

CAREFREE CAR RENTAL

Trap

Ed and Joan from Lake Park were planning on flying to California for a family reunion. They also planned to rent a car for a drive along the Pacific Coast Highway. But despite having driven for years, neither had ever rented a car. They called Consumer Affairs with questions about how to avoid problems and save money.

Tips

Renting a car can be a snap. Follow these tips to make your trip carefree:

- First, you must be at least 25 years or older to rent at most agencies.
- Use the Internet to save money. Check at least three car rental agencies for discounts. Read the terms and contract carefully. Print a copy and make sure it includes the confirmation number and the bottom line cost. Members of AARP, AAA and discount clubs can check those respective Web sites for cost savings.
- If you call for reservations, ask the agent about restrictions. Is there a fee for additional drivers? If your arrival is delayed how long will the car be held? Is there a cancellation fee? What are the local taxes or airport surcharges? What are the pick-up and return procedures?
- If you have personal auto insurance or charge the rental to a major credit card, you may be covered for collision damage. Be sure to check with your insurance agent or credit card issuer about coverage.
- Before driving away, inspect the car carefully for body damage. Be sure the door locks, brakes, lights and turn signals work properly. Report any defects at once. Write down the odometer mileage at the start of the rental period in the event there is a dispute.
- Save money by refueling the car before returning it to the car rental agency. Do the fill-up several miles away from the airport, since nearby stations tend to have higher prices.

