

# Used Car Buyer's Inspection Check List

## PART 1. MECHANICAL INSPECTION

(c) 1991 SOL (11/18/91)

### FIRST PHONE CONTACT:

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: (h) \_\_\_\_\_ (w) \_\_\_\_\_

Date/Time: \_\_\_\_\_

1. Can you describe the car and its condition?
2. Does it run well?
3. How is the:
  - Body?
  - Any Rust?
  - Paint?
  - Interior?
  - Tires?
  - Engine?
  - Brakes?
  - Shocks?
4. Does it have Overdrive or Turbo? Do they work?
5. What special features or options does it have?
6. Why are you selling it?
7. How long have you owned it? ...had it for sale?
8. Is it currently registered and licensed?
9. Where is the car located?
10. How many miles does it have on it? [15K/yr?]
11. What problems have you had with the car?
12. Has it ever been hit or in an accident?
13. What work does it need done on it now?
14. How much are you asking for it? or What's the least you're willing to take for it?

## QUESTIONS TO ASK YOURSELF:

Why am I buying this car?  
What do I intend to do with it?  
Will it be my commute vehicle?  
What service and support is locally available?  
Will I be driving it year-round or summer only?  
Do I want to work on the car more than driving it?  
Am I willing to pay a premium because someone else has already done most of the serious work on the car?  
What is the most that I'm willing to pay for this car?  
What is the least that I think that the car can be had for?

## SUGGESTIONS:

1. Read some of the "How to buy Used Cars" books available at your library. They provide useful strategies and cautions that go far beyond the scope of this list. Also, review this list carefully before using it.
2. Always inspect/take delivery of the vehicle in the broad daylight, never in the evening/night or in the rain.
3. A clean piece of cardboard placed under the engine/trans after the test-drive will help show fluid leaks.
4. In some states, older non-titled vehicles may be titled with just a bill of sale. Other states may require an additional security bond to be posted. Use extreme caution in either of these cases!
5. Require seller have the vehicle pass all state inspections (safety, emissions) at a mutually agreeable shop (NOT one of his choosing) before you pay for it. Old (> 30 days) inspections are of absolutely no use to you.
6. A general guide to reading exhaust smoke:  
  
Black smoke = unburned fuel. Valves bad or out of adjustment? Carb out of adjustment?  
  
Blue smoke = burning oil. Accelerating: Piston rings bad? Decelerating: Valve seats/guides bad?  
  
White smoke = burning coolant!  
Bad head gasket? Warped or cracked Head or Block?

## TOOLS TO BRING FOR INSPECTION:

Essentials: A cynical, mechanically-minded friend, Your standard tool Set, Voltmeter, Compression Gauge, Tire gauge, Flashlight, Magnet, the 2 different spark plug sockets, spray lube, clean rags Clipboard, pen and hi-liter to use with a photocopy of this list, some cash, drivers license and copy of your insurance showing you are covered driving the sellers car.

Optional: tow rope, starting fluid, jumper cables, timing light, ramps, jack (floor or scissors), mirror, coveralls, rags, gas can, oil, duct tape, wire, repair manuals, misc. fuses, calculator

## ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS TO ASK:

Original Owner? \_\_\_\_\_  
Names/nums of previous owners available? \_\_\_\_\_  
What regular maintenance was done? Records? \_\_\_\_\_  
Who was your mechanic? name/address/phone? \_\_\_\_\_  
What gas mileage have you been getting? \_\_\_\_\_  
Are there any repair or gas mileage records? \_\_\_\_\_  
Oil change interval? \_\_\_\_\_  
Type of oil used: \_\_\_\_\_  
How old are the tires? \_\_\_\_\_  
Battery? \_\_\_\_\_  
Has it passed emissions recently? \_\_\_\_\_  
Where? \_\_\_\_\_  
Has any bodywork ever been done? \_\_\_\_\_  
Why? \_\_\_\_\_  
Receipts? \_\_\_\_\_  
Any mechanical work recently? \_\_\_\_\_  
Where? \_\_\_\_\_  
Receipts? \_\_\_\_\_  
What work remains to be done or corrected? \_\_\_\_\_  
Are there any missing parts? \_\_\_\_\_  
Do you have any extra parts or wheels for it? \_\_\_\_\_  
What new/aftermarket parts are in the car? \_\_\_\_\_  
Receipts? \_\_\_\_\_  
Was it ever used for towing? \_\_\_\_\_  
Has it ever been crashed, burnt, stolen, hit or rolled? \_\_\_\_\_  
How was the car generally driven? \_\_\_\_\_  
On highway or in town? \_\_\_\_\_  
Are engine, transmission, steering, differential original? \_\_\_\_\_  
(If not, why not? Origin and receipts?) \_\_\_\_\_  
Do you have any books about the car or the engine? \_\_\_\_\_  
(repair books, owners manuals, history or general  
interest, parts catalogs, club newsletters)  
Any interesting history? \_\_\_\_\_  
Has it ever been raced? \_\_\_\_\_  
Are there any tools that come with the car? \_\_\_\_\_  
Do you know of any parts cars or good parts sources? \_\_\_\_\_

## **PART 2. EXT/INT INSPECTION.**

(Don't start the engine yet)

### **OWNERSHIP VERIFICATION: (Do all of the following agree and seem right?)**

Name on title:

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Name on registration:

---

Model/Year on title:

---

VIN on title: \_\_\_\_\_

VIN on registration:

---

VIN on dash:

---

VIN on door:

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Mileage on title:

---

Mileage on odometer:

---

Price on title:

---

Asking price:

---

Blue Book price:

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## IS THE CAR READY TO SELL:

OK Not-OK

- \_\_\_ \_\_\_ Title ready for transfer? Any liens?
- \_\_\_ \_\_\_ Do body numbers match those on title?
- \_\_\_ \_\_\_ Title in sellers name?
- \_\_\_ \_\_\_ Do body numbers match registration?
- \_\_\_ \_\_\_ Current Emissions certificate, < 30 days old?
- \_\_\_ \_\_\_ Current registration? Current Plates?
- \_\_\_ \_\_\_ Current Safety certificate if req'd, < 30 days?

## EXTERIOR WALK-AROUND:

OK Not-OK

- \_\_\_ \_\_\_ Check door edges and underside for rust/tears
- \_\_\_ \_\_\_ Check doors/hinges for stress/tears
- \_\_\_ \_\_\_ Doors/hoods open/close freely? Rubs?
- \_\_\_ \_\_\_ Is anything obviously broken?
- \_\_\_ \_\_\_ Are grill/lights cracked, dented or broken?
- \_\_\_ \_\_\_ Car sits level? (view from all sides)
- \_\_\_ \_\_\_ Are bumpers dinged? Rusty? Loose? Level?
- \_\_\_ \_\_\_ Paint OK? Panels same shade? Cracks?
- \_\_\_ \_\_\_ Any of the trim or hubcaps rusty or missing?
- \_\_\_ \_\_\_ New paint? Why? Any body ripples?
- \_\_\_ \_\_\_ Find bottom of trunk/side wells. Rust? Holes?
- \_\_\_ \_\_\_ Rust/repair on body? Fenders? Sills?
- \_\_\_ \_\_\_ Raise/lower the top. Condition? Does it leak?
- \_\_\_ \_\_\_ Any Bondo? Fiberglas? (magnet) Why?
- \_\_\_ \_\_\_ Rubber parts and seals condition? Cracked?
- \_\_\_ \_\_\_ Any fender dings or misalignment? Why?
- \_\_\_ \_\_\_ Gas tank & fill hose OK? Rusty? Patched?
- \_\_\_ \_\_\_ Door/hood dings? Misalignment? Why?
- \_\_\_ \_\_\_ Jack OK? Spare tire good? Jack points good?
- \_\_\_ \_\_\_ Tires: Tread? Bulges? Cracks?
- \_\_\_ \_\_\_ All the same model/brand?
- \_\_\_ \_\_\_ Rims: Bent? Rusted? Cracks? All the same?

## UNDERSIDE:

OK Not-OK

- \_\_\_ \_\_\_ Anything dented? Bent? Welded? Why?
- \_\_\_ \_\_\_ Any underbody/floor pan/trunk rust?
- \_\_\_ \_\_\_ Any rocker panel or wheel well rust?
- \_\_\_ \_\_\_ Are main frame members rusted? Dogs?
- \_\_\_ \_\_\_ Disks grooved? Brake pads? Any leaks?
- \_\_\_ \_\_\_ Turn, push/pull driveshaft by hand
- \_\_\_ \_\_\_ Any movement or slop? U-joints OK?
- \_\_\_ \_\_\_ Constant velocity joints and boots OK?
- \_\_\_ \_\_\_ Camber? Caster? Tire wear even?
- \_\_\_ \_\_\_ Suspension loose? Pull on side/top of wheels
- \_\_\_ \_\_\_ All shocks & struts damp OK? Any leaks?
- \_\_\_ \_\_\_ Exhaust pipe/cats/muffler solid & original?
- \_\_\_ \_\_\_ Tail pipe: Grey=OK, sooty/oily/greasy=Not-OK
- \_\_\_ \_\_\_ Anything hanging down, taped or wired up?
- \_\_\_ \_\_\_ Any non-stock suspension mods?

## UNDER HOOD:

OK Not-OK

- \_\_\_ \_\_\_ Anything broken? Patched? Leaking?
- \_\_\_ \_\_\_ Is engine clean? Any rust? Stock?
- \_\_\_ \_\_\_ Has it overheated? Paint blistered?
- \_\_\_ \_\_\_ Check fluid levels. Look for leaks
- \_\_\_ \_\_\_ Check fluid condition with flashlight
- \_\_\_ \_\_\_ Any play in main crankshaft pulley?!\$
- \_\_\_ \_\_\_ Any play in any of the other pulleys?
- \_\_\_ \_\_\_ V-Belts cracked? frayed? missing?
- \_\_\_ \_\_\_ Radiator corroded? Hoses cracked?
- \_\_\_ \_\_\_ Check coolant; run finger inside radiator neck to check for oil.
- \_\_\_ \_\_\_ Heater hoses stiff? Cracked? Patched?
- \_\_\_ \_\_\_ Vacuum hoses stiff? Patched? Capped? Missing?
- \_\_\_ \_\_\_ Is emissions equip original & working?!\$
- \_\_\_ \_\_\_ Are catalytic converters original & working? \$
- \_\_\_ \_\_\_ Distributor, cap, rotor, and points OK?
- \_\_\_ \_\_\_ Wiring harness appearance? Any new electrical tape?
- \_\_\_ \_\_\_ Open fuse box. Any missing? Any wiring hacks?
- \_\_\_ \_\_\_ Any non-stock engine modifications?
- \_\_\_ \_\_\_ Remove grounding cable, check for shorts
- \_\_\_ \_\_\_ System polarity: + or - ground?
- \_\_\_ \_\_\_ System voltage: \_\_\_\_\_ volts
- \_\_\_ \_\_\_ Battery age/voltage \_\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_\_ volts

## INTERIOR/ELECTRICAL:

OK Not-OK

- \_\_\_ \_\_\_ Is anything broken? Torn? Patched?
- \_\_\_ \_\_\_ Carpets OK? Underlayment condition?
- \_\_\_ \_\_\_ Rust, rot or water under the carpets?
- \_\_\_ \_\_\_ Any wiring hacks under the dash?
- \_\_\_ \_\_\_ Seats dirty or torn? Look under cover
- \_\_\_ \_\_\_ Do both seats adjust? Seat heaters?
- \_\_\_ \_\_\_ Dash cracked? Headliner torn/dirty?
- \_\_\_ \_\_\_ Windshield cracked? Chips? Scratched?
- \_\_\_ \_\_\_ Windows all open & close? Any cracks?
- \_\_\_ \_\_\_ Mirrors all present and adjustable?
- \_\_\_ \_\_\_ Steering play? Does shaft move at all? Why?
- \_\_\_ \_\_\_ Brake pedal feels right? Smooth? Firm?
- \_\_\_ \_\_\_ Clutch pedal feels right? Smooth?
- \_\_\_ \_\_\_ All gauges/controls work? Stereo? Tape?
- \_\_\_ \_\_\_ Headlights high/low work? Lenses OK?
- \_\_\_ \_\_\_ Tail and side lights all work? Lenses OK?
- \_\_\_ \_\_\_ Brake lights all work? Any broken lenses?
- \_\_\_ \_\_\_ Turn signals all work? Any broken lenses?
- \_\_\_ \_\_\_ Windshield wipers & washer work?
- \_\_\_ \_\_\_ Heater, defroster, AC, and fans work?
- \_\_\_ \_\_\_ Safety equipment (seat belts, horn work?)

## **PART 3: TEST DRIVE.**

### **IGNITION ON, BUT DON'T START ENGINE:**

OK Not-OK

- \_\_\_ \_\_\_ Temp light should come on! Connected?
- \_\_\_ \_\_\_ Oil warning light should come on! Connected?
- \_\_\_ \_\_\_ Charge warning light should come on!

### **START THE ENGINE YOURSELF:**

OK Not-OK

- \_\_\_ \_\_\_ Temp warning light goes out?
- \_\_\_ \_\_\_ Oil warning light goes out?
- \_\_\_ \_\_\_ Charge warning light goes out?
- \_\_\_ \_\_\_ Do all idiot lights go on/out right?
- \_\_\_ \_\_\_ Are all the instruments working?
- \_\_\_ \_\_\_ Does it start easily when cold?
- \_\_\_ \_\_\_ Does it run smoothly when cold?
- \_\_\_ \_\_\_ Depress clutch several times. Noises?
- \_\_\_ \_\_\_ Oil Pressure: idle \_\_\_\_\_ 4000 RPM \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_ \_\_\_ Volts/Amps: idle \_\_\_\_\_ 4000 RPM \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_ \_\_\_ Any odd engine noises when cold?
- \_\_\_ \_\_\_ Exhaust condition/noises? Pressure even?
- \_\_\_ \_\_\_ Cap pipe with clipboard. Any exhaust leaks?
- \_\_\_ \_\_\_ Any deposits on clipboard? Does it smoke?
- \_\_\_ \_\_\_ Turn car off. Does it restart? Restart again.
- \_\_\_ \_\_\_ Now pull forward. Check for leaks on ground.
- \_\_\_ \_\_\_ Do you have any gas? Does gauge really work?

### **TEST DRIVE (Allow 30-40 minutes)**

OK Not-OK

- \_\_\_ \_\_\_ Test the foot and hand brakes first!
- \_\_\_ \_\_\_ Relax, drive a bit to get used to it.
- \_\_\_ \_\_\_ How does car ride? Soft or hard?
- \_\_\_ \_\_\_ Revs smoothly to red line? flat spots?
- \_\_\_ \_\_\_ Any unusual engine noises/vibrations?
- \_\_\_ \_\_\_ Any drive train noises or vibrations?
- \_\_\_ \_\_\_ Any noticeable slop in drive train?
- \_\_\_ \_\_\_ Reverse works? Rev. lights go on/off?
- \_\_\_ \_\_\_ Trans shifts smoothly to all gears?
- \_\_\_ \_\_\_ Overdrive engages/disengages properly
- \_\_\_ \_\_\_ Turbo engages/disengages properly?
- \_\_\_ \_\_\_ Any clunks, whines, rumbles, rattles?
- \_\_\_ \_\_\_ Clutch smooth? Slippage on hill test?
- \_\_\_ \_\_\_ Hand brake works? Test against engine
- \_\_\_ \_\_\_ Is the low engine speed operation OK?
- \_\_\_ \_\_\_ Brakes strongly to stop from 50mph?
- \_\_\_ \_\_\_ Do brakes still work? Stops straight?
- \_\_\_ \_\_\_ Make 2 tight 360' turns each way. Any noises?
- \_\_\_ \_\_\_ Accelerates smoothly from dead stop?
- \_\_\_ \_\_\_ Are there any hesitations/flat spots?
- \_\_\_ \_\_\_ Does the power seem right? Hill test.

\_\_\_ \_\_\_ Is it running too hot or cold? Why?  
 \_\_\_ \_\_\_ Drive beside a long wall. Any unusual sounds?  
 \_\_\_ \_\_\_ Is it too noisy in general at highway speeds?  
 \_\_\_ \_\_\_ Any noises or vibrations when accelerating?  
 \_\_\_ \_\_\_ Any noises or vibrations when coasting?  
 \_\_\_ \_\_\_ Any noises or vibrations when decelerating?  
 \_\_\_ \_\_\_ Any noises or vibrations when braking?  
 \_\_\_ \_\_\_ Steering action loose or tight? Parallel park.  
 \_\_\_ \_\_\_ Handles OK on bumps, curves and sharp corners?  
 \_\_\_ \_\_\_ Slams OK? Bad understeer, oversteer, lean?  
 \_\_\_ \_\_\_ Tracks straight with hands off steering wheel?  
 \_\_\_ \_\_\_ Brakes straight with hands off steering wheel?  
 \_\_\_ \_\_\_ Brakes still work? Pulls? Pulse? Drag? Noises?  
 \_\_\_ \_\_\_ Having fun yet? Comfortable? Does it fit?  
 \_\_\_ \_\_\_ Do the heater, defroster and AC work right?  
 \_\_\_ \_\_\_ Are all the instruments & lights still working?  
 \_\_\_ \_\_\_ Now let it idle a while. Is temp stable/OK?  
 \_\_\_ \_\_\_ Any exhaust, gas or coolant odors? Pull forward.  
 \_\_\_ \_\_\_ Turn it off. Go back to check ground for leaks.

Have friend get out and watch the car driving:

OK Not-OK

\_\_\_ \_\_\_ Tracks straight? (Frame bent?)  
 \_\_\_ \_\_\_ Smokes?  
 \_\_\_ \_\_\_ Wheels wobble? Any noises?  
 \_\_\_ \_\_\_ Leans? General impression?

## POST DRIVE:

OK Not-OK

\_\_\_ \_\_\_ Open hood. See or hear anything unusual?  
 \_\_\_ \_\_\_ Does engine seem too hot?  
 \_\_\_ \_\_\_ Check for fluid leaks after shutdown.  
 (Oil, Coolant, Hydraulics, Trans, Fuel, Differential)  
 \_\_\_ \_\_\_ Check oil cap and dipstick for signs of water.  
 (Oil off-color, brown/grey/white or bubbly)  
 \_\_\_ \_\_\_ Compression test: (disconnect coil, remove ALL plugs)

1. Dry: 1 \_\_\_ 2 \_\_\_ 3 \_\_\_ 4 \_\_\_ 5 \_\_\_ 6 \_\_\_ 7 \_\_\_ 8 \_\_\_

2. Oiled: 1 \_\_\_ 2 \_\_\_ 3 \_\_\_ 4 \_\_\_ 5 \_\_\_ 6 \_\_\_ 7 \_\_\_ 8 \_\_\_

\_\_\_ \_\_\_ Plug condition? (OK? Burnt? Oily? Sooty?)  
 1 \_\_\_ 2 \_\_\_ 3 \_\_\_ 4 \_\_\_ 5 \_\_\_ 6 \_\_\_ 7 \_\_\_ 8 \_\_\_

\_\_\_ \_\_\_ Does it restart when warm? Why not?

# PART 4. BILL OF SALE

Year, make, and model: \_\_\_\_\_

VIN: \_\_\_\_\_

Odometer reading: \_\_\_\_\_

Date and time of sale: \_\_\_\_\_

Seller hereby acknowledges receipt of \$\_\_\_\_\_ in the form of \_\_\_\_\_ for full and final payment for the above vehicle, which is sold "AS IS."

I, the seller, certify that I or we are the current owner of this vehicle, and have the authority to sell it. I hereby transfer full ownership of this vehicle described on this receipt to the buyer(s). I certify that the Title or ownership of this vehicle at the time of sale is subject to no outstanding taxes, fees, liens or encumbrances, other than those specified on the Title or listed below, if any, and none other, and that if there are, the seller will be held fully responsible for their payment.

Buyer(s) hereby acknowledges receipt of the following: the signed certificate of ownership transferring seller's full ownership of the vehicle and all of it's contents to the buyer; various maintenance records; this signed bill of sale and the mileage disclosure statement; and all keys to the vehicle as well as delivery of the vehicle.

\_\_\_\_\_  
(seller's signature) (date) (buyer's signature) (date)

\_\_\_\_\_  
(seller - print name) (buyer - print name)

\_\_\_\_\_  
(seller's signature) (date) (buyer's signature) (date)

\_\_\_\_\_  
(seller - print name) (buyer - print name)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Address Address

\_\_\_\_\_  
City, State, Zip City, State, Zip

\_\_\_\_\_  
Phone Phone

## PART 5. ODOMETER (MILEAGE) STATEMENT

### (Two Pages)

(Federal regulations require you to state the odometer mileage upon transfer of ownership. An inaccurate or untruthful statement may make you liable for damages to your transferee, for attorney fees, and for civil or criminal penalties, pursuant to Sections 409, 412, and 413 of the Motor Vehicle Information and Cost Savings Act of 1972 (Pub. L. 92-513, as amended by Pub. L. 94-364) and applicable state laws.)

I, the seller \_\_\_\_\_, state that the odometer mileage on the vehicle described below now reads \_\_\_\_\_ miles/kilometers.

Circle ONE only:

(1) I hereby certify that to the best of my knowledge the odometer reading as stated above reflects the actual mileage of the vehicle described below.

(2) I hereby certify that to the best of my knowledge the odometer reading as stated above reflects the amount of mileage in excess of designed mechanical odometer limit of 99,999 miles/kilometers of the vehicle described below.

(3) I hereby certify that to the best of my knowledge the odometer reading as stated above is NOT the actual mileage of vehicle described below and should not be relied upon.

_____	_____	_____
Make	Model	Body Type
_____	_____	_____
Vehicle Identification No	Year	Color

Circle ONE only:

(1) I hereby certify that the odometer of said vehicle was not altered, set back, or disconnected while in my possession, and I have no knowledge of anyone doing so.

(2) I hereby certify that the odometer was altered for repair Or replacement purposes while in my possession, and that the mileage registered on the repaired or replacement odometer was identical to that before such service.

(3) I hereby certify that the repaired or replacement odometer was incapable of registering the same mileage, that it was reset to zero, and that the mileage on the original odometer or the odometer before repair was \_\_\_\_\_ miles/kilometers.

\_\_\_\_\_  
(seller's signature) (date) (buyer's signature) (date)

\_\_\_\_\_  
(seller - print name) (buyer - print name)

\_\_\_\_\_  
(seller's signature) (date) (buyer's signature) (date)

\_\_\_\_\_  
(seller - print name) (buyer - print name)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Address Address

\_\_\_\_\_  
City, State, Zip City, State, Zip

\_\_\_\_\_  
Phone Phone

## **Appendix A: Copyright notice**

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