

BUY BY TYPE

How to buy a car wash

By Ayodele Olasiji, Optimax Commercial · Updated October 18, 2026 · 2 min read · Online at [optimaxdeals.com/guides/how-to-buy-a-car-wash](https://www.optimaxdeals.com/guides/how-to-buy-a-car-wash)

SHORT ANSWER

To buy a car wash, check monthly car counts and, if it sells memberships, the number of members and how many cancel each month. Then look at the age and condition of the tunnel or in bay equipment, water, sewer and chemical costs, and whether the land is included. Pay station reports should match tax returns and bank deposits.

How to, at a glance

1. Get monthly car counts and membership numbers
2. List equipment with make, year and repair history
3. Check water, sewer and chemical costs and permits
4. Confirm whether the land is included

Questions buyers ask**Are car washes passive income?**

Less than they are often sold as. Equipment breaks, chemicals run out and members expect clean, working bays. Budget for an attendant or a manager.

What makes a car wash valuable?

Steady car counts, a membership base that does not churn fast, equipment with years left, and good traffic and visibility.

Should I buy the land?

If it is offered and you can finance it, owning the land removes lease risk and gives you a real estate asset.

1. Know the wash type

- **Express tunnel:** high volume, often built on memberships, expensive equipment.
- **In bay automatic:** one car at a time, often beside a gas station.
- **Self serve bays:** low labor, older customer base, lower revenue per car.

2. Car counts and memberships

- Cars washed per month for two years, by wash package.
- Membership count, monthly price and how many members cancel each month.

- Pay station and point of sale reports matched to tax returns and deposits.

3. Equipment

- A list of equipment with make and year: conveyor, brushes or touchless arches, dryers, pay stations, water reclaim.
- Maintenance logs and recent major repairs.
- If the automatic is old, the cost to replace it. See [touchless or friction](#).

4. Water, chemicals and permits

Water, sewer and chemicals are major costs. Ask for the bills, and confirm discharge permits are current and transfer to you.

5. Financing

Car washes are commonly financed with SBA loans, often with the land included on longer real estate terms. See [SBA loans to buy a business](#).

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