

Used car buyer's checklist - Samarins.com

Initially:

- Any "bad" records in a VIN history report?
- Any service records with mileage readings? Has the oil been changed regularly? Any major engine or transmission repairs? Last emission test?

Walk-around

Indications of possible problems:

- Does the car sit level or do any of the suspension springs appear sagging?
- Are the body lines not straight? Ripples? Misaligned panels?
- Does any part of the car appear to be repainted? Mismatched colors? Paint overspray? Different paint texture on different panels? Why? Accident? Corrosion?
- Does the driver's door have a free play in the hinges? Is it difficult to close?
- Are the gaps between the panels different on one side of the car compared to the other side?
- Does the car have many rusty spots?
- Is there a trailer hinge? Was the car used for towing a heavy trailer?
- Any cracks, chips, scratches on the windshield?

Wheels and Tires:

- Are the tires of a reputable brand or a "no name" kind of product? Are all 4 tires the same?
- Any cuts, cracks or other damage? Is the tire tread low? Irregular wear? Damage on the rims?

The suspension and chassis problems:

- Does the car bounce too much when you push one of the corners down?
- Does the car look badly corroded underneath?
- If the vehicle has a frame, is it badly rusted? Does it appear repaired?

The interior:

- Any smell? Excessive perfume? Dampness?
- Is the driver seat or steering wheel worn excessively? Does it look like it was a rental or heavily used car?
- Any dampness under the carpet or in the trunk?
- Do all the electrical features work? Power locks, windows, mirrors, sunroof, wipers, remote control?
- Does the air conditioner blow really cold air?
- Do the heater and rear window defogger work?
- Do windows get foggy with the heater ON?
- Is the radio reception good?
- Does the CD player play disks?
- Do you feel comfortable in the driver's seat? Space? Visibility? Mirrors, controls, steering?
- Is there a cruise control? ABS? Stability Control?
- Do all the seat belts work?
- Is the rear seat space sufficient?
- Does the vehicle have an additional ignition key(s), spare tire, jack and a wheel wrench?

Under the hood:

- Is there a burnt oil smell under the hood?
- Any leaks? Is the engine dirty or oily? - Does the engine look sludged up under the oil cap?
- Is the oil level low? Is the oil on the dipstick too dark?

- Does the engine oil appear white? (coolant mixed with oil)
- Is the transmission fluid on the dipstick too dark or dirty? Does the transmission fluid smell burnt?
- Is the coolant, brake fluid, steering fluid low?
- Are the battery terminals corroded?
- Any indication of poor quality repair work or lack of maintenance? (e.g. badly corroded battery terminals, very low oil level, etc.)

During a test drive:

Engine issues:

- Is the engine difficult to start? Is the idle rough?
- Any noises? Knocking, tapping, pinging, whistling, piston slap? Excessive shaking? Vibrations?
- Any smoke? (slight water steam is OK)
- Any warning lights come on on the dash?
- Is the engine oil pressure too low at idle?
- Any hesitations, sputtering on acceleration?
- Does the engine have enough power? Is it smooth?

Automatic transmission issues

- Is the time between shifting from Park into Drive or from Park into Reverse and the moment the transmission kicks in too long? (Long engagement)
- Any noises, jerks, jolts? A clunk when shifting into Reverse?
- When driving, any delays, slipping, shudder or harsh shifting? Is the overdrive working?
- Does the transmission downshifts when accelerated?
- Is there a clunk or jolt when coming to a stop?

Manual transmission issues:

- Any noises while accelerating or decelerating in any gear?
- Any troubles or grinding when changing gears?
- Is it difficult to shift into Reverse?
- Is the clutch slipping? Any noises, vibrations when the clutch pedal is pressed or released?

4WD issues:

Do you notice binding in turns? Do all 4WD modes work? Driveline noises? Vibrations?

Suspension and steering issues:

- Does the steering have a notable free play?
- Any knocking, rattling, creaking noises when driving over bumps or rough road?
- Does the car bounce a lot when driving over bumps?
- Does the car pull aside? Is the steering wheel out of center? Does the vehicle feel unstable? On a rough road? On a highway? In turns?
- Any humming, growling noises? Vibrations?

Brakes issues:

- Does the brake pedal go down too low?
- Does the brake pedal feel too soft (spongy) or too hard?
- Any brake pedal pulsation or steering vibration during braking?
- Any noises during braking? Grinding, screeching, squeaking?
- Does the vehicle pull aside during braking?
- Does the vehicle brake well?

This checklist is based on How to check a used car - a buyer's guide with photos. Visit Samarins.com for more information about how to buy a used car and how to check a used car prior purchase.