

PRACTICAL ADVISE: If You're Buying a Used Car

Written by

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A. Mechanical Parts
1. ♦♦ ♦ Is the engine clean and engine oil clear? Are there oil leaks?
2. ♦♦ ♦ Are the battery terminals clean or corroded by acid?
3. ♦♦ ♦ Is the exhaust smoke black, blue or white when you start the engine? White smoke is all right, black smoke may mean there is a carburetor problem, blue smoke may mean the engine is worn out.
4. ♦♦ ♦ Is the exhaust noisy? If so, it should be fixed.
5. ♦♦ ♦ Is the engine number on the engine block the same as on the registration card. If not, the car maybe stolen.
6. ♦♦ ♦ Are the tires worn evenly? Is there enough thread on the tires? If not, they should be replaced.
7. ♦♦ ♦ When you shake the front wheels from side to side, they should not be too loose.
8. ♦♦ ♦ Is the suspension in order? If you push down the car above each mud-guard, the car should go down and then bounce back to its original position. If it does not, then there is something wrong with the suspension or springs.
9. ♦♦ ♦ Do all the lights and indicators work? Are there any cracks in the glass covering the lights?
10. ♦♦ ♦ Do the oil, temperature, fuel and speedometer gauges work?
11. ♦♦ ♦ Do the windscreen wipers and hooters work?
12. ♦♦ ♦ Does the steering wheel feel loose when you turn it?
B. Bodywork
1. ♦♦ ♦ Is there any rust? The best place to look is at the bottom of doors and the edges of the boot and bonnet. Look inside the boot as well to see if it has rust which might show that it leaks.
2. ♦♦ ♦ Are there uneven paint surfaces or paint ripples? These may show that the car has been repainted because it was involved in an accident or because rust has been taken out. Ask the seller why it was repainted.
3. ♦♦ ♦ Do the windscreen and windows have any cracks or scratches that make it difficult to see through.
4. ♦♦ ♦ Are the seats in good condition? Are the seats torn or worn? Do the seats sag? Do the seats slide forwards or backwards easily? If there are seat covers, check underneath to see if the upholstery is torn or worn.
5. ♦♦ ♦ Are the seatbelts in good condition? Do they adjust easily? Are they torn? Are they clean?
6. ♦♦ ♦ Is the steering wheel cracked? If it has a steering wheel cover, ask the seller to remove the cover so that you can check for cracks.
7. ♦♦ ♦ Are there rubber covers on the tool pedals? If so, are they too worn-out or too new? If so, ask why?
Test driving a used car. What you should look for?
1. ♦♦ ♦ Before driving off, you should check that the gears from reverse to first and through the other gears. Then test the gear changes while driving. Watch out for strange noises and gears that grate when you change them.
2. ♦♦ ♦ Test the brakes by going up to 55 km/h and then slowly pressing down on the brake pedal. If it goes down without slowing the car or goes down quite far without slowing the car, the brakes are faulty.
3. ♦♦ ♦ If the car pulls to one side when you apply the brakes it may mean faults in the brakes, suspension or alignment.
4. ♦♦ ♦ Find an empty parking area and test the steering by driving slowly and moving the steering wheel from side to side. If it does not turn the car immediately, the steering may be worn. Try driving at 35km/h and allow the car to steer itself. If the car goes off to one side, there may be wheel alignment problems.
5. ♦♦ ♦ Drive the car on a bumpy road. If it moves from side to side or bounces too much, the shock absorbers may be faulty. Listen out for loud rattles and other strange noises.
6. ♦♦ ♦ Park the car for a short while and then move it forward. Check for any leaks (for example: oil, water and brake fluid)
Note: The best way of checking a used car is to ask an organisation like the AAM to do it for you. They will charge you a small fee for this

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service if you are a member. They will provide a full report on the car including a checklist of faults. There are AAM testing workshops in most large towns. Alternatively, you may take along your own mechanic to test the car.