Fake car dealer and shipper sites continue to target consumers, BBB warns

Burnsville, MN – April 15, 2019 – Checking with the Better Business Bureau® of Minnesota and North Dakota before investing in a major purchase is always a smart idea, but it can be especially beneficial when the would-be purchase ends up being a scam.

Three fraudulent “businesses” popped up on BBB’s radar this month after consumers submitted more than 200 inquiries combined about Duluth Motors Transport, Tralaway International and Auto Recovery Brokers. These fake auto dealer and shipper websites defraud consumers thousands of dollars at a time.

In February, BBB warned of these fake websites and has continued to monitor the marketplace for similar scams. The ruse starts with a car, RV or other vehicle listed for an improbably low price on a website like Craigslist or Oodle. Often the ad is posted across the country from where the vehicle is allegedly located, meaning buyers can’t see the vehicle in person.

The scammer emails an invoice to the consumer and includes payment instructions that generally involve bank routing information or wire transfer instructions. Once the money is wired, the scammer cuts off communication and the consumer walks away empty-handed.

While Auto Recovery Brokers uses the same model BBB warned about in February, the other two entities operate as fraudulent vehicle shipping services convincing buyers to wire money for vehicles they will never receive.

Duluth Motors Transport claims to be in Duluth, Minn., but research revealed its listed address is an empty warehouse. Auto Recovery Brokers claims to be in Grand Forks, ND, but there is no licensed auto dealer by that name in the entire state. Neither entity, nor Tralaway International, has a U.S. Department of Transportation motor carrier number, which is required by law.

BBB is aware of at least one consumer who was scammed out of more than $17,000 by Duluth Motors Transport. The consumer said the most valuable lesson he learned out of his experience is never to wire transfer money for a large purchase.

“Bank wiring is not the safest way to do a transaction,” he said. “If you’re doing a transaction, you should insist on seeing something. I taught myself a big lesson.”

These types of scams are not going away, but with the BBB’s guidance, you can avoid being the next victim. Before making a purchase, search the business on BBB Scam Tracker by visiting www.bbb.org/scamtracker/us or on www.bbb.org to view its rating, read customer reviews, and check whether the profile has been flagged as risky by BBB.
Following these tips will also help you stay on the right track:

- Do everything in your power to avoid wiring money for an online vehicle purchase, especially if you can’t view and inspect the vehicle in person first.
- Watch for red flags like improbably low prices on vehicles.
- Make sure the dealer is licensed to sell cars and/or other motor vehicles. In Minnesota, auto dealers are licensed through the Department of Motor Vehicles; in North Dakota, through the Department of Transportation.
- Look up the dealer on www.bbb.org to make sure their profile hasn’t been flagged with concerns and to read customer reviews.

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The mission of BBB is to promote, through self-regulation, the highest standards of business ethics and conduct, and to instill public confidence in responsible businesses through programs of education and action that inform, protect and assist the public.

Contact the BBB at bbb.org or 651-699-1111, toll-free at 1-800-646-6222.