

Driving in Pennsylvania

Contributed by Melissa Yeo 24th July 2012

Driver's License

How to get your driver's license?

Follow the instructions here: <http://www.studentaffairs.cmu.edu/oie/pa-license.pdf>

Most importantly you need a visa that is at least one year, most first time SMU peeps coming to CMU, your visa isn't long enough, so you need a senior to buy for you. In our second year coming to CMU, our visas are one year and that's when we apply for a driver's license.

Do you need a driver's license to buy a car?

No you don't you need a state ID, but you must have passed driving in Singapore to have a valid Singapore Driver's license to drive in PA. But same thing for a state ID, you go through the same <http://www.studentaffairs.cmu.edu/oie/pa-license.pdf> except you don't have to take a driving test.

How is the driving test like?

If you can pass SSDC's driving you can pass the PA driving test very easily, all you need to do is drive around a parking lot, parallel park into a parking that's big enough to fit at least 1 whole school bus and drive on the street at speeds of 25mph. The test is also quite cheap and it's valuable if you want to have a lower insurance premium, it's like \$5-\$10 cheaper a month.

Buying a Car

PA inspection and Emissions

Every car you buy in Allegheny county (where pittsburgh resides) needs to be inspected and check for emissions. The stickers last for an entire year.

<http://www.santangelotireandauto.com/images/EmissionsSafetyWindowStickers.jpg>

Without those stickers, your car is deemed illegal and you will get a fine. Hence it's common advice to get a car that is already inspected. Reason being that if the previous owner did not inspect it and when you send it to the shop to inspect there could an array of problems like (need to change tires \$400, need to change exhaust system (at least \$200)) things like that you want to avoid. Hence, if you are leaving in August 2013, I would suggest you find a car that is inspected in August 2012, so that you have one year of worry free driving.

***Dishonest Seller Tricks: some sellers will refuse to do an inspection, for example it's July, the inspection ends in August, you ask him to do an inspection and you will only buy if it passes. He can give you some lousy excuse saying that you can only inspect it in the month you buy. That's nonsense. You can inspect your vehicle at any time of the year.*

Craigslist

<http://pittsburgh.craigslist.org/i/autos> is your best friend. If you want to buy from a dealer, do note there are extra charges. I bought my 2008 Suzuki SX 4 AWD for \$12,000 and I had to pay the dealer \$1,000 which I already bargained with him. I would recommend buying from a private seller if you are purchasing a low valued car < \$10,000. Also beware of fraudsters that tell you all sorts of story and you'll never see the car, don't waste your time, if the car is too cheap. IT'S NOT REAL!

Kelly Blue Book

<http://www.kbb.com/> is your best friend when it comes to figuring out how much cars are worth. :) Use this to figure out if the seller is overpricing his car or not.

Things to always consider when looking at cars

1. Mileages

- Japanese cars like Hondas and Nissans are infamous for living forever, hence a 150k mileage on those cars is nothing, but 150k mileage on an American car like Chevrolet is reaching the end its lifespan of that car.

2. Year of manufacture

- If the car is manufactured in year 1995 and before it's OBD1 inspection is visual and not computerized, if your car is manufactured in year 1996 and above it's OBD2 inspection, it's computerized, once your car throws a check engine light, your car immediately fails inspection and the check engine light code is sent to PENDOT. Hence I hate computers. I drive an OBD1 car with almost every light on. :P

3. Check for inspection and emissions

- Some counties don't have emissions and their cars are not inspected for it as well. If you have to buy it, pray hard the exhaust does its job and passes the emissions test. it's like \$20+ to do an emissions at Pepboys.

4. Check tires

- In winter time it's crucial to have good tires, make sure the car has all-season tires with good tread on them. If it's bald, negotiate with the seller to lower the price, it's around \$80 a tire for good all-season tires, or you can always get winter tires. and you can get them mounted and balanced for each wheel at \$5 at Walmart.

5. Oil changes

- Make sure the car has oil change at least every 3,000 miles if running normal motor oil or at least every 5,000 miles if running synthetic. If you're not sure and don't trust the owner, pop open the oil cap for the motor. If it is dark brown, it means the seller is probably lying and doesn't change his oil at all, it's light brown/transparent, means the seller did a good job taking care of the motor. IF IT'S BLACK, TELL HIM TO SCRAP THE CAR!!

6. Brakes

- The next more important thing, make sure it has brakes, whether or not it has ABS, doesn't really matter, good brakes are important, make sure the brake pedal isn't too mushy, which means you need to change brake fluids, (\$90 at pepboys) and make sure the car doesn't wobble when you brake at higher speeds like 60mph cause that means you need new brakes + rotors (at least \$400). The Volvo just had the front changed at \$250.

7. RUST

- THIS IS VERY IMPORTANT! If your car has too much rust, it will NOT PASS INSPECTION. It's the PA rule and since it snows a lot and salt is thrown on the road to prevent icing, all these elements make cars rust 10 times faster than in VEGAS. So, if you see a small rust spot the size of your thumb in summer, and if you don't garage your car (park on the street), it can grow as big as your fist by the end of winter. It also degrades the value of your car ALOT!!! *Suggestion: don't buy a car with ANY form of rust, even if the seller tells you it's surface rust, YOU HAVE NO TIME or SKILLS to fix it.*

Buying the CAR :)

You need to have purchased insurance, BEFORE you go to AAA or the dealership, PA law states that every car needs to be insured!!

A. PRIVATE SELLER

So you've finally found the perfect car :) next you need to find a Notary, or most of us go to AAA, it's \$32 just to transfer the car and another \$25 for a license plate, if you want to wait you can wait 2 months to get a vanity plate (<http://www.dmv.state.pa.us/centers/vanityPlate.shtml>) I got CPT SLOW :) I just transferred a car 2 weeks ago it was \$60.50 excluding the plate, I think it's close to \$100 to transfer the car with a new plate.

If you're not an AAA member, it will be advisable AAA membership, it's cheaper to buy the membership the first time you transfer the car, and it discounts the AAA fees and you get 1 year of basic membership (3 miles towing free) ← which i strongly recommend upgrading to the 100 mile towing because 1 mile towing is like \$5 bucks, or just pray your car never breaks down. XD

Also note in PA, there's a 7% tax on all cars, if you are getting a car privately you can discuss with the person how much he wants to declare as the "selling" price, do note it is a federal offence and is considered as cheating the government, but it's not uncommon. But you cannot ask him to declare a \$5000 car as \$1000, but maybe \$4000 and you pay 7% of that \$4000.

After you are done, you get your plate, u get a photocopy of the title and you get the ACTUAL registration. The title will be mailed to you within a couple of weeks, there is a registration sticker that has the month you bought your car, stick it on the license plate. You must bring screw drivers or the right sockets to change the plate immediately. Once the transaction is done, it is illegal to drive around with the old plate (from the previous owner)

Keep the registration in your glovebox at all times. When cops pull u over, that's the first thing u need to show. For the title, keep it at home, u need it when you sell the car.

Also when the time comes when you have your own driver's license/state ID, and you need to transfer the car over to you from your senior, REMEMBER YOU DON'T HAVE TO BUY A NEW PLATE (i did this) wasted my \$25. You can use the same plate for a different owner, because when we transfer the car from the senior, we consider it as a "gift" NOT A "SALE" so no 7% tax, but you pay the transfer fees of \$60.

AAA locations that I liked to go to: **006 - North Hills**

4790 McKnight Road (15 MINUTES AWAY, but they have more counters and u will be processed within 10 minutes!!) very good service!!
Pittsburgh, PA 15237

Phone:	412-367-7600
Fax:	412-367-5898

Hours of Operation

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
10 - 8	10 - 8	10 - 8	10 - 8	10 - 6	10 - 3

AAA East Central (5 minutes away, BUT ONLY GOT 2 COUNTERS, took me 1 hour to transfer before >_< because they're beyond tortoise speed)

AAA East Central
5900 Baum Blvd # 2, Pittsburgh, PA 15206

Phone:	412-363-5100
Fax:	412-365-6544

Hours of Operation

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
8:30 - 5	8:30 - 5	8:30 - 5	8:30 - 5	8:30 - 5	10 - 3

B. DEALERSHIP

You just follow the nice ang moh guy, he give you what paper you sign. :) END OF STORY! and pay him a lot of money. XD he'll give u a piece of paper, letter size u need to stick it in your rear window, IT'S YOUR REGISTRATION STICKER. It's more important than your plate but u also need to put your plate.

Parking

Most of us street park/parallel park on the streets. Buy a parking permit from here (<http://www.pittsburghparking.com/rppp>) it's downtown at \$20 a year but because i've been hit 3 times over a span of 22 days of street parking so I put my \$3000 car back into the garage at \$105 a month at Fifth Neville garage, where I can sleep peacefully. But it's really your choice, or you can put the car in the garage only in the winter months, so that you don't have to dig your car out of the snow everytime you want to use it.

Insurance

If you don't have a state ID, chances are your car is going to be registered under a senior and you have to have the senior's name in your insurance, for me KLAW bought my car, so i just registered my insurance under him. We were using progressive, one of the cheaper insurance companies. Most of us get comprehensive to cover both the other person's car and our car. Most of us get limited tort and deductibles of \$1,000, because we're cheap :P but it's clearly up to you.

Lesson learnt from Joel: he gave the insurance companies his phone number to get insurance quotes and he keeps getting spam calls/sms from them. SO DON'T GIVE YOUR REAL NUMBER.