

# \$600 Car Odyssey

Being that I work from home and my transportations needs frequently involve nothing more than fetching food stuffeses, my needs for a vehicle are very minimal. I have never been any good at managing money, going through a divorce, 2 kiddos in high school, so the car note had to go. So, a car for \$600? For your daily driver? Preposterous. Am I a glutton for punishment? Maybe, but I am fairly handy with a set of tools, know how to internet for answers.

With my budget, I was not looking for or expecting to get very much car. I went to the usual places looking for used cars. From what I was seeing, there are a lot of people with unrealistic evaluations of their used cars. With out any specific type of vehicle in mind, I was really just trying to find something with a decent running motor. Messaged a few people about their adds. A lot of them I didn't think they were being honest about the description of what their vehicle needed. Too many it ran fine until the battery died and needs a battery. The car I did settle on, during messaging with the owner it was described as needing the front struts replaced, parts included with the purchase, a can of freon, and a tune up because the motor dies at idle. I decided that if they could drive the car to where I am, it runs good enough for me to be able to get back and forward to the parts store. So, here's what I bought.



## 2004 DODGE STRATUS R/T COUPE WITH A 3.0 6 CYLINDER ENGINE.

Yes, the car wouldn't idle, it did die when you took your foot off the gas whether it was in park or in gear. Some things that are needing attention that were not mentioned by the seller. Inside door handle on drivers Side does not work. Missing lock cylinder on drivers door, so you can't lock the car. Drivers window seemed to roll up to high and did not sit flush when fully rolled up. Front bumper has some damage. Missing the fog light on the passenger side. On the interior, drivers side sun visor was tore up. Drivers seat needs to re-covered. Back window at some point had tint that has been peeled off and the glue residue makes it hard to see out of the back. Of course, a car with that age has some other expected wear and tear.

It was in the evening when the seller delivered the car. After exchanging cash for the title, I locked the car up to go inside and eat. Came back outside to give it a more thorough look over and off the bat I had to spend money on a locksmith to open the doors. There is no keyhole on the passenger's door. \$80, haven't even personally turned the steering wheel yet.

Then I go looking for the parts that were supposed to come with the car. Literally, a trunk full of junk, but no struts. Messaged the seller "Forgot to grab them, I'll bring them over tomorrow." That turned into I got off work late, no biggie, I work from home so bring them early, late, I don't care. That then turned into "I'm out of town but will have so and so bring them." Ok, yeah. When the struts finally were brought over, no knock on the door, just left on the porch. So, I open one box, obviously not a front strut, rather a shock for the rear. And on top of that, being for the wrong end of the car, they were rear shocks for the sedan Stratus, not the coupe. My guess is, they didn't actually have them when I bought the car and bought the cheapest things they could find once I gave them the money for the car. I wanted to message and ask if they had the receipt so I could return them and get the right parts, but \$600.

I also notice a cable hanging in the rear of the car. Parking brake cable had been cut. No parking brake. Normally, not a big deal, but it does need to work to pass inspection. Now I'm thinking I might have been better off with \$600 in bus passes. No parking brakes, car dies at idle, vibrates violently while driving, driver's window doesn't seat properly, can't open the door from the inside driver's side, can't lock it up because you can't get back in, no A.C. battery doesn't hold a charge and frequently needs a jump. Horn doesn't work, also needed to pass inspection.

Other than the car cutting off when idling, no funny noises coming from the engine. That's a plus. I went to the usual culprit with this type of problem. I disconnected the IAC (idle air control valve). No more dying during idle! Yeah! Small victories. With the IAC disconnected, it does idle around 2000 rpm, but won't die.

After driving the car a couple times, I would have to get a jump. Dead battery. Replaced the battery, after about 3 days or so, needed a jump again. Ultimately, not the battery, alternator needed to be replaced. Haven't needed jumper cables since. 8^)

What about those front struts the previous owner said needed replacing? Well, the car has a HORRIBLE vibration when driving. BUT the frequency depended on throttle position. If you have ever driven a car that needs shocks, the faster you go, the worse it gets. Not this car. If you are cruising at 70 mph on the highway and not accelerating, very smooth. Touch the throttle and it would feel like the car was gonna shake itself apart. MOTOR MOUNTS. This car has 3. I've already replaced the top front once, easy to get to. That cut down on a lot of the vibration, but there are still two at the bottom I need to replace.

Let me go back to that IAC. That joker 😞  
Maybe \$40 cheaper from a well known



from a local auto parts store.  
online auto parts store.

ORDER TOTAL

US \$29.25

Free shipping



Now that's more like it! Guess what, no more idling at 2000 rpm, no more dying when you let your foot off the gas.

The motor mounts by the way, \$180 for the upper and \$90 a piece each for the 2 lower at local stores. \$40 for the upper and about \$20 each for the lower online.

But Mark, you live in hell (Texas) what about the A.C.? Well, the seller was right. Not a full 12 oz can of freon later, blows ice cold. And it's a two door coupe, doesn't take long to cool the entire interior. I do need to buy a window shade. All black interior and it is a scalding hot oven when you first get in the car.

So, at this point, I've replaced battery and alternator, one motor mount, and the IAC, filled the freon in the A.C. Now I can comfortably drive, but the vibrating does get annoying. One of the motor mounts hasn't arrived yet, and since I have to take a crossmember off to replace them both, I'll do them when the last one gets here.

I've mentioned the brake cables, but I haven't spoken about the brakes. Yeah, they worked, but had some crunching and grinding. I have replaced all pads and all 4 rotors. Stops smoothly, in a straight line, no unusual noises. I did buy a kit online that had all 4 rotors, all the brake pads and hardware for a lot less than a local store.

The brake cables. One for each side on the back. Repair manuals estimate 2.5 hours to replace both. Contact your favorite repair shop and ask them what their labor rates hour per hour. Now the parts, less than \$50 for the set shipped, compare that to how much the labor would cost you, so yes took me 6 hours but save my self hundreds of dollars. Again, it's only a \$600 dollar car. If I had a lift instead of jack stands, I probably could have done them in 3 hours. Plus I'm too old to crawl around under cars my body told me for the next couple of days.

Here is a check list of everything the car needs to have done.

1. Head light lenses cleaned
2. Horn (has 3 horns, one was disconnected. Reconnected, horns now work.)
3. Bumper cover replaced
4. Passenger side fog lamp
5. Battery
6. Alternator
7. Idle Air Control Valve
8. Upper motor mount
9. Front lower motor mount ( on hand, not installed)
10. Rear lower motor mount (ordered)
11. 4 sets of brake pads and rotors
12. Passenger side brake cable (replaced both)
13. Driver's side door lock cylinder (Inside door, not connected, missing retaining clip. Does not work with ignition key)
14. Driver's door cable from handle to latch (Could not find just the cables to order. Ordered a complete door latch with he cables connected to a door handle pulled from another car)
15. Remote keyless entry remote programmed (ordered a programmer)
16. Drivers seat cover replaced/repared

17. Both sun visors
18. ~~Drivers door window fixed~~ (front bumper to stop the windows progress up was inside the door and not bolted to the window glass. Fixed)
19. Missing spare tire
20. Both back seat courtesy lights missing
21. Rear window replaced or tint residue cleaned
22. Side view mirrors harness/connector to switch
23. ~~AC Freon~~
24. Power steering pump
25. ~~Radio antenna~~
26. Oxygen Sensors
27. New tires
28. Sun roof does not open, but you can hear the motor
29. Radiator flushed

So yeah, that's a pretty healthy list. My priorities are to do the jobs needed to pass inspection first. I believe the oxygen sensors, specifically the down stream 2 are all that's needed at this point besides new tires. The front two have plenty of tread, the rear don't. All are within my skill set except if the back window does need replacing. Once I get the tires replaced, I will have about as much money in parts in this car than the car itself. This has been a good distraction to get my mind off some other life events. I won't have this car forever. In fact, I won't have it long at all. I'm going to give it to my son for his 18th birthday.