

Used Car Test Drive Checklist

Exterior

- _____ Look for unmatched paint or poor body fit (may indicate collision damage).
- _____ Check for body filler (use a refrigerator magnet on suspicious spots, unless body panel is not made of metal to begin with).
- _____ Look for rust all around, especially at wheel wells, under doors, in trunk.
- _____ Musty smell or dampness in trunk may indicate collision damage.
- _____ If car appears newly painted, why?

Tires

- _____ Wear should be even on each tire and among the set.
- _____ Tires must be same size.
- _____ Wear should be consistent with odometer mileage.
- _____ Insist on a spare, jack, and lug wrench.

Suspension

- _____ Push down and release each corner of car. If it bounces more than once, car may need struts or shocks.
- _____ Push and pull on each wheel from beside the car. If wheel moves in or out, bearings or CV joints may be in bad condition.
- _____ Remember that uneven tire wear may indicate suspension problems. If car has new tires, be extra careful in checking suspension.
- _____ Check for "dog-tracking" by having a friend follow you while driving the car. If rear end of car seems to be sliding to the side, car may have serious frame damage from a collision.
- _____ If front-wheel drive, check CV joint boots on either end of front axles (should be a total of four). If torn or missing, expect to have trouble with expensive joints!

Interior

- _____ Wear of seats, steering wheel, etc. should be consistent with odometer mileage.
- _____ Pay special attention to amount of wear on pedals.
- _____ Musty smell or new carpet may indicate flood damage.
- _____ Make sure windows, safety belts, etc. all work.
- _____ Check glove box contents. You should have an owner's manual. Look for repair orders which may show the car's mileage. Make sure mileage makes sense with current odometer reading.

Under the Hood

- _____ Check for proper fluid levels.
- _____ Oil should not smell burnt or contain water.
- _____ Coolant (antifreeze) should be green, not rusty. (Note that Texaco now makes an coolant that is orange.)
- _____ Automatic transmission fluid should be red or pink and not smell burnt.
- _____ Look for leaks around radiator and hoses.
- _____ Spots on ground under the car may indicate leaks. To be sure, place a clean newspaper on ground under the car after driving it. Check in a few minutes for spots.

The Final Steps

- _____ Inspected by mechanic. If car passed your inspection, take it to an independent mechanic for a more complete inspection.
- _____ Test driven according to our Used Car Test Drive Checklist.