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Scam Alert – January 2007 by Stacie Harris, Economic Crimes Unit

ONLINE CAR SALES SCAM

Scammers target online sellers of cars, boats, motorbikes, even horses.

This is by no means a new scam. It has been around for quite awhile, but is starting to rise high on the list again. The scam has become popular and the scammers are all over the world. How does the scam work?

A legitimate seller will place an ad for the vehicle on the internet (or magazine) with a contact email address for any responses. When the scammer contacts the buyer by email, he or she will state that they will pay the full asking price and even pay an extra amount on top of the asking price. The scammer may give a reason for the extra money as being for shipping of the vehicle to a foreign country as they are representing a buyer overseas. The extra amount could be as much as \$10,000.00 and the scammer offers to pay by cashier's check. Of course the legitimate seller is astonished and excited to receive the full amount. The legitimate seller will anxiously accept the offer and the scammer will respond immediately, stating that a check will be sent and that when it is received, it should be deposited immediately and the extra money sent on to the shipping company, after which arrangements will be made to pick up the item being sold.

There may be some kind of a delay over time but the scammer will eventually send a cashier's check. The check is usually mailed from a foreign country, which is done to fool USPS investigators who are checking on postal fraud. The legitimate seller believes the check to be good - - after all, it's a cashier's check. Counterfeit checks can be difficult to distinguish from the real thing and when the legitimate seller deposits it in his or her account and asks the bank if it is good, more than likely the bank will state that it seems to be good and will release the funds immediately, or within a day or two. It is **not** a valid check and may take up to 10-14 days to be declared fraudulent by the bank in which it was deposited. The scammer is hoping that by the time you find out the check is not good, you will have already sent the extra money on to his accomplice for those alleged shipping charges. Please be aware that if the seller does send the money on to the scammer's accomplice before finding out from the bank that the check is no good, the bank will hold the seller responsible for the full amount of the check.

In most instances, the con-artists in these scams are usually in West Africa (Nigeria). Recovery of any funds sent are pretty much wishful thinking and hoping.

If you believe you have fallen victim to this type of scam and wish to report it, you may file a complaint with the Internet Fraud Complaint Center (IC3) at www.ic3.gov. IC3 is co-sponsored by the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) and the National White Collar Crime Center (NW3C).

You can also file a complaint with the United States Postal Service since it was fraudulently used to send the bogus check through.

The best rule of thumb is, if it sounds too good to be true, then it usually is.

IDENTIFY A SCAM BEFORE A SCAM IDENTIFIES YOU!