

One of the most important things to remember when considering the purchase of a guitar, no matter where it comes from, is the price. The pawnshop can be thought of as the world's oldest financial institution. It can be traced to ancient China, when merchants would hold collateral and heirlooms in exchange for rice. Here, we will give you a little insight to not purchasing a "pig," as pawn shops call merchandise that is virtually unsellable and based on luck of an inexperienced buyer.

Part One – The Purchase

The biggest mistake a person can make is to believe that just because they buy low, that they sell low. Over 50% of their sales prices are over retail. Yes, retail. That T.V. that you bought there could have been bought for less money. But that also means that half the other people buying there are getting their stuff cheaper, and here's why.

Browse often. Even if you don't plan to buy anything, stop in once or twice a month and just look around. Build a repertoire. The best deals always go to those they think will give them repeat business. Not the guy who thinks he can just swing in and get something for nothing. Building a relationship will also get you access to items that are not displayed.

For example, there may be a Les Paul in the back that is just a couple days away from being forfeited. This bit of information might be thrown your way if you're in the market for a new axe. There is nothing the pawnshops like better than to have a forfeited item pre-sold. It saves them a lot of time and headache.

I also understand that a lot of people just don't have the time or inclination to frequent a pawnshop a couple of times a month. If that's the case here are a couple of bargaining strategies.

Most people believe that if you act like you don't really want something, you can get it for less. THIS IS NOT TRUE. If the salesman thinks you aren't interested, then he figures he doesn't really want to waste his time trying to get you to buy it. In the pawnshop realm, they don't care if you buy it or not. You have to keep in mind that the interest on loans is their bread and butter, not selling items. The items will sell eventually to someone else who does want them, and NO MATTER WHAT, the pawnshop got it for next to nothing any way. They have until hell freezes over to sell.

THE ATTITUDE TO HAVE IS: You really do want it and if they work with you and are reasonable, a deal can be struck.

The most important thing is be prepared to buy on the spot. Say something like "well, I'll have to discuss this with my wife" and you are dead in the water. Just smile and show cash money (or a credit card). That is what will do most of the talking for you.

Negotiate tax. If you agree on \$500 for that strat, try to get it out-the-door for that. If they won't, try to meet them half way. They can write it up as selling for \$485.00 and you split the difference on tax, paying only about \$515.00 out the door instead of \$535.00.

The biggest misconception is that pawn shop guitars are not worth what is on the sticker for it. That is true in some ways, but not in others. Sure the pawn shop will have to make their money, but remember, it's not the product. It's the interest off of everyone else that has PAWNED, and not sold or bought. The other side of this is that most decent pawn shops will look up your item no matter what. This saves both you and the pawn shop due to negotiation.

Most of the time, pawn shops are taking guitars out from people that have had to forfeit their guitar because they couldn't pay the finance charge to hold it over until the next period. Ask any pawn broker and you will be surprised of how many nice Gibson's, Taylor's, and Fender's have come through their store. You may be surprised. NEVER NEVER NEVER NEVER NEVER settle for what the sticker says. They will ALWAYS negotiate. If they don't, just leave and never return. They are non-negotiable people in this case, and you will get nowhere fast.

Part Two : The Investigation

Below are some easy-to-follow steps in making sure that you aren't purchasing a "pig" from a pawn shop:

1. Make sure that you actually play the guitar in the shop. The biggest mistake you can make is looking at it, thinking it looks cool, and then just buying it. Most good pawn shops make sure that the item works on the shelf, but you never know. Not only can one item slip their mind, but that item may actually HAVE worked when they put it out. Remember, the item you are considering buying could have been in there for a few years.

2. Check the weight on it as opposed to some of the others. Some guitars that are made in Mexico have a much lighter weight to them, which is why you may see some Fender guitars even at retail stores for cheaper than you can fathom. That

is because they are Mexican-made Strats, and not officially the real deal. They do sound rather close together, but in fact they are not.

3. Turn the guitar up to where you can see the strings that are on it and make sure that the neck isn't warped. You can eyeball this if you wish, but you can also ask them for a stick to check it. Believe it or not, you will get what you want. They have rods all over the place there, and you will be granted this as an option. All you have to do is place the rod on the neck beside the strings and look to see if the board looks somewhat straight.

4. Start from an open string on each fret and go from fret "one" all the way down to the pickups. If you hear, WITHOUT THE GUITAR BEING PLUGGED IN any rattling, other than the string rattle, don't buy it. If you don't hear anything when it isn't plugged in, do the same again when it is plugged in. Never buy a guitar if you can't plug it in. NEVER. For acoustics this is a little different, but the concept is the same. You may still need to plug it in to see how it sounds. Also check to see how many pickups a guitar has. Try for three, because two may not let you switch your tone out very well for different styling.

5. Finally, try to find out if the guitar is used or new. If it is new, you probably can find a better price for it online. If it is used, you may inherit a gem, or you may indeed end up with a "pig." Try to follow these steps and you should be in for a pretty decent beginner guitar.