

GUIDES TO INDEPENDENCE™

Used-Vehicle Test Drive Checklist

Print this checklist, grab a flashlight, a magnet, a rag, and a pencil, and you're ready to inspect.

Vehicle: _____

Under the hood	
	Leaks
	Fluid levels
	Oil (should be light brown)
	Antifreeze (should be bright color, not rusty or brown)
	Power steering fluid (should be clear)
	Transmission fluid (should be red)
	Belts (check for cracks and looseness)
	Hoses (should be firm, not soft or hard)
	Battery and connections
	Electrical connections and wiring
	Old oil buildup or sludge inside the valve cover--where the oil filler cap is (sign of neglect)
Under the vehicle	
	Leaks
	Undercarriage for damage
	Exhaust system
	Tires for uneven wear
	Loose parts hanging from body
	Rear suspension for leaks
	Rust on body
	CV boots (corrugated rubber boots, usually black) that surround the CV joints on front-wheel drive vehicles
Body/chassis	
	Operation of hood, doors, door glass, all latches, and keys
	Exterior body paint
	Vehicle's body for waviness, irregularities on both sides (could mean repairs after an accident)
	Magnet check on panels (if doesn't stick, metal panel may have been repaired and replaced with non-metal part)
	Mismatched colors and uneven textures
	Poorly fitted panels that suggest body repairs
	All lights, headlamps, taillights, turn signals, brake lights, back-up lights, and license plate tag lights
	Spare tire, jack, and tools
	Water or water damage in trunk

Interior	
	Seats, door panels, headliner, rugs, and mats
	Seat belts, front and rear
	Door locks, power windows, and power seats
	Radio, tape player, or compact disk player, sound system
	Horn and steering column
	Windshield wipers and operation of washer fluid nozzles
	Dash lights, interior lights
Starting the engine	
	Stand behind the vehicle and look for smoke
	Barely visible (just a little white is normal)
	Blue smoke indicates burning oil
	Black smoke indicates engine too rich (too much fuel)
	Heavy, white smoke may be blown or cracked head gasket
Test drive	
	Find some rough pavement, go over a few bumps and listen for rattles, squeaks, and loose suspension.
	Test to see if car pulls to one side or the other (sudden veering may indicate car needs front-end alignment).
	(Front wheel drive only) Make sharp right/left turns in tight circle in empty parking lot. Knocking sounds may be bad CV joints).
	Brakes should stop smoothly and quietly (no squeaks or pulsations or pulling from one side to the other).
	Brake pedal should feel firm--not spongy.
	Try the air conditioner and the heater to make sure they work.
	Engine performance: Engine should run smoothly and quietly. Listen for pings, rattles, knocks, grinds, vibrations, squeals, engine hesitation, or stumbles on acceleration.
	Transmission performance: An automatic transmission should shift smoothly without jerking, slipping, or hesitation on upshift. With a manual transmission shift gears and listen. A grinding sound may indicate needed clutch plate or internal repairs.