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Buying Fitness Equipment On eBay: Deals or Duds?

By Jane Simms

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With tens of millions of registered members and more than 12,000 items listed, eBay is, without a doubt, the world's largest Internet marketplace. And you can buy just about anything there—from CDs, movies and vitamins to first edition books, new businesses and even someone's last breath of air. But—what you want to know—is it the place to shop for fitness equipment?

The answer is yes, but that's if you don't mind sifting and, in most cases, bidding.

On a given day in June 2003, there were 1,026,771 items listed under the "Sports" category; and there were 344,705 items in the "Sporting Goods" subcategory, which is broken down into more than three-dozen subcategories. Under "Exercise & Fitness," a "Sporting Goods" subcategory, there were 7,146 items. And that subcategory is divided up into six subcategories. Hope you're not too confused.

On that given June day, I took a look at several fitness products sold on eBay. I wanted to find out how low prices on new (never been used) popular or quality products go on this mega auction site. The good news: They can go pretty low.

One product I examined was Total Trainer, and there are several models listed on eBay. I zeroed in on the 3000 model, which is supposed to be comparable to the Brinkley- and Norris- endorsed Total Gym 3000. On eBay, Total Trainer is offered in two pricing formats: Name your own or Buy It Now (skip the auction process) for \$277. Off eBay, Total Gym retails for, on average, \$500.

I also compared a few other infomercial-marketed products. One, a knock-off of the Fast Abs bodybuilding belt, an electronic muscle stimulation device, runs for about \$10 to \$15 on eBay (with free shipping). Off eBay, the real product will cost you around \$30, plus shipping/handling. Another, Smart ABS, is priced at \$50 on eBay; off, it ranges between \$70 and \$80. A third product is a Fitness Quest glider similar to the Tony Little Gazelle Freestyle Elite. Buy it on eBay and you'll pay roughly \$220, almost half of what you would spend at Little's official site.

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The last product I checked out was Jolie Weights, one-pound attachable fitness shoe weights introduced this spring by Jolie World. At JolieWeights.com, these weights cost \$19.99. An independent eBay seller was auctioning them for \$14.99. That's a 25 percent savings. Plus, shipping/handling charges are exactly the same.

The bottom line is: You will find some good deals on eBay. But there are a good number of duds there too. The best advice? Do your research before buying. Compare prices; read the fine print; ask the seller whether it's a discontinued or irregular product; and be vigilant of bloated shipping/handling charges (a common practice among eBay sellers). A final tip: before buying anything, read the seller's reviews, where buyers post their positive or negative shopping experiences. If the eBay seller has too many negatives, then you may want to pass on the deal. If the seller seems legitimate, and you've confirmed it's a steal, jump on it. The price—the product— may be gone tomorrow.

Jane Simms is a Florida-based health and fitness freelance writer. E-mail Jane at:

Beware Knock Offs - How Not To Get Ripped Off

By "Bridget P. Allen"

Designer duds are expensive, plain and simple. If you are in the market for superb items straight off the runway but do not have the budget for buying items straight from the store, there are alternatives. However, you should be warned that buying designer items from anyone else that the original manufacturer leaves you open to possibly purchasing fake goods. Designer knock offs are sold on the street, in stores, and most popularly, on the World Wide Web. Protect yourself from spending hard earned money on items that have been poorly made from sub par materials. Just because the item in question possesses a brand name that is no guarantee you are dealing with the real McCoy!

Most of those items that are claimed to be designer goods sold on the street are just plain fakes. Use a bit of common sense when buying any type of goods from any type of seller. If you buy a fifteen dollar Louis Vuitton signature purse, there is a strong chance that item is indeed a fake. Remember the old adage, "if it is too good to be true, then it probably is." This cannot be truer than individuals looking super deals on authentic designer duds.

Regardless where you choose to purchase your cut rate designer goods, be sure the seller is reputable. If you are purchasing items from virtual stores on the World Wide Web, look to see if there are any complaints lodged against that specific company. Also, if you choose to purchase designer items from online auction sites like Ebay or Yahoo! Auctions, carefully evaluate the seller by searching the feedback responses. As always, go with your gut instinct—if you think something is a fake, and then avoid buying the item. No matter how great you are at sniffing out a deal, there is not way that bag you are buying for fifty dollars is a genuine Hermes Birkin bag.

The best way to avoid buying faked designer goods is by feeling the items. If the materials seem cheap, rough, unevenly dyed or woven, or poorly made, the item is probably a fake. Furthermore, take a close look at the craftsmanship. Check the seams, buttons, zippers, and any other items that can

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give an item away as a fake. With bags and shoes, look at the quality of the leather. Furthermore, the lining of a bag can tell you more about the quality of that particular purse than anything else, so be sure to take a peek inside.

Bridget Allen has worked for many years in the fashion industry, at a senior level, and she has written an amazing totally free fashionista minicourse that will thrill, entertain, and most importantly educate you about what you absolutely need to know about fashion. Get the free course " Fashionista Essentials" now at

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