

USED VEHICLE TEST DRIVE CHECKLIST

Before you drive

- Get the Vehicle Identification Number (VIN) so you can check the vehicle history report at www.dmv.org or with another vehicle history report provider.
- Check the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration's website at www.nhtsa.gov for any recall information.

Engine

- Check the engine oil, transmission fluid and coolant levels when the engine is cool.
- Examine hoses and belts for signs of excessive wear.
- With the engine running, listen for any knocking, ticking or tapping.

Exterior

- Confirm the VIN. In more recent models, it's usually visible at the bottom of the front window on the driver's side.
- Check the vehicle's body for potential signs of undisclosed accidents, like unevenness in the paint or ripples or dents in the exterior.
- Check the ground beneath the vehicle before and after the engine has been running to see if there are any fluid leaks.
- Take out your ruler and place it inside one of the grooves of the tire's tread. The tires should have at least ¼ inch of tread.
- Check the tires for signs of excessive or uneven wear, cracks or splitting.

- Make sure the tires have no objects lodged in them, like nails or screws.
- When you check for rust, pay special attention to the underside of the vehicle, the wheel wells, the edges of doors and windows, and the trunk.

Interior

- Are there any rips or stains on the seats?
- How does it smell?
- Do the heating and air conditioning work?
- Test the horn, turn signals, windshield wipers, door locks and dome lights.
- If you have a child who uses a safety seat, check to make sure your safety seat will work with the vehicle.
- Turn the key to the accessory position – the one right before the engine is engaged – and make sure all the dash warning lights illuminate.

Windows

- Are there cracks that could develop into bigger problems?
- Do all the windows go both down and up?

Driving

- Does the transmission shift gears smoothly?
- If the vehicle has a manual transmission, is the clutch easy to engage and are the gears easy to shift?

- Briefly take your hands off the wheel while you are driving at a low speed. Does the vehicle veer to one side?
- When your vehicle is idling at a stop sign or light, does the engine sputter?
- Does it lurch forward when you take your foot off the brake?
- Does the vehicle vibrate excessively at high speeds?
- Does the cruise control work?
- Are there blind spots that could make lane changes difficult or dangerous?
- Intentionally hit a few bumps to see how the suspension feels on uneven surfaces.
- In an empty part of a parking lot, turn the wheel as far as it will go to both sides while you are driving and listen for any strange noises.
- While you are still in the parking lot, apply the brakes quickly and firmly.
- Look at the gauges while you are driving in the parking lot to make sure they all work and that no warning lights are on.

Other

- Does the vehicle have a spare tire (in good condition), jack and iron?
- Check that all the lights work, including the brake and hazard lights.
- Open and close and lock and unlock anything that will – all doors, sunroof, trunk, glove box, etc.
- If you can afford to, have a trusted mechanic check out the vehicle for you.