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| **California teen trades up from an old cell phone to a Porsche Boxster**  By Rebecca Kimitch San Gabriel Valley Tribune San Jose Mercury News |  |

GLENDORA - Seventeen-year-old Steven Ortiz is fairly sure he is the only student at Charter Oak High School who drives a convertible Porsche to school.

And, to the surprise of some of his friends, it doesn't belong to his parents.

Steven started with an old cell phone and eventually traded up to his impressive ride.

It didn't happen overnight, but with the help of the Craigslist website and a lot of patience, Steven made 14 online swaps over two years to get his 2000 Porsche Boxster S.

Steven is part of a growing number of people who use the barter section of Craigslist to unload unwanted items and acquire desired goods, rather than just buying and selling them.

But he does more than just make a casual posting to swap concert tickets or an old bike. He spends five to six hours a day on his i-Phone scouring the website for good deals.

"I get so many people who say, `Can you trade my phone for a car?' I just say, `Yeah. It's not that easy,"' he said.

Steven started his lucrative journey when his friend gave him an old cell phone - the sort most people would throw away or shove into a junk drawer.

He traded that phone for a better phone, which he then traded for an i-Pod touch. He traded that for a series of dirt bikes, a MacBook Pro, and a 1987 Toyota 4Runner.

At the time, Steven was just 15 and unable to drive his new acquisition. So he quickly swapped it out for a souped-up off-road golfcart, another more valuable dirt bike, a streetbike, then a series of cars ending with a 1975 Ford Bronco. He spent a few months enjoying each acquisition before determining he was looking for something else.

It was that Bronco that got him the Porsche. Because some older Broncos are considered collectibles, Steven estimated his was worth $15,000.

He got offered all manner of trades - including a locksmith business - for the Bronco. The Porsche, worth about $9,000, was actually a trade down.

Ortiz's love of Craigslist, and a good deal, came long before his interest in bartering.

For years he has bought his friends' old cell phones for $30 then turned around and sold them for three times that online. And whenever his parents need anything, like a new washer and dryer, he scours the site for good deals.

He has a knack for fixing small electronics, and sometimes makes a few repairs to get something someone thought was nearly worthless working again.

Then one day he came across the bartering tab, and decided to have a go at it.

At the time, he had never heard of Kyle MacDonald, a Canadian who made international headlines when he traded a red paperclip for a two-story farmhouse through a series of transactions in 2005 and 2006. MacDonald blogged and wrote a book about the adventure, spawning many copycats.

Steven was not one of them.

The teen said most of the people he trades with aren't after something for nothing.

They are simply looking to get rid of an item they don't need in exchange for something they do. And they often can get a better deal than if they sold the item for cash.

"A lot of people don't have money right now, in this economy. So they think, `I really need a new phone, but I don't have the money. Here I have this CD player lying around that I don't use anymore, maybe I can trade,"' Steven's father Esteban explained.

Because expensive items can quickly lose value, sometimes people think they're better off trading. For example the man who traded his 4Runner for a MacBook is a musician who really needed the computer for his band, and didn't need the car, Steven said.

That is why it frustrates Steven when some of his relatives - who don't understand what he does - call him a con artist.

"People just make these trades," Steven said. "I am not lying to anyone."

Esteban has stressed the value of honesty in such transactions and not to take advantage of anyone.

Steven and his dad have themselves been hit hard by the economy. Steven lost his job at a sushi restaurant, and his father has seen business at the cement laying company he owns plummet. Steven's knack for trading and finding good deals has come in handy.

Esteban hopes his son's knack for sales and trading can lead to better things.

"I think this is teaching him something. I want him to go to college - make something of his life," he said. "He is learning the value of things, responsibility and negotiation skills."

Steven wants to study either law or business and he says his sales skills and persistence will help get him there.

In the meantime, he is already looking for a new car.

Soon after he acquired the Porsche a few months ago, Steven realized it has had its drawbacks, namely operating expenses. An oil change costs at least $150, and a routine tune-up at least $1,000.

So he is considering his next trade - maybe an Escalade.

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