



15 Tips for Wheelin' and Dealin' at Auto Swap Meets

To help secure the best deals possible on parts, repair manuals, literature and auto collectibles, Mike Yager, President of Mid America Motorworks, which hosts a number of dedicated Swap Meets throughout the year, has some tried and true tips that can save hobbyists time, money and heartaches.

- 1. Plan Wisely.** Secure directions to the swap meet destination, opening show times, and entry fees.
- 2. Arrive Early.** The first day of any swap meet holds the best chances to secure rare or hard-to-find items. If you can arrive while vendors are still unloading, there's a good chance of beating other collectors to that desperately needed item.
- 3. Dress Properly.** Remember the Swap Meet dress code. Wear older, comfortable clothes that will allow you to rummage through parts piles. Don't forget a pair of gloves to protect hands from sharp sheet metal parts. And don't advertise your "automotive affiliation" with garb that makes you look like a walking billboard for a marque if you want to maximize your bargaining power.
- 4. Light your way.** Bring a flashlight and a few shop towels for pre-dawn scouting or peering into engine bays and wiping dirt and grime off parts to better read date codes or VIN numbers.



5. Keep in touch. Carry a note pad, pens, cell phone and/or radios to jot down vendor info, part numbers, and keep in touch with your buddies, who are searching other aisles of the swap meet for those items you or they might need.

6. Bring business cards if you have them. If you get a business card from a vendor or swapper, write down the part numbers/descriptions of what he has, as you might not remember later.

7. Cash talks. Bring lots of cash and some credit cards. You never know what you might find that you simply can't live without. Small denomination bills are best for negotiating prices. It's hard to beat a seller down from \$40 to \$15 on a specialty part and then hand the seller a \$100 bill.

8. Identify your targets. Make a list of part numbers and price points of items you want. Don't rely on memory. A small reference book with part numbers, date codes and application of parts by model year can be invaluable.

9. Know your numbers. Make sure you know your car's VIN #, date codes, color codes, engine #s, horsepower, transmission model, etc. before leaving home.

10. Cart those treasures. Bring a lightweight 2-wheel folding cart or a heavy canvas shoulder bag for toting all the goodies, plus plastic wrap and stretch cords to haul and secure large, leaky items in your truck or car for transport home. Also bring plastic bags for storing small clips and fasteners, which can be easily lost and difficult to replace, and a marker to identify the parts once they are securely bagged.





11. Go for Components. Be willing to purchase component pieces to make up the whole of the parts or items for which you are searching.

12. Sign Up! Wear a signboard outlining the major items you are seeking and list anything you would like to sell or trade. You may feel foolish at first, but when a stranger spots the sign and offers that special part at a bargain price, or another shopper says he has just the part you need, or knows someone who might, you'll be ecstatic. Swappers love to network and help each other.

13. Negotiate wisely. It's often easier to convince a seller to throw in some extra parts than to convince them to lower their price.

14. Keep it to yourself. Never reveal the depth of your knowledge about the parts you wish to purchase. Many potential buyers have had rare parts scooped up right in front of them after they discussed the value of a particular item. Knowledge can be a dangerous thing if shared with the wrong people at the wrong moment.

15. Even if you don't plan to purchase anything, it's always a good idea to review these tips because invariably there will be an unexpected "gem" lurking at that next swap meet that you simply must take home.

Mid America Motorworks hosts two annual **Swapfests**, one in April and one in October. The swap meets, held at company headquarters in Effingham, Illinois, are dedicated to Corvette, Air-Cooled VW, street rods and other collectible and special interest cars.

Swapfest is the perfect event for enthusiasts to discover those rare or one-of-a-kind items needed to complete a restoration or find that final, long-sought accessory, as well as mingle with fellow collectors. Admission is free to buyers and lookers.

