection (PPO) and you're safe.

This is flatly misleading. Be aware of a few points:

First, if you're planning to use a BMW dealership to perform a pre-purchase inspection, note that most dealerships are only interested in inspecting their own cars for their Certified Pre-Owned lot, and aren't eager to satisfy your desire for an inspection.

The dealership I contacted responded to my inspection request like it was quite uncommon and unenthusiastically offered two options: 1) "Vehicle Safety Check", for \$42, comprised of nothing more than a state inspection-like service, and 2) "Vehicle Check", for \$150, a general once-over with fault code readout and an oil change. They offered no vehicle-specific inspections or formal pre-purchase inspections.

Of course, if you have a relationship with a local dealer you may get a warmer reception. But if you're planning to use an out-of-town dealer, good luck.

More importantly, most BMW dealerships have little or no experience with the 8-series. Therefore any "inspection" will be generic.

Secondly, using an independent inspection service is better than nothing, especially if you're buying remotely. But I found these services aren't always thorough or even accurate. For example, the service I used reported incorrect tire sizes and missed failed high beam flashers and an inoperative rear speaker.

Since they aren't BMW specialists, inspectors tend to focus on obvious points such as visible paint scratches and body damage. You can use the "notes" section of your inspection order to specify points of interest. However, these points may be overlooked or otherwise not addressed by the inspector, with "no comments" printed in your inspection results.

It's far better, if possible, to get the help of an enthusiast friend. If not, use these pre-purchase inspection services with awareness of their limitations.

Rule #3: Price and quality of the car's condition are the same

I found this rule to be the most accurate. It explains the large price variations in the current market. "You get what you pay for" is an expression that applies quite well to 8-series shopping. An 8-series with service records and in fully functional condition may rightfully command the "excellent condition" price rating. But few do.

This is not to say that anything less should be avoided. There are many bargains out there for the enthusiast-owner who's not afraid to get his hands dirty. Some remedial maintenance will be needed in most cases, so just expect it – and budget for it. Simply do your homework, use the many online resources available, and exercise good judgment.

CLOSING THE DEAL ON YOUR 8

Since these cars are rare, you'll most likely have to travel to the car. If you rule this option out, you'll be limiting your choices significantly.

Maybe it's just my luck, but the cars that interested me were always 1200-1600 miles away. While many dismiss such obvious logistical problems by simply recommending shipping, I found this to be problematic.

Since sending the seller a check and waiting for the car to be shipped is foolish - but cavalierly suggested by some! - you'll have to consider alternatives.

While there may be a few online escrow services that could significantly reduce your risks, sellers may not agree to it. Few people have heard of these escrow companies and many simply don't trust them. The number of online scams has made people rightfully skeptical.

It's far better to plan a fly/buy/drive option. This eliminates the monetary risk and allows you to personally inspect the car before final payment. Furthermore, one-way airfare booked in advance costs much less than insured shipping. Consider the additional expense of gas, food, and hotel as the price to pay for peace-of-mind.

If your return drive involves more than two, eight-hour driving days, consider bringing a friend to share the driving duties. Despite your excitement over your new purchase, it won't negate the realities of long distance driving such as sore posteriors and stiff legs. Also, adverse driving conditions can bring about simple fatigue, so don't underestimate the task. Check weather forecasts for your route and use rest stops regularly to stretch and relax.

You'll also want to add the car to your insurance coverage before you close. Some sellers may wish to formally transfer the title before you leave, which will require proof of insurance.

For some, driving an unfamiliar car 1600 miles home is a daunting prospect. In this case, use a shipping company but still close the deal in person with round trip airfare, just for peace-of-mind. Unless your insurance company covers it, I would recommend the more expensive insured shipping options, since transit damage is not uncommon. But be prepared to wait upwards of 3 weeks for long distance shipping.

CONCLUSIONS

Buying and owning an 8-series is not for everyone. I recommend it for enthusiasts only. Happy owners are mature individuals who are willing to assume risks and shoulder responsibility. This includes costs.

Maintenance and parts are more expensive than other BMW's but there are several online resources (discussion forums, discount parts houses, etc.) which make owning this car so much more affordable. Get familiar with them. A patient owner willing to learn and perform some maintenance himself has an advantage.

The 8-series is a classy, collectible GT car which can reward its owner in many ways. Be prepared and exercise responsibility for the best possible ownership experience.

Good luck with your search!

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