

THE USED CAR TEST DRIVE CHECKLIST

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The rule: parked and moving are two different inspections. Inspect, drive, then inspect again.

1 — BEFORE YOU TURN THE KEY

- Hood is COLD to the touch (warm = someone ran it before you arrived)
- Key ON, engine off: EVERY warning light illuminates, then goes out after start
- Scan for stored codes — or check whether codes were just cleared
- Your route planned: rough pavement, stop-and-go, parking lot, highway on-ramp
- License in pocket; insurance question settled (ask first with a private seller)

2 — COLD START & FIRST FIVE MINUTES

- Listen from outside, hood open: rattles, knocks, squeals in the first seconds
- Idle settles smoothly — no hunting, no stumbling
- Shift pause test: P > R > N > D, each engages within about a second, no clunk
- First gentle brake: pedal firm and high, not soft or sinking

3 — CITY SPEEDS (WINDOWS DOWN, RADIO OFF)

- Firm stop from ~40 mph: stops straight, no pull, no pulsing through the pedal
- Rough patches: no clunks from the suspension
- Steering returns to center on its own after turns
- Slow full-lock circles BOTH directions: no clicking (CV), no groan or pop
- Note any noise and whether its pitch changes with speed

4 — HIGHWAY

- Hard on-ramp acceleration: no hesitation, no slipping shifts, no warning lights
- Relaxed grip at cruise: car tracks straight
- No vibration through the seat or the steering wheel at steady speed
- Noise check: rises with ROAD SPEED (coast in neutral - stays) or with RPM (drops)?
- Second pass windows CLOSED, audio off: judge the cabin noise itself

5 — AFTER THE DRIVE (THE RETURN LAP)

- Hot idle, 60-second listen from outside
- Smell check: sweet = coolant / sharp burnt = clutch or brakes / hot oil
- Fresh drips: green-pink = coolant, amber-brown = oil, RED = transmission
- GET BACK UNDERNEATH — find the source of anything that made noise
- Read the screws: factory fasteners match; missing or mixed = someone was in there
- EV or hybrid: no gouges, dents, or scrapes anywhere near the battery pack floor

THE CALL:

Priceable wear (rotors, links) = NEGOTIATE | Could-be-anything (vibration, drips) = PPI FIRST
Transmission clunk, dead dash bulb, soft pedal + burnt smell = WALK AWAY