

Used Car Inspection Checklist

Checklist · 25 items · 7 sections

Buying a used car without a thorough inspection can lead to expensive surprises. This used car inspection checklist covers every critical area: exterior condition, interior, under the hood, test drive performance, and vehicle history: so you buy with confidence.

Open the editable, AI-powered version online:

<https://genechecklist.com/checklist/used-car-inspection-checklist>

BEFORE INSPECTING

- Run a Carfax or AutoCheck vehicle history report using the VIN

HIGH

Check for accidents, salvage title, odometer rollback, and number of owners

- Verify VIN on dashboard matches VIN on title and door jamb sticker

HIGH

EXTERIOR

- Check for rust: look under car, wheel arches, door sills, and frame

HIGH

- Check all body panels for mismatched paint (sign of previous repair)

HIGH

- Look for uneven panel gaps: doors, hood, trunk (indicates accident repair)

HIGH

- Inspect windshield and all windows for cracks or chips

HIGH

- Check all lights: headlights, tail lights, brake, turn signals, reverse

HIGH

TIRES & WHEELS

- Check tire tread depth and wear pattern: uneven wear indicates alignment issues

HIGH

- Inspect all 4 tires for matching brand and age (check date code on sidewall)

- Check wheels for bends, cracks, or curb damage

ENGINE & FLUIDS

- Check engine oil: dark sludge or milky color indicates serious problems
HIGH
- Check coolant level and color: should be clean, not rusty or oily
HIGH
- Check brake fluid color: dark fluid means it's overdue for a change
- Inspect engine bay for oil leaks, coolant leaks, or frayed belts
HIGH
- Check transmission fluid: should be pink/red, not brown or burnt-smelling
HIGH
- Look for white smoke from exhaust on startup (head gasket issue)
HIGH

INTERIOR

- Test air conditioning and heating
HIGH
- Test all power windows, mirrors, and door locks
HIGH
- Check dashboard for any warning lights when engine is running
HIGH
- Inspect seats, carpet, and headliner for damage, stains, or mold smell
- Test radio, speakers, Bluetooth, and infotainment screen

TEST DRIVE

- Accelerate, brake hard, and turn sharply: listen for unusual noises
HIGH
- Drive on highway: check for vibration, pulling, or rough ride
HIGH
- Test brakes: should stop straight and not pull to one side
HIGH

PROFESSIONAL INSPECTION

- Get an independent pre-purchase inspection by a trusted mechanic
HIGH

A mechanic inspection (\$100–\$150) is the best money you can spend before buying