

Used Car Inspection Checklist

Mechanic's parking-lot walkaround - use this before you hand over money, sign papers, or fall in love with a polished problem.

Vehicle: _____	VIN: _____
Mileage: _____	Seller / dealer: _____
Price: _____	Engine cold when you arrived? <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No

1) Before You Go

<input type="checkbox"/> Ask seller not to warm up or move the car before you arrive.	<input type="checkbox"/> Confirm VIN, title status, asking price, and seller name.
<input type="checkbox"/> Ask for service records and receipts, not just "well maintained."	<input type="checkbox"/> Run recall check by VIN and note any open recalls.

2) Cold Walkaround: Body, Tires, Story

<input type="checkbox"/> Car sits level; no corner sagging or weird stance.	<input type="checkbox"/> All tires same size; note mismatched brands or cheap replacements.
<input type="checkbox"/> Check tread, DOT date, sidewall cracks, and inner-edge wear.	<input type="checkbox"/> Look for uneven gaps, paint shade changes, overspray, tool-marked bolts.
<input type="checkbox"/> Open doors, hood, trunk, fuel door; everything should close consistently.	<input type="checkbox"/> Check rust at doors, wheel wells, trunk floor, pinch welds, and underbody edges.
Notes: _____	Repair/walk-away? _____

3) Interior: Wear vs. Mileage

<input type="checkbox"/> Seat bolster, pedals, steering wheel, shifter, buttons match the odometer.	<input type="checkbox"/> Smell for mold, wet carpet, smoke, coolant, fuel, burnt oil, or heavy air freshener.
<input type="checkbox"/> Check windows, locks, mirrors, seats, infotainment, speakers, key fobs.	<input type="checkbox"/> Key ON before start: check-engine, ABS, airbag lights should illuminate for bulb check.
Notes: _____	Repair/walk-away? _____

4) Under Hood Cold

<input type="checkbox"/> Oil level and condition on dipstick; no glitter, fuel smell, or sludge.	<input type="checkbox"/> Oil cap: no creamy "milkshake" sludge or water droplets.
<input type="checkbox"/> Coolant level and color; no oily film, rust mud, crust trails, or empty reservoir.	<input type="checkbox"/> Battery terminals tight and clean; no scary wiring, loose grounds, or zip-tie repairs.
<input type="checkbox"/> Look for leaks, missing clips, cracked hoses, fresh steam-cleaning, and bad belt wear.	<input type="checkbox"/> Ask: does this look maintained, or just cleaned for sale?
Notes: _____	Repair/walk-away? _____

5) Cold Start + Running Check

<input type="checkbox"/> First 2 seconds: listen for chain rattle, knock, lifter tick, belt squeal, weak crank.	<input type="checkbox"/> Let it idle; do not rev it. Idle should settle cleanly.
<input type="checkbox"/> Watch for smoke, misfire, hunting idle, vacuum hiss, early fan panic, exhaust leaks.	<input type="checkbox"/> Automatic: shift P-D-R with brake held; big engine jump or clunk can mean bad mounts.
Notes: _____	Repair/walk-away? _____

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Finish the walk, drive it properly, then decide: buy, get a PPI, negotiate in writing, or walk.

6) Underneath

<input type="checkbox"/> Oil, transmission, coolant, brake-fluid, or power-steering leaks.	<input type="checkbox"/> Frame/floor rust: surface rust is one thing; flakes, holes, fresh welds are another.
<input type="checkbox"/> Crushed jack points, bent pinch welds, torn axle boots, wet shocks, bad bushings.	<input type="checkbox"/> Loose exhaust, fresh black spray hiding rust, missing shields, scraped underbody parts.
Notes: _____	Repair/walk-away? _____

7) Test Drive

<input type="checkbox"/> Radio OFF. First shift, first brake, first turn, first bump leaving the lot.	<input type="checkbox"/> Steering pull, brake pulsation, clunks, wheel-bearing hum, vibration under load.
<input type="checkbox"/> Transmission delay, flare, slip, hard shift, or shudder.	<input type="checkbox"/> Drive slow/fast, both turns, light brake, safe hard brake, steady cruise.
<input type="checkbox"/> Check AC hard and heat too, even in Florida.	<input type="checkbox"/> After drive: idle again, smell again, look underneath for hot leaks.
Notes: _____	Repair/walk-away? _____

8) Lights + Electronics

<input type="checkbox"/> Low beams, high beams, DRLs, turn signals, brake lights, reverse lights.	<input type="checkbox"/> Fog lights, plate lights, mirror signals, interior lights, and dash lights.
<input type="checkbox"/> Look for flicker, moisture, dim side, mismatched color, or yellowing LED strip.	<input type="checkbox"/> Newer sealed LED/DRL assemblies can be four-figure repairs. Get it fixed in writing.
Notes: _____	Repair/walk-away? _____

9) OBD2 Scanner

<input type="checkbox"/> Scan stored codes and pending codes; no check-engine light does not mean no problem.	<input type="checkbox"/> Check monitor readiness. "Not ready" can mean codes were recently cleared.
<input type="checkbox"/> Confirm warning lights illuminate key-on, then go out after start if systems are OK.	<input type="checkbox"/> Do not buy the happy seller story if the computer story does not match.
Notes: _____	Repair/walk-away? _____

10) Paperwork + PPI

<input type="checkbox"/> VIN on car, title, history report, service records, odometer records all match.	<input type="checkbox"/> Check NHTSA recalls by VIN; note open recalls before buying.
<input type="checkbox"/> History report helps, but it does not replace your eyes or a mechanic inspection.	<input type="checkbox"/> Seller allows independent pre-purchase inspection (PPI). If no, that is the answer.
<input type="checkbox"/> Repair promises are written, signed, and attached to the deal. Verbal does not count.	<input type="checkbox"/> Use inspection findings for price off, written repair, or walk-away decision.
Notes: _____	Repair/walk-away? _____

Final Decision

<input type="checkbox"/> BUY / GO FORWARD: Story matches, no major red flags, PPI allowed.	<input type="checkbox"/> GET A PPI FIRST: Good car, but needs lift inspection or repair estimate.
<input type="checkbox"/> NEGOTIATE IN WRITING: Tires, lights, battery, key, brakes, small leaks, or repairs.	<input type="checkbox"/> WALK AWAY: Frame/flood/title issues, bad rust, overheating, slip, smoke, seller blocks inspection.
Offer / condition: _____	Written promise signed? <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No

Download more honest buying advice at [SpotForCars.com/buying-advice/](https://spotforcars.com/buying-advice/). Keep this on your phone, but do not let a checklist replace common sense. If the car feels wrong, it probably is.