

USED CAR INSPECTION CHECKLIST



by stillrunningstrong.com

Don't forget to take with you: pen, tissues, flashlight, paint thickness gauge

QUESTIONS TO ASK THE SELLER

- Are there any problems with the car?
- Was the car involved in any accidents?
- Were any of the body panels resprayed?
- Does the engine burn any oil?
- Are there any oil leaks?
- How old are the tyres?
- When was the last service visit?
- How complete is the service history?
- When is the next service due?
- Does the car currently need any maintenance work?
- When is the next vehicle inspection due?

CAR BODY INSPECTION

Scratches (rule of thumb: paint scratches will catch your nail)	
Dents (has the paint cracked or chipped off?)	
Corrosion (key areas: wheel arches, side sills, under the doors)	
Headlights (yellowed or cracked? any moisture inside?)	
Are all the windows original? (find the manufacturing dates)	
Chips or cracks in the windshield (take your time – they aren't easy to spot)	
Do all doors move & close freely? (inspect the area around stiff car doors more closely)	
Color mismatch between panels (a slight mismatch between bumpers & panels is OK)	
Panel gaps (uneven or asymmetrical)	
Chipped paint on body panel bolts (bolts holding the front wings, bonnet & boot lid)	
Paint runs and sags (check areas where panel gaps & bolts look suspicious)	
Overspray (check suspect areas)	
Paint blisters & Orange peel (check suspect areas)	
If you suspect collision damage : check the frame, headlight tabs, radiator & spare tyre well for damage	
Use paint thickness gauge (optional but highly recommended)	

ENGINE BAY

Has the engine been washed? (proceed with caution if it has and ask why)	
Oil / coolant / brake fluid leaks (look for leaks in the engine bay, use flashlight)	
Engine oil (check the level and colour)	
Engine oil cap (any milky residue?)	
Coolant (check the level and colour, any traces of oil?)	
Brake fluid (check the level and colour)	

UNDER THE CAR

Has the oil pan been washed? (dry and dusty is good, washed is not)	
Engine oil leaks (key areas: oil pan & bell housing)	
Transmission oil leaks (also check the rear differential in RWD & AWD cars)	
Condition of the CV joint boots (look for cracked CV boots – they leak grease)	
Condition of the shock absorbers (any leaking shock absorbers or broken springs?)	
Corrosion (key areas: side sills, floorpan & exhaust system)	

START THE ENGINE (COLD START)

Timing chain or VVT rattle (stand near the engine, ask the seller to start the car)	
Exhaust smoke (look for smoke immediately after checking for noises)	
Engine smoothness & sound (back to the engine: any ticking noises? rough idle?)	

Leave the engine running

TYRES AND BRAKES

Is the car sitting level? (compare the gaps between tyres & wheel arches)	
Condition of the alloy wheels (look for kerb damage and paint flaking off)	
Tyre make (tyres on the same axle must be the same)	
Tyre tread (check the tread depth and look for uneven wear)	
Tyre sidewall damage (do quick visual check for cracks and bulges)	

Tyre manufacturing dates (read the DOT codes)	
Condition of the brake discs (visually check through the wheel spokes)	

INTERIOR INSPECTION

Driver seat and other seats (look for wear, stains & ripped stitches?)	
Moisture under the floor mats (check all footwells, look for water marks)	
Moisture in the boot (check the spare wheel compartment, spare tyre OK?)	
Wear on the pedals	
Steering wheel wear	
Any damaged or missing pieces of trim?	

CHECK THE CAR EQUIPMENT

Electric windows	
Power steering (full lock in both directions, should be smooth & quiet)	
Stereo (sound quality, radio reception, CD player)	
Heater and fan	
Air conditioning (A/C can be expensive to fix, so make sure it works)	
Windshield wipers and washers	
Rear window defogger (look for engine RPM drop when turned on)	
Lights (ask the seller to help you)	
Power seats and mirrors	

Don't forget to check the car-specific features

FINAL CHECKS BEFORE THE TEST DRIVE

Ask the seller to drive away quickly (do this after 5 min of idling - look for exhaust smoke)	
Warning lights (MIL, ABS, airbags)	
Rattling noise when turning the engine off (a sign of a failing dual-mass flywheel - check twice)	

Rattling noise when operating the clutch (DMF or release bearing – press the clutch a few times)	
Vibrations in the cabin with the engine on (a sign of dual-mass flywheel or motor mount failure)	

TEST DRIVE – URBAN

Ask a friend to drive behind you for the first few minutes of the test drive and look for **exhaust smoke** (optional).

Parking brake (check at 5-10 mph or on an incline)	
CV joints (drive in a circle and listen for a clicking noise)	
Car suspension – go over bumps (look for knocking noises, squeals or a bouncy ride)	
Condition of the wheel bearings (listen for a growling noise that changes when turning)	
Engine sound (listen for knocking, rattling & loud exhaust)	
ABS and brakes – check at 30-40 mph (the ABS should engage, car must not pull to the side)	

MANUAL TRANSMISSION – Look for problems:

Clutch pedal vibrates or is hard to press	
Clutch bite point is inconsistent	
Clutch slips during acceleration	
Clunking/crunching when changing gears	
Jerky gear changes	
Selecting gears requires force	
Juddering when taking off from standstill	
Vibrations when accelerating at low RPM	

AUTOMATIC TRANSMISSION – Look for problems:

Harsh engagement: "Drive" & "Reverse"	
Harsh gear changes while driving	
Delayed gear changes (RPM too high)	
Transmission slip when changing gears	
Missing gears	
Transmission dropping out of gear	

AUTOMATIC TRANSMISSION – Check kickdown & torque converter lock-up

Kickdown (forced downshift) (put the pedal to the metal)	
Torque converter lock-up (drive at 50+ mph, then start pressing on the gas)	

TEST DRIVE – HIGH SPEED (70 mph)

Acceleration (is it fast enough?, any misfires or hesitation?)	
Manual transmission: look for clutch slip (heavy acceleration in 3 rd or 4 th gear)	
Any play in the steering wheel? (also check that the steering wheel is not off-centre)	
Vibration on the steering wheel? (particularly at 60-70 mph or when braking)	
Car pulling to the side? (check when cruising and braking)	
Engine coolant temperature (operating temperature reached and no overheating)	
Gearbox or differential noise (listen for a whining or howling noise)	
Cruise control (check that it works)	

AFTER THE TEST DRIVE

Check that the brakes are not dragging (the car should roll when pushed)	
Automatic transmission fluid (check the level, colour & smell)	
Radiator hose squeeze test (the radiator hose should be hard but not rock-hard)	

PAPERWORK

Service history (check the service book & receipts – it's important)	
Registration documents (the VIN on the vehicle must match the paperwork)	
Insurance & vehicle inspection certificate (where applicable - check the law in Your country/state)	

Before finalizing the deal, check if the car comes with:

- toolkit & spare tyre
- spare key
- car owner's manual
- radio code
- winter wheels or tyres

This checklist is available for download at:

<https://stillrunningstrong.com/buying-a-used-car/checklist/>

CAR FLUID COLOUR GUIDE



ENGINE OIL (petrol engines)



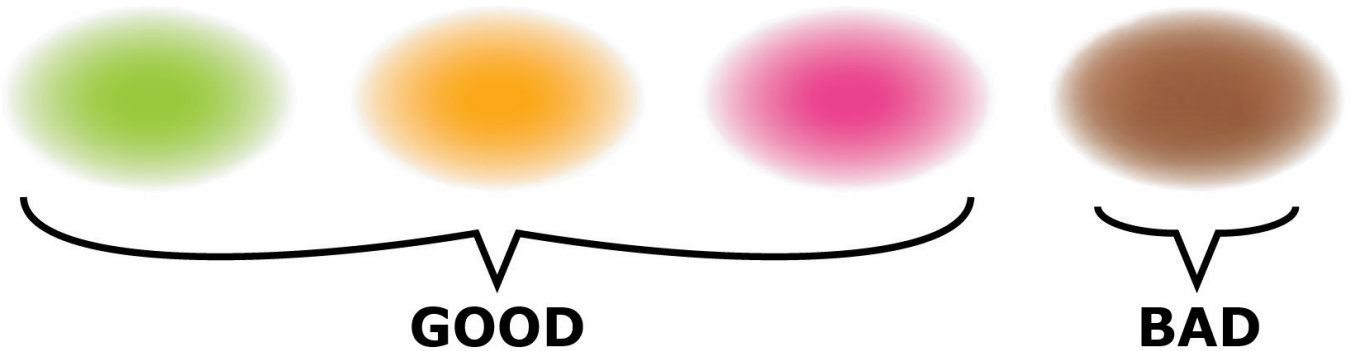
ATF



Coolant in transmission (milky pink):



COOLANT



BRAKE FLUID

