

Basic checks when you view a car



Use this checklist to help you decide whether a car is worth taking out for a test drive. These checks aren't a substitute for a professional pre-purchase vehicle inspection. To safeguard yourself from buying a lemon, you should get a mechanic to look over the car before you buy it.

Before you start the car



Review any service or maintenance receipts or the car's service handbook. Check the receipts:

- to make sure they are relevant to the car you are viewing, eg the make, model and plate number on the receipt matches the car's details
- show regular servicing and maintenance done on time
- are marked with an authorised dealer stamp or on a mechanic's letterhead.



Inspect the tyres. They should:

- be free of any cracks on the side of the tyres
- preferably be a well-known tyre brand
- be at least the minimum legal tyre tread depth of 1.5mm — but over 3mm tread is recommended.



Check the body of the car. Look:

- along the side of the car for any rust, dents, scratches or ripples — the surface should be smooth
- for any cracks or chips in the windows
- outside and inside the car for any difference in paint colour
- for any rust
- at the gaps between the body of the car and the doors, bonnet, tailgate and fuel filler cap — the gaps should all be parallel and the same width.



Open the bonnet. Check:

- how clean the engine is — an untidy engine may be a sign the seller hasn't looked after the car well
- for any signs of oil or fluid leaks in, around and underneath the engine
- the belts located on the side or front of the engine for any frays or damage
- the quality and level of the oil using the dipstick — the oil shouldn't be black or smell burned
- underneath the inside of the oil cap — there shouldn't be any creamy looking residue.



Check for signs of a tampered odometer. The odometer may have been rolled back if the vehicle has low mileage, but the:

- vehicle looks worn
- brake, accelerator or clutch pedals are badly worn
- driver's seat looks well used
- steering wheel looks well used.

When you start the car



Check:

- if any warning lights on the car dash stay on
- the exhaust tailpipe for any blue or black smoke that may appear within the first ten seconds of starting the car
- for any leaks, unusual noises or strong exhaust smells coming from the exhaust system
- for any other knocks, clunks or unusual noises coming from any part of the car.



TIP 1:

Check receipts or records for a history of regular servicing.



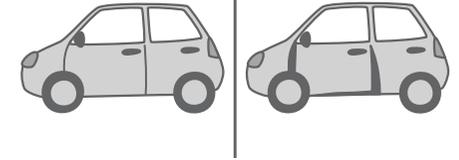
TIP 2:

Tyres should have at least the legal minimum tread depth of 1.5mm. Over 3mm is recommended. A coin can help you measure.



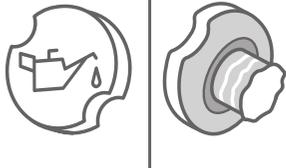
TIP 3:

Look along the side of the car to check the body for any dents or ripples. The surface should be smooth.



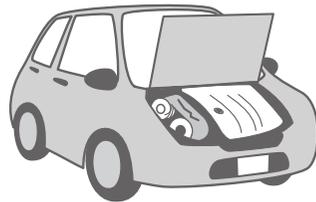
TIP 4:

Panel gaps between the body of the car and the doors, bonnet, tailgate and fuel filler cap should be parallel and the same width.



TIP 5:

Check underneath the inside of the engine oil cap. There should not be any buildup of creamy looking residue.



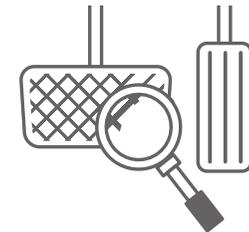
TIP 6:

Check the condition of the belts that are visible on the side or front of the engine. They should not be frayed or cracked.



TIP 7:

Check for any blue or black smoke that may appear from the tailpipe right after you start the car.



TIP 8:

If the car's brake or accelerator pedals are badly worn but it's mileage is low, the car's odometer could have been tampered with.