

Used Car Inspection Checklist

A checklist for inspecting a used car before you buy it.

Documents and history

- ☐ Confirm the VIN on the dash, door and engine bay all match each other.
- ☐ Check the VIN matches the title and registration documents.
- ☐ Run a vehicle history report for accidents, title and odometer data.
A salvage, rebuilt or flood title can drastically reduce value and safety.
- ☐ Verify the title is clean and clear of outstanding finance or liens.
- ☐ Review service records for consistent, on-schedule maintenance.
- ☐ Confirm the seller's name matches the title and ID.

Exterior and body

- ☐ Inspect every panel in daylight for dents, rust and repaint.
- ☐ Check panel gaps and alignment for signs of accident repair.
Uneven gaps or mismatched paint can indicate prior collision damage.
- ☐ Look for overspray, mismatched bolts or fresh underseal on the frame.
- ☐ Examine the windshield and glass for cracks and chips.
- ☐ Check tires for even wear and matching brands and dates.
- ☐ Inspect under the car for rust, leaks or frame damage.

Interior and electronics

- ☐ Check seats, carpets and trim for wear consistent with the mileage.
- ☐ Smell for damp, mold or strong air fresheners masking flood damage.
- ☐ Test all windows, locks, mirrors and the sunroof.
- ☐ Verify the air conditioning, heater and infotainment work.
- ☐ Confirm all warning lights illuminate then clear at start-up.
- ☐ Check the odometer reading against pedal, seat and tire wear.

Engine and under the hood

- ☐ Inspect the cold engine for leaks, corrosion and frayed belts.
- ☐ Check oil on the dipstick for level, color and a milky film.
A milky film can signal a head gasket or coolant problem — investigate further.
- ☐ Check coolant, brake and transmission fluids for level and condition.
- ☐ Look for fresh sealant or repairs hiding a leak.
- ☐ Watch the exhaust at start-up for blue, white or black smoke.
- ☐ Listen for knocking, ticking or rough idle once running.

Test drive

- ☐ Start cold and note any hesitation, smoke or warning lights.
- ☐ Test acceleration, smooth shifting and the clutch or transmission.
- ☐ Brake firmly to check for pulling, vibration or noise.
- ☐ Drive at highway speed to feel for vibration or wandering.
- ☐ Test steering for play, pulling and a centered wheel.
- ☐ Listen for clunks over bumps and on turns at low speed.

Final checks before buying

- ☐ Arrange a professional pre-purchase inspection by an independent mechanic.
An independent inspection is the single best protection against a costly used car.
- ☐ Get any agreed repairs or terms in writing before paying.
- ☐ Confirm all keys, the owner's manual and accessories are included.
- ☐ Verify the registration is current and transferable.
- ☐ Use your findings to negotiate the price down.
- ☐ Complete a written bill of sale and proper title transfer.