



## Don't Buy a Clunker! Used Car Shopping Checklist

I love lemonade. It's so delicious. Buying a lemon, though? Not as much. Used cars are a great investment, but you've gotta be careful about who you trust. They don't always come with warranties and guarantees like new cars. I know you might feel intimidated. Once you take the keys, you are also taking ownership of the vehicles' history. There are so many working parts on every vehicle that it's hard to keep up with everything! Don't worry. I'll help. Simply print this page and check off one item at a time. Happy shopping!

### Part I: Prep Work

#### Research/History:

- ⦿ Are there any areas of concern in the vehicle's history?
- ⦿ Previous maintenance receipts?
- ⦿ Look up recalls using the VIN#
- ⦿ Were there any major engine or transmission repairs?
- ⦿ Do any previous service records mention
- ⦿ Mileage readings?
- ⦿ Guarantee or warranty on previous work performed
- ⦿ Check the maintenance schedule. (In the OMV, or look it up)
- ⦿ Has the vehicle been maintained regularly?
- ⦿ Has the oil been changed regularly?
- ⦿ Will major work be recommend soon?
- ⦿ When was the last emission test?

### Part II: Walk Around

#### Indications Of Possible Problems Or Areas Of Concern:

- ⦿ Does the car sit level or do any of the suspension springs seem to sag?
- ⦿ Are there any noticeable ripples or misaligned panels in the car's body?
- ⦿ Does any part of the car appear to be repainted? Mismatched colors? Paint overspray?  
Different paint texture on different panels?
- ⦿ Are the above issues due to natural causes (aging) or traffic accidents?
- ⦿ 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?
- ⦿ Are there any cracks, chips, scratches on the windshield?
- ⦿ Do you see unusual watermarks or sand in strange places?





### **Wheels & Tires:**

- ⦿ Are the tires the same size and the same brand?
- ⦿ Are the tires of a reputable brand or a "no name" kind of product?
- ⦿ Are all four tires the same or are they mismatched?
- ⦿ Are there any cuts, cracks or other damage? is the tire tread low? Irregular wear? Damage on the rims?

### **The Suspension & Chassis Problems:**

- ⦿ Does the car look badly corroded underneath?
- ⦿ If the vehicle has a frame, is it badly rusted? Does it appear repaired?

### **The Interior:**

- ⦿ Are there any smells? Excessive perfume? Dampness?
- ⦿ Is the driver seat or steering wheel worn excessively? If so, does it look like it was a rental or heavily abused car?
- ⦿ Is there 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 discs?
- ⦿ 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), wheel lock, spare tire, jack and a wheel wrench





## Lighting

Do they work? Try them all:

- ⦿ Hi-beams
- ⦿ Headlights
- ⦿ Tail lights
- ⦿ Directionals
- ⦿ Blinking hazards
- ⦿ Are the lense on the lights ozidized, reducing the light from shining through?

## Under The Hood:

- ⦿ Is there a burnt oil smell under the hood?
- ⦿ Are there any leaks? Is the engine dirty or oily?
- ⦿ Does the engine look sludged up under the oil cap?
- ⦿ Is the oil level low? Is oil on the dipstick too dark?
- ⦿ Does engine oil on the dipstick have the "coffee with milk" color? (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, or steering fluid low?
- ⦿ Are the battery terminals corroded?
- ⦿ Is there any indication of poor quality repair work or lack of maintenance?  
(e.g. badly corroded battery terminals, very low oil level, etc.)

## Part III: Test Drive

### Engine Issues:

- ⦿ Is the engine difficult to start? Is the idle rough?
- ⦿ Are there any noises or sensations? Knocking, tapping, pinging, whistling?
- ⦿ Excessive shaking? Vibrations?
- ⦿ Is there any smoke? (slight water steam is OK)
- ⦿ Did any warning lights come on with the engine running?





- ⦿ Does the engine feel steady at idle?
- ⦿ Are there any hesitations, sputtering on acceleration?
- ⦿ Does the engine have enough power? Is it smooth?

### **Automatic Transmission Issues**

- ⦿ Is it difficult to shift from Park into Drive or from Park into Reverse?
- ⦿ Does the transmission take a while to engage? (Long engagement)
- ⦿ Are there any noises, jerks, jolts? A clunk when shifting into Reverse?  
When driving, do you notice any delays, slipping, shudder or harsh shifting?
- ⦿ Is the overdrive working?
- ⦿ Does the transmission downshift when accelerated?
- ⦿ Is there a clunk or jolt when coming to a stop?

### **Manual Transmission Issues:**

- ⦿ Are there any noises while accelerating or decelerating in any gear?
- ⦿ Did you notice any 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 & Steering Issues:**

- ⦿ Does the steering have a notable free play?
- ⦿ Did you notice any knocking, rattling, or creaking noises when driving over bumps and rough roads?
- ⦿ 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?
- ◉ Did you feel any pedal pulsation or steering vibration during braking?
- ◉ Did you hear any noises during braking? Grinding, screeching, squeaking?
- ◉ Does the vehicle pull aside during braking?
- ◉ Do the brakes engage quickly?
- ◉ Are the brakes strong?

### Congrats! You Did It!

If the used car in question passed all of these tests, then you can feel confident in your decision to bring it to a repair shop with your checklist, for a full check-up. Buying a car is only half of the battle. Now you need to keep it in excellent condition! Join empowered women just like you at [www.WomenAutoKnow.com](http://www.WomenAutoKnow.com) for more resources that will help you be a better driver, passenger, and consumer.

