

Getting Started In Quarter Midgets

Most people buy a used Quarter midget to see if they like the sport before diving in with a full checkbook. But once they've fallen in love with it (the vast majority of those who try it do), they usually want to part with their beginner equipment -- which usually wasn't state of the art --and get something they believe will make them instantly competitive. This usually occurs at the end of the first or second season.

Sadly, they rarely become anymore competitive with the newer, more expensive equipment when they were with the older, all other things being equal. Oh sure, there are some advantages to the newer, high-dollar equipment. It is less likely to be worn out for one; for another, the newer equipment will give the driver a greater sense of security and comfort with his/her own driving abilities. But most of the great leaps forward a driver will make in getting quicker doesn't necessarily come from the equipment; in almost every instance, it's from becoming a better driver and a better handler. This gives you, the entry-level handler, and great opportunities to pick up competitive equipment for what amounts to a song.

When you first get started don't go out and buy a new car because it will get wrecked a lot.

Find a good used car to start in then move up to a new one. You will just about get your money back on a used car when you are ready to sell it. You will bend a lot of radius rods the first year. I'm not saying your driver is a bad driver but you are running in the novice class and all the other drivers are in training just as you are and when you get them together they are going to bump and bang.

So what happens when you buy a roller? First, you'll need to buy the other parts that will enable you to race. Let's say you find a great Quarter Midget -- straight frame, full bodywork, tires and wheels-- for, say, \$1,500. (For comparison, a new, bare frame will set you back around \$900-\$1000.) So

\$1,500 for a roller is a pretty good price. You can find them cheaper and you can find them more expensive. It's been my experience that you almost always get what you pay for. So be a smart

shopper. Before I get in this too deep you need to talk to other members in your club about the car you are interested in, they can tell you about the car. Most of the time they know if it is a good car or

not. Call and talk to the novice trainer and the president of the club they will be glad to help you get what you pay for. Also try to purchase a QM that has an established base in your club

These other members can help you get it set up, if you buy one that no one else is running you will be on your own.

To the base roller price add:

Engine (again, getting what you pay for) \$350-\$800

Exhaust \$40 - \$100

New tire \$40 - \$55 each

Racing Jacket or Suit: \$40 - \$300

Helmet: \$125 - \$350

Neck Brace: \$20 - \$40

Gloves: \$20 - \$60

Stop Watch: \$15 - \$45

Kart Stand: \$50

Spare parts: \$50- \$250

Air tank: \$20- \$30

Fuel and oil: \$5 - \$75

Something to transport your car \$100 - \$10,000

Now, you're up to \$1,500 for the roller and at least \$1,100 for all the other stuff for a minimum total of \$2,600. Only you can decide if that's a better deal than buying a complete setup, usually from someone getting out of Quarter Midgets. Someone getting out of is usually a very motivated seller and I've seen deals for everything -- engines, extra parts, etc. -- for as low as \$800 and as high as \$5,000. Both were great bargains.

Car Buying Guide

When buying the complete setup, look to acquire the car, engine(s), pipes, extra gears, new ones run around \$15 each, engine oil, extra brake pads, axle clamps, air filters, fuel filters, spares, spares, spares. If you don't have these, you'll need them eventually and \$10 here and \$20 there starts to add up real quickly. If you're buying a car from someone who is moving up to newer equipment, you're not in as good a bargaining position as you would be with someone selling to get out of Quarter Midgets. He or she most likely is interested only in selling the car, sometimes with engine and sometimes without. Still, there are advantages to this also. Most often, this seller is someone you're going to be seeing regularly at the track and with human consciences being what he or she are; this seller is more likely to be more honest. Having said that, I must say that Quarter Midget people as a group are the most trustful and honest around.

Some specific things to look for when buying any used Quarter Midget:

The most important of all is the car it self **MAKE SURE YOU BUY A DOWN TUBE OFF SET CAR.** If it doesn't have tubes from the front top of the roll cage to the front of the car it is an old car and not competitive. The Quarter Midget should be clean, neat, well assembled and apparently well cared for. If it's dirty with cracked fiberglass and rust everywhere, shy away from it. If the seller doesn't care enough about it to keep it in good shape, why would you want to put your child in something that might fall apart? There are lots of cars for sale.

Inspect the frame closely for cracks or re-welding. A painted frame sometimes makes finding cracks more difficult than an unpainted frame. A cracked frame that has been re-welded properly is more than likely okay, and no reason to shy away from an otherwise smart deal. Look for cracks and or bent tubes around the front of the car, rear axle area and especially around the engine mount tubes. If the welding was sloppily done, shy away from that one also. Don't waste your time on one that has been hastily or badly repaired. Check the frame for straightness most of the time you can eyeball it or by measuring the diagonals... from the left front upright bar on the front to the very intersection of the very back cross bar, Measure the other diagonal. They should be within 0.125-0.25 inches of each other. This can be done from tipping the car up and measuring on the bottom of the belly pan. If the measurement is greater than that, the frame is warped, go look for another Car. Roll the Car back and forth on pavement. It should roll freely and easily. Check the spindles and/or check the toe-in alignment. Spindles should look the same both left and right. Spindle bearings should not be binding. Steering should be without binding. Don't be turned off by an unpainted frame. Some people don't paint their frames. One, unpainted frames make cracks easier to see; two, it takes longer to get a painted one from the factory; three, a painted frame is slightly heavier (you'll find in Quarter Midgets that less weight is a good thing). Wheels should be free of cracks, obviously, but also free of hefty nicks, especially on the lips. They should roll freely. If you can feel roughness while spinning the front wheel/tire, you'll need to replace the bearings. Not a big deal, nor actually expensive, but another bargaining chip. Unless the tires are new or almost new (the tread surface will be soft; you'll be able to easily dig your fingernail into the rubber), plan on buying new tires with any used Quarter Midget (about \$160 a set). One-piece wheels offer convenience while being more expensive initially and more expensive to replace. Two-piece wheels are somewhat of a pain to mount, and more apt to leak air, but less expensive to replace in the event of damage. Check rear bearings for roughness by spinning the axle (with the chain disconnected). If any roughness exists or if the axle spins slowly, you can plan on replacing the axle bearings (even easier than replacing front bearings, but \$10 to 20 each and you'll need two; front bearings are \$3.25 each and you'll need four). However, another cause of a rear axle spinning slowly might be misalign bearings, especially if bearing cassettes are not used. While spinning the rear axle, also check visually for a bent rear axle (new axles start at around \$55 and go much higher, depending on material and size).

Check brakes for air bubbles in the brake lines (they'll be visible when you apply the brakes)(this is just a sign you need to bleed the brakes), for ease of operation and whether when applying the brakes will lock up the right rear wheel. Check brake pads for wear (relatively easy to replace and not that expensive). Check master cylinder(s) for leaks (rebuild kits are \$11 each). Check that the brake fluid is clean (has it been replaced regularly or recently?). Dirty, dark brake fluid is a sure sign the

seller hasn't been caring for the brakes or the car. Ask the seller what type of brake fluid he/she uses (DOT 5 is the most common in Quarter Midgets and costs around \$11 a bottle).

Don't mix brake fluids; always replace with the same type.

Hopefully, you can buy a used gauge. **Gauges** usually work or don't work; there rarely is a middle ground. Sometimes one function of a multiple-function gauge will not work (the cylinder head temperature might give erratic readings, for example). This is most often caused by a bad gauge lead, and they are inexpensively replaced and even more inexpensively sent back to the factory for reconditioning. Some gauges will offer at least dual functions, most commonly cylinder head temperature (CHT) and revolutions per minute (RPM). Some three-function gauges will add exhaust gas temperature (EGT) or speed (MPH). Some of the newer, more expensive gauges will offer memory recall. My feeling is that novices need at least a tachometer (SenDec gauge is around \$79). A floor pan that is not torn or dented is highly desirable, as it keeps the car cleaner inside and adds a bit of aerodynamics. New floor pans can be made of sheet aluminum (use the old one as a template) usually around \$40/ sheet aluminum. Check fuel tanks for being clean inside (no residue from leftover fuel) and that the tank doesn't leak. Also check for flexible fuel lines (they get hard with age but are cheap and easy to replace). A handler really wanting to sell his used car should have replaced the fuel lines anyhow, clean fuel filter (again, cheap and easy to replace) and check to make sure the fuel valve will turn off the fuel.

Exhaust systems run the gamut of inexpensive to expensive. A one-piece Honda pipe costs around \$60 new plus \$5 for the Briggs Stratton muffler. You simply bolt it to the engine. Shy away from exhausts that have large dents in them. If you're buying a new exhaust, be sure to get the most recent version, or the version used by most Quarter Midgets at the track(s) you run.

Bodywork should be straight and in good repair. It is not unusual for bodywork to have been patched (some forms of Quarter Midgets qualify as a contact sport!) or re-glassed. Bad bodywork shouldn't be a deal-breaker but would serve as a major negotiating point. You can always hang new bodywork for about \$150 plus your own labor. A hood for a quarter Midget will run you about \$50 plus shipping and shipping will cost more the hood.

Generally, the more you spend for an **engine**, the better the engine. For comparison purposes, a new in-the-box Honda is around \$469. Add \$200-\$350 for blueprinting on top of that (not always required and sometimes not even suggested until after the engine has been used). Ask how often the oil has been changed (the correct answer is at least after every race weekend) what kind of oil was used. When buying, negotiate for all the extras you can get the seller to part with. Again, if the seller is getting out of Quarter Midgets, there's a strong incentive on his/her part to get rid of it all at once. Offer to write one check for everything. You avoid the hassle of having to round up all the stuff that you're going to need, and the seller avoids the hassle of getting rid of stuff with a fairly limited market over a longer period of time.

The most crucial **extras** would be: extra gears (around \$15-\$20 and you'll need several sets), extra wheels and tires (about \$250 a set). Some tools and other things you might need: wheel balancers (\$20), gear puller (about \$17), tire breaker, stainless steel safety wire, air tank, air gauge, Stop Watch, etc. You'll need a small set of metric and standard wrenches and sockets, screwdrivers, wire cutters, pliers, scissors, hex-head sockets, extensions, extension cord, folding lawn chairs, cooler, rain suit, umbrella, WD-40, carb cleaner, brake cleaner, electric drill, drill bits, hack saw, hammer, assorted nuts, bolts, washers, duct tape, clear tape, electrical tape, etc. Those extras that make the experience more enjoyable are pit boards (\$25), stopwatches (\$25+), a pit canopy (\$100+), car cover (\$85), trailer (\$2,000), etc. The handler who is getting out of the sport will have absolutely no use for most of this so bargain accordingly.

Most will buy a new **helmet** (\$150-\$600). Used helmets tend to retain some of their former owner's fragrant identity. Do yourself and your head a favor and buy a new one, despite the bargain that a used helmet represent. Remember it is your child's head and it is better safe than sorry. However, the rest of your personal **driving gear** can easily be purchased used. With driving suits, gloves, just shop wisely. A \$150 driving suit new is probably only worth \$25 to \$50 a year later, so racers on a budget can save some serious money here.

For additional info, visit the documents page of www.thqma.com; Novice Handbook.