



Used car buyers: inspection checklist

In the market for a used car? Think you have found it? Use our handy checklist before signing your contract.

Whilst a cooling off period is now provided, make sure any extra requirements such as carrying out a “Vehicle Inspection by RAA to my satisfaction” is part of the contract you may be signing.

While the RAA provides various vehicle inspection options, there are a few basic checks you can do yourself. While these checks may take a little time, the effort will be worth it.

Use this checklist to help you assess the overall condition of the car you are interested in and remember, always inspect the car under good light, preferably daylight, and when it’s dry.

When you look at the car’s body, check:

☐ **Rust or accident damage**

Look for paint bubbles, variations in the paint colour, loose panels or panels that don’t appear to fit properly. Check the inside of the boot, the bottom of the doors, under the carpet and the floor wells for rust scale or perforations, which are signs of advanced rust.

☐ **Doors, boot and windows**

Make sure the boot and each door and window opens and closes securely and the locks are operating. Check the rubber seals are in place and are in good condition.

☐ **Paintwork**

Look for over spraying which is a sign of a potential poor repair. Chips, dents and scratches are more signs of poor general care.

When you look under the bonnet, check:

☐ **Engine number, Vehicle Identification Number (VIN) and body number**

Check that each of the numbers matches the number on the Certificate of Registration. Check the numbers have not been interfered with or altered.

The VIN must have 17 characters.

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Registration #: _____ Engine #: _____

To make a Personal Properties Security Register enquiry, visit online at www.ppsr.gov.au or call 1300 007 777. This check can be done to see if there is finance owing on the vehicle, or if it has been recorded as stolen or written off.

☐ **Date of manufacture**

Check the compliance plate to see that the advertised date of manufacture is correct. The compliance plate is usually fitted to a panel in the engine bay.

☐ Engine

A dirty engine is a sign the car has not been well maintained and may indicate a mechanical problem.

☐ Engine oil

Grey or milky oil indicates a serious problem. Don't be fooled by lovely clean oil at the first dip; check the oil colour again after the engine has been running. A thick oil build up is a sign the car is lacking in maintenance.

☐ Engine at idle

Ensure the engine starts easily without hard revving. Lift the bonnet and listen to the engine idle. The sound should be even with no unusual noises (knocking, rattling, etc). Check the exhaust smoke; blue smoke can signify serious problems.

☐ Radiator

Check for damage or corrosion. Even worse, check for signs of leakage.

☐ Radiator coolant

The coolant should be clean and brightly coloured.

☐ Battery

The battery should be held securely in place and the battery terminals should be secure and clean. Check for acid corrosion.

When you look under the car, check:

☐ Exhaust systems

Excessive noise or fumes may indicate holes or rust in the muffler or pipes.

☐ Tyres

Check all tyres for tread, cracks and uneven wear, which can indicate problems with the steering or suspension. Include the spare tyre in your inspection.

☐ Oil leaks

Check the engine, transmission, differential, brakes, power steering and the shock absorbers for any signs of a leakage.

When you sit inside the car, check:

☐ Upholstery, trim and carpets

Check throughout for wear and tear. Remember to look under mats and seat covers.

☐ Seat belts

Check the seat belts are in good condition, not frayed or faded, and that they are well anchored.

☐ Lights

Ensure all lights illuminate when they should, both on the dashboard and outside the car.

☐ Accessories and electrical devices

Try them out. Make sure the radio, air-conditioner/heater, windscreen wipers, horn, electric windows, etc all work as they should. This is still important to check even if you are buying from a licensed motor vehicle dealer as they may have excluded some of these items from the warranty so if there is a problem the cost will be yours.

☐ Jack and tool kit

Make sure they are included and are in a workable condition.

When you take the car for a drive, check:

☐ Brakes

Make sure the pedal feels firm on application. When braking, the steering wheel should not vibrate and the car should stop smoothly in a straight line and not pull to one side.

☐ Steering

Relax your grip on the steering wheel and see if the car pulls to one side as this can indicate either worn suspension or misaligned steering.

☐ Engine

Listen for any rattling or knocking noises when you accelerate, decelerate or are cruising. Unusual noises may indicate excessive wear.

☐ Exhaust

Blue smoke can signify serious problems.

☐ Suspension

Listen for any unusual noises particularly when you drive over bumps.

☐ Transmission

Check the gears change easily (both in manual and automatics) without any abnormal 'whining' or 'howling' noises.

For more information on buying a used vehicle, contact Car Advice on 8202 4689.

To book or to find out more about Vehicle Inspections, call 8202 4688.