



Used Car Test Drive Checklist

Before you drive

- Get the Vehicle Identification Number (VIN) so you can check the vehicle history report at www.dmv.org or with another vehicle history report provider.
- Check the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration's website at www.nhtsa.gov for any recall information. If there have been any recalls, ask the seller for proof the vehicle has been taken to a dealer or the manufacturer for any necessary changes.
- Map out a test drive route ahead of time that includes busy streets, freeways, hills, and a relatively empty parking lot.
- If you have a friend or relative who is experienced with cars, bring that person along for the test drive.
- If you are unfamiliar with how to do it, now is a great time to learn how to check engine oil, transmission fluid and engine coolant.

What to take with you

- Ruler
- Tire air pressure gauge
- MP3 player or favorite CD
- Safety seats for children, if you use them
- Friend or relative to help you go through the checklist

Engine

- Check the engine oil, transmission fluid and coolant levels when the engine is cool. Each should be within the appropriate levels and should be clean in appearance.
- Examine hoses and belts for signs of excessive wear.
- With the engine running, listen for any knocking, ticking or tapping.
- Smell the engine while it is running and pay attention to any burning smells.
- Ask to see a maintenance/service history, if the owner kept one. If there is none, factor this into your decision and use it in the price negotiation process.

Exterior

- Confirm the VIN. In more recent models it's usually visible at the bottom of the front window on the driver's side.
- Check the car's body for potential signs of undisclosed accidents, like unevenness in the paint or ripples or dents in the exterior.
- Check the ground beneath the car before and after the engine has been running to see if there are any fluid leaks.
- Take out your ruler and place it inside one of the grooves of the tire's tread. The tires should have at least ¼ inch of tread.
- Check the tires for signs of excessive or uneven wear, cracks or splitting.
- Make sure the tires have no objects lodged in them, like nails or screws.
- When you check for rust, pay special attention to the underside of the car, the wheel wells, the edges of doors and windows, and the trunk.
- Open and close all doors and listen for unusual sounds that could indicate damage to the doors or the frame of the car.

Interior

- Is it comfortable to sit in?
- Do the seat and steering wheel adjust?
- Are there any rips or stains on the seats?
- How does it smell?
- Play your CD or MP3 player to test the speakers.
- Do the heating and air conditioning work?
- Test the horn, turn signals, windshield wipers, door locks and dome lights.
- If you have a child who uses a safety seat, check to make sure your safety seat will work with the vehicle.
- Turn the key to the accessory position – the one right before the engine is engaged – and make sure all the dash warning lights illuminate.

