



DON'T BUY BLIND · FREE GUIDE

The Used-Car Buying Checklist

27 checks to spot flood cars, rolled-back odometers, hidden accident damage and seller scams before you pay.

HOW TO USE IT

- Print it, or open it on your phone at the viewing
- Tick each box as you go. Don't skip the test drive.
- Two or more red flags? Walk away. There's always another car.

Disclosure: this guide contains a paid (affiliate) link. If you buy a vehicle history report through it, I may earn a commission at no extra cost to you. This checklist is general guidance, not a substitute for a professional inspection.

1 Before you go

- ☐ Research common problems for this exact model & year
- ☐ Check fair market value for the trim and mileage
- ☐ Ask: any accidents? service records? why selling?
- ☐ Ask the seller **not** to start the car before you arrive

2 Paperwork & VIN

- ☐ VIN on dashboard = driver door sticker = title
- ☐ Title status: clean, salvage, rebuilt or flood?
- ☐ Seller's ID matches the name on the title
- ☐ Service records: oil changes, timing belt, transmission

3 Exterior

- ☐ Even panel gaps and matching paint, no overspray on trim
- ☐ Rust on frame rails, wheel arches, rocker panels
- ☐ Tire wear even on all four, matching brands
- ☐ No fluid drips under the car

4 Under the hood (engine cold)

- ☐ Oil not milky or gritty
- ☐ Coolant clean, no oil film
- ☐ Belts and hoses not cracked, no fresh leaks
- ☐ Cold start: no knocks, ticks or heavy smoke

Bring these to the viewing

Flashlight

Under the car, the engine bay and seat rails

OBD2 scanner

Reads stored error codes, even with no dash light

Paper towel

Wipe the dipstick to see the oil's colour

A friend

Watches the exhaust while you start the car

Small magnet

Won't stick well over thick body filler

This checklist

Printed or open on your phone



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5 Interior & electronics

- ☐ No musty smell, damp carpet or silt under seats
- ☐ Every window, lock, light, AC and heater works
- ☐ Warning lights come on at start-up, then go off
- ☐ Pedal, wheel and seat wear matches the mileage

6 Test drive (20+ minutes)

- ☐ Drive at city and highway speeds
- ☐ Smooth shifting, no slipping or delay
- ☐ Brakes straight and quiet, no pulsing
- ☐ No pulling, vibration or clunks over bumps

7 Before you pay

- ☐ Check for liens / money owing on the car
- ☐ Independent mechanic pre-purchase inspection
- ☐ Written bill of sale with VIN, price, date, signatures

Seller rushing you?

A good car will still be there tomorrow. Pressure to pay today is a red flag on its own.

Check the car's history by VIN

Accidents, title brands (salvage, flood, rebuilt), odometer records and theft checks, all before you hand over money.



[Check a VIN now \(paid link\)](#)

Tip: if checkout offers a \$1 trial, check whether it renews as a subscription, and cancel if you only need one report.

Walk away if...

The VINs don't match · the seller's name isn't on the title · no title in hand · no inspection allowed
· the price is far below market · the engine was already warm and they won't wait.



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