

Used Car Checklist

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1 Engine

- oil level and cleanliness - oil should be clear honey-colored or brownish; definitely not black, unless it's a diesel
- coolant fluid level and condition of radiator
- brake and clutch fluid levels and clarity, leaks?
- power steering fluid level, leaks?
- condition of belts, cracked? dry? squeaky? loose?
- battery condition, corrosion? janky wiring?
- wiring, proper routing/tied down, bundled/taped well?
- overall cleanliness and tidyness, any janky mods?
- random oils, fluids, leaks - everything should be dry/clean within reason
- starts well
- idles smoothly
- *no engine or other warning lights illuminated on dash when car running*

2 Transmission/clutch

- clutch operates smoothly w/out odd noises, rattles, screeches
- bite point of clutch well down in its range and no slipping/hesitation when released
- no hesitation/binding when shifting
- no odd gear noises, check all gears
- no grinding when shifting
- remember to check reverse
- make sure reverse lights illuminate in reverse

3 Axles

- no oil leaks around axle hubs
- no obvious oil leak at transmission/transaxle/differential(s)
- front CV joints: intact rubber boots at both ends (transaxle and wheel) and no excessive greasy/oily look around boots
- no weird clacking/clicking noises when moving and making a slow, sharp turn

4 Brakes

- discs should look clean not full of deep grooves, both sides of each

- should be at least 4mm on brake pads
- no evidence that things are loose or rattling around
- no leaks evident in brake hoses/fittings
- drums should not be overly rusted, can't really inspect shoes etc. in drums...
- test brake operation at moderate speed: decent bite point, smooth operation, doesn't pull to one side or the other, feels like front and back brakes are working
- test parking brake: pull/set it comfortably, make sure car doesn't roll, get out and try to push it, or do test on a hill
- make sure brake lights illuminate when brakes applied

5 Frame and general underbody

- minimal evidence of rust
- things look tidy, where they should be, factory mounts and brackets intact
- exhaust routed correctly, catalytic converter present, no leaks or messy fixes/homebrew welds
- nothing looks burnt or like it's getting too hot

6 Body

- check for rust everywhere
 - bottom of doors
 - bottom of side/sills
 - round back door
 - bumpers if metal
 - fender areas, inside and out
 - hood and engine bay
- paint in generally good condition, check roof
- any dents etc. - if so, decent repairs?
- rubber door+ seals all present and intact and appearing to do reasonable job
- doors - aligned correctly, hinges work smoothly
- door latches
 - doors close firmly and stay in place
 - door latch mechanisms, handles etc. function correctly
 - door locks function properly and actually lock/unlock doors
- windows intact with weatherproof seals
- windscreen wipers function properly and window washers work (don't worry about bad wiper blades)
- opening window mechanisms work correctly and windows close with good seal
- bumpers OK, no evidence of accident, or accidents explained
- test all running lights
 - headlights high and low
 - tail lights
 - brake lights
 - reverse lights
 - safety lights in back if they have, above window, illuminates when headlights on
 - all blinkers
 - running lights
 - flashers
- sideview mirrors function as intended, if electric, check that they work

7 Interior

- no evidence that water leaks into car anywhere
- carpets/floor OK, no funkiness under/around carpets
- upholstery OK
- seat cushions OK
- no funky smells
- seat belts all work
- dash gear all present and functioning
 - driver controls
 - sound system
 - ventilation fan, AC, heating, defrosting
 - rear window defrost works
- overall condition of plastic, cracked? disintegrating?
- any janky mods, weirdness?
- rearview mirror present and functional

8 Accident history

- do a carfax check

9 Driving

- generally smooth and all controls operate as intended and without noises, rattles, shakes, hesitation, slipping, binding, etc.
- suspension feels OK, generally sits flat and doesn't lean one way or the other
- if you bounce a 1/4 (push down and release), does suspension bounce or go back to normal smoothly?
- how is it over bumps and around corners?
- *does steering feel tight, aligned, and controlled*
 - no wandering
 - no looseness
 - no jumping around
 - no pulling one way or the other - *both cruising and braking*
- is acceleration OK - smooth, reasonably responsive
- is braking OK - smooth, straight, controlled, easy to modulate
- any excessive rattles or creaks?