



Making decisions easy

USED CAR CHECKLIST

If you're buying a used car, use this checklist for your inspection

Car make _____

Model _____

Year _____

Mileage _____

Number of owners _____

Seller's name _____

Address _____

Phone _____

Date inspected _____



The 5 big steps to buying a car

1. General inspection

Good light is a must and the car should be clean and dry, or you may miss defects in the panel work. Use our checklist.

2. Test drive

Again use our checklist. The drive should take up to half an hour and it helps to have someone with you to assess some of the items on the list.

Make sure you include some speed driving on the motorway or open road, and some hill work for checking the gears and handbrake.

Although fine weather is good for the inspection, rain can be helpful for the drive. You'll give the wipers (and possibly the tyres) a better workout, and you might even discover a leak or two.

3. Mechanical inspection

Most of the time it's not a good idea to use a mate. If they miss something, it's bad luck.

But if you pay a specialist inspection service or your own garage or mechanic, they are obliged under the Consumer Guarantees Act to do the job to a reasonable standard according to your instructions. If they get it wrong, you can hold them liable for any losses you incur.

A full pre-purchase inspection will cost up to \$120. Not much in the total cost of the car.

4. Paperwork

The car itself is only half the story. There's also a lot of documentation to check, especially if you're buying from a dealer.

Warrant of fitness Every vehicle sold by a dealer must have a warrant of fitness less than one month old. Private sellers have the option of selling without a warrant, provided the car is clearly identified for sale 'as is where is'.

Supplier information notice A dealer (but not a private seller) is required to attach to every motor vehicle for sale a 'supplier information notice' (SIN).

The information that must be disclosed in the SIN includes:

- The name and business address of the dealer.
- Whether the dealer is a registered motor vehicle trader.
- The cash price of the vehicle.
- Whether any security is registered over the vehicle.
- The year in which the vehicle was manufactured (or the manufacturer's designated 'model year').

- The make, model, engine capacity and fuel type of the vehicle.
- The year in which the vehicle was first registered in New Zealand or, if the vehicle was first registered overseas, the year of that first registration.
- The odometer (distance travelled) reading, or a statement that the odometer reading is or may be inaccurate.
- Whether the vehicle is recorded on the motor vehicle register as having been damaged when it was imported.

If you buy the car, you must be given a copy of the SIN.

Debts If you buy privately, your car could be repossessed if there are any outstanding debts on it. Use a vehicle history checking service to find out if the car is free of debt.

If you buy from a registered motor vehicle dealer, you won't be liable for any such debts, unless you were told about them.

Ownership The certificate of registration, which you should be shown, lists the current registered owner of a car. This should be the company or person – whether dealer or private – you are buying the car from.

If you're in any doubt about the ownership of a vehicle, call the police. They'll tell you if it's been reported stolen.

Sale agreement If you're buying from a dealer, they must provide you with a written sale agreement and the Supplier Information Notice which you have signed. Don't sign an agreement until you have read and understood all the clauses, particularly those regarding interest rates and warranty costs. Beware of documentation fees charged by the dealer.

Change of ownership Both the buyer and the seller have to fill out forms available from an LTSA agent (such as New Zealand Post) or use the NZ Transport Agency's online transaction centre. The buyer pays the fee and is ultimately responsible for the changeover.

If you're selling privately, make sure the changeover really has happened before you release the car. You don't want speeding or parking tickets turning up addressed to you.

5. Finance

Dealer finance is often expensive. You'll probably get a better deal from a bank.

With any loan offer, check the time to repay, the monthly payments and the total cost of credit over the term of the loan. All lending organisations must provide this information, to allow you to compare the deals they offer.

If the dealer offers an interest-free loan, check there are no extra hidden fees and that the asking price hasn't been inflated.

CHECKLIST

Outside the car

- Rust holes or bubbles in the paintwork (especially door bottoms behind the rubber seals, wheel arches, around the petrol cover, boot and windows.)
- Filler used to repair rust or accident damage.
- Colour variations in paintwork or in different panels (sign of accident damage).
- Bumps or ripples along panels (sign of accident damage).
- Shock absorbers worn (push down on each corner of the car; it's a bad sign if it bounces more than twice).
- Doors, boot or bonnet don't open and shut or lock properly (the gaps around the edges should be even).
- Damaged or cracked glass (this may not pass a warrant of fitness).

Inside

- Interior too small (check legroom and headroom front and back).
- Seat (check for comfort, damage and adjustability).
- Seatbelts not working or frayed or badly faded.
- Headlining damaged.
- Windows that don't wind down easily,
- Dampness or rust in floor pan: lift up the carpet (indicates leaks in windows and doors).
- Missing jack, wheel brace or spare wheel in boot.
- All the controls (indicators, wipers, lights, locks, gauges and warning lights, heater, air conditioning, stereo etc).
- Cigarette smell (non-smokers may find this hard to get rid of).



Under the bonnet

- Oil low on dipstick (could be an oil burner or a leak).
- Oil creamy or milky (water in oil: sign of a blown head gasket).
- Rusty water in radiator or overflow tank.
- Radiator fins rusted or crumbly.
- Leaks of water, oil or petrol.
- Corrosion around battery terminal and surrounding bodywork.
- Brake fluid or power steering fluid low.
- Signs of accident repair.



Under the car

- Worn tyre tread (it's illegal if less than 1.5mm deep over 75% of the tread).
- Tyres worn unevenly or feathered on one side of tread pattern (sign of wheel misalignment).
- Tyres of different types or sizes.
- Spare tyre in poor condition.
- Underbody shows fresh patches of underseal.
- Rust in underbody.
- Leaks on the ground under the vehicle.
- Loose exhaust system.
- Holes in exhaust (place a dampened rag over the tailpipe while the engine is running; spitting noise indicates holes).



Test drive

- Controls don't suit you or are stiff to move.
- Free play in steering wheel.
- Engine hard to start.
- Vehicle moves crabwise or wheels wobble (get someone to check as you drive away).
- Brakes are weak, pedal goes right to the floor or vehicle doesn't stop straight (test on a smooth even road surface).
- Handbrake won't hold car on a steep hill.
- Clutch slips or doesn't release properly when engaging gears.
- Gears (or automatic shift) don't change smoothly.
- Odd engine noises.
- Petrol or oil smells.
- Hard suspension on rough roads.
- Overheating.
- Car pulls to one side or steering wheel not centred when driving straight.
- Exhaust smoke: idle the engine for a while then rev it, or drive down a long hill and accelerate at the bottom (blue smoke indicates an oil burner, black means problems with the fuel mixture and white, long after the engine is warmed up, may indicate water leaking in the engine).
- Engine runs on when you turn it off.

