

THE PRE-PURCHASE INSPECTION

A working checklist for the day you go and look at the car, written for keepers who intend to buy the record along with the metal. Print it, carry it, mark it up in the rain, and file it in the Vault when the keys change hands.

HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

A pre-purchase inspection buys you a number to negotiate with and a clear view of the record you're about to inherit.

Work through the guide in the order it's printed, which keeps you from missing anything and stops you spending an afternoon on a car you should have walked away from in the first ten minutes. Check the paperwork first, because a title, a VIN, and a chassis stamp that don't match will kill the sale however good the car looks. Check the structure second, because rot in the sills, the floors, and the chassis rails costs more to repair than every mechanical fault in the rest of this guide combined. Leave the mechanical checks until last, since parts have prices you can look up and put in front of the seller.

Inspect in daylight, on dry ground, with the car cold and parked where you can walk all the way around it. A wet car hides its paintwork, a warm engine hides its cold start, and a car backed against a garage wall hides one whole side. Mark the boxes as you work, write faults on the notes lines, and photograph anything you want to look at again on the drive home.

THE BOXES AND THE OPTIONAL GRADE

Tick a plain box once you've done the check and found nothing worth writing down. Gold boxes marked /5 take a grade instead, running from 0 at worst to 5 at best. Grading is optional, so a sheet of plain ticks still does the job.

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| 0 Absent, unusable, or failed outright | 3 Serviceable, and worth watching |
| 1 Poor, and it needs work before you drive it | 4 Good, and correct for its age |
| 2 Tired, and it needs work inside the year | 5 Excellent, and better than you hoped |

WHAT TO BRING

Carry a bright flashlight, a small inspection mirror, a cloth-wrapped magnet, a paint depth gauge, a tread depth gauge, a code reader for anything built after 1996, gloves, a mat to lie on, a tape measure, a pen that writes in the cold, and a phone with room on it for two hundred photographs. Bring a friend who likes cars and feels nothing for this one.

BEFORE YOU GO

Half of this inspection happens on the phone, days before you drive anywhere, and the answers you get decide whether the trip is worth making.

THE CONVERSATION

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| ☐ Ask for the VIN in writing and check it before you spend a Saturday driving. | ☐ Ask whether the title sits in the seller's name and in the seller's hand. |
| ☐ Ask how long the seller has owned the car and who owned it before them. | ☐ Ask for photographs of the underside, taken today, in daylight. |
| ☐ Ask what work the car has had in the last twelve months, and who did it. | ☐ Ask why the car is for sale, then stop talking and let the seller fill the gap. |
| ☐ Ask whether the car has ever been off the road, and for how long. | ☐ Ask whether a previous buyer walked away, and what from. |
| ☐ Ask which jobs the seller did themselves and which went to a shop. | ☐ Ask whether the mileage shown is the mileage the car has covered. |
| ☐ Ask what the car will need next, and note whether the answer comes ready or gets invented. | ☐ Ask whether anyone else is scheduled to view it the same day. |
| | ☐ Ask what spares, hardtops, and parts come with the sale. |
| | ☐ Ask whether the car carries a current appraisal or agreed-value policy. |

THE ARRANGEMENTS

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| ☐ Ask the seller to leave the car cold and untouched until you arrive. | ☐ Book a lift or a ramp nearby for the same afternoon. |
| ☐ Ask the seller to lay out the service file, the receipts, and the manuals before you arrive. | ☐ Price three comparable cars and bring the printouts with you. |
| ☐ Agree on the route and the length of the road test in advance. | ☐ Read the owners' club notes on this model's known failures. |
| ☐ Confirm the car carries insurance for your test drive, or arrange your own. | ☐ Write down the price you'll pay and the price you'll walk at. |

PAPERWORK AND TITLE

Start here, in the kitchen, with the file open on the table and the car still cold outside, because the documents decide whether you inspect the car at all.

GOLD BOXES TAKE A GRADE FROM 0 LOW TO 5 HIGH. PLAIN BOXES TAKE A TICK.

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| ☐ Match the name on the title to the name on the seller's identification. | ☐ Count the keys, the remotes, and the immobilizer fobs, then test each one. |
| ☐ Match the VIN on the title to the VIN stamped and plated on the car. | ☐ Find the radio code, the wheel lock key, and the tool roll. |
| ☐ Read the title for a brand: salvage, rebuilt, flood, hail, lemon, or export. | ☒ /5 Collect the handbook, the workshop manual, and any dealer stamps. |
| ☐ Check for a lien or outstanding finance recorded against the VIN. | ☒ /5 Match restoration photographs to the car standing in front of you. |
| ☐ Compare the mileage on the title to the odometer and the service file. | ☐ Ask whether the engine or gearbox rebuild has paperwork, and who holds it. |
| ☒ /5 Sort the invoices into date order and look hard at the gaps. | ☐ Ask for the previous keeper's contact details and permission to use them. |
| ☐ Read the invoices for work that was quoted, advised, and then declined. | ☒ /5 Look for club records, concours sheets, magazine features, and old advertisements. |
| ☐ Confirm the import, customs, and federalization paperwork on an imported car. | ☐ Photograph every document you can't take away with you. |
| ☐ Check registration status, road tax, and any inspection certificate still in date. | ☐ Agree in writing which documents transfer with the car on the day of sale. |
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Sellers who keep a full file keep a full car often enough to price on it. A thin file costs the seller money at your hands, it will cost you money again at the hands of whoever buys the car from you, and a Vault that carries the record forward ends that cycle.

IDENTITY AND NUMBERS

“The car keeps the same number stamped into its chassis for the whole of its life, through every owner and every sale.”

THE KEEPER'S MANIFESTO · ARTICLE VIII

GOLD BOXES TAKE A GRADE FROM 0 LOW TO 5 HIGH. PLAIN BOXES TAKE A TICK.

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| ☐ /5 Find the VIN plate and study the rivets, the font, and the finish around it. | ☐ /5 Look for filled metal, ground surfaces, or fresh paint around any stamping. |
| ☐ Read the chassis stamp and compare its character spacing to the plate. | ☐ /5 Check the glass date codes across every pane for a replacement. |
| ☐ Record the engine number and compare it to the paperwork. | ☐ Compare date stamps on the belts, the wheels, and the master cylinder. |
| ☐ Check the gearbox and axle numbers wherever the marque stamped them. | ☐ Confirm the build date against the model year shown on the title. |
| ☐ Locate the body number on the shell and on the door tags. | ☐ Record the reading from the odometer, the trip, and any service sticker. |
| ☐ Compare the paint code on the plate to the color on the car. | ☐ /5 Note which numbers match the factory record and which have been replaced. |
| ☐ Check the trim code against the interior you're sitting in. | ☐ Photograph every number framed wide enough to prove where it sits. |

Matching numbers raise a price and a replacement engine lowers one, so record whichever you find without editing it. A car running a period-correct replacement block, documented and dated, sells better than a car whose seller shrugs at the question, so write down what you find either way and let the next buyer read it.

VIN · CHASSIS STAMP · ENGINE NUMBER

MEASUREMENTS AND THRESHOLDS

Write your readings down as numbers, because a number survives the drive home and an impression doesn't. The figures below are working thresholds for a road-going heritage car, and each one gets confirmed against the marque's own manual before you argue with anybody about it.

HOURS PARKED COLD BEFORE YOU ARRIVE

12

ASK FOR IT IN ADVANCE • A WARMED ENGINE HIDES ITS WORST MINUTE

COMPRESSION SPREAD

10%

ROAD TEST

30_{min}

VIN POINTS MATCHED

3

Compression varying by more than a tenth between cylinders points at a mechanical cause worth naming before you buy, and a wet test tells you whether the rings or the valves are responsible. Thirty minutes covers a cold start, a town crawl, a highway run, and a full warm-up with the cooling fan cycling, and no shorter drive gives a car the chance to show you its faults.

Paint depth works by comparison rather than by any published figure, so take a reading on every panel, note the numbers side by side, and treat a panel reading far above its neighbors as filler or a repaint until somebody produces the invoice. Tire date codes read as four digits on the sidewall, giving the week and the year of manufacture, and rubber over six years old belongs in the negotiation whatever the tread looks like.

STRUCTURE AND CORROSION

Spend an hour on this page and get underneath the car, because structural rot can cost more to cut out and replace than the finished car is worth.

GOLD BOXES TAKE A GRADE FROM 0 LOW TO 5 HIGH. PLAIN BOXES TAKE A TICK.

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| ☐ /5 Run a cloth-wrapped magnet along the sills, arches, and lower doors. | ☐ Clear the sill drain holes and look for mud packed behind them. |
| ☐ /5 Press the floor pans from inside with the carpet lifted. | ☐ Tap suspicious panels and listen for the dull note of filler. |
| ☐ /5 Check the jacking points and the seat belt mounting points. | ☐ Look for weld spatter, plated repairs, and mismatched seam sealer. |
| ☐ /5 Follow the chassis rails from the front arch to the rear spring hanger. | ☐ /5 Inspect the outriggers and body mounts on a separate-chassis car. |
| ☐ /5 Check the inner wings, the strut towers, and the battery tray. | ☐ /5 Feel inside the wheel arch lips for rot hiding behind the trim. |
| ☐ /5 Inspect the bulkhead, the scuttle, and the base of the windshield. | ☐ /5 Look up into the front valance and the headlight bowls. |
| ☐ /5 Open each door and look at the hinge pillars and the striker plates. | ☐ /5 Check the fuel tank straps and the floor immediately around them. |
| ☐ /5 Lift the trunk mat and check the spare wheel well for water and rust. | ☐ Ask what went on underneath any fresh underseal. |
| ☐ /5 Check the rear spring hangers, the shackles, and the crossmembers. | ☐ /5 Check panel alignment for the twist that follows a hard impact. |
| | ☐ /5 Check the rear valance corners and the body seams where mud collects. |
| | ☐ /5 Check the rear axle mounts and the spring perches for tearing. |

STRUCTURAL FINDINGS

BODY, PAINT, AND GLASS

Stand at the corner of the car, drop your eye to the level of the shoulder line, and read the reflection running down the flank, because ripples, filler, and repainted panels show up in a reflection long before they show up head on.

GOLD BOXES TAKE A GRADE FROM 0 LOW TO 5 HIGH. PLAIN BOXES TAKE A TICK.

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| ☐ /5 Walk the car in daylight and read the reflections down both flanks. | ☐ /5 Check the glass for chips, delamination, and mismatched brands. |
| ☐ /5 Check the panel gaps at the doors, the hood, and the trunk. | ☐ /5 Test every rubber seal for shrinkage, hardening, and lifting. |
| ☐ /5 Take paint depth readings on every panel and note the outliers. | ☐ /5 Look at the brightwork for pitting, dents, and uneven replating. |
| ☐ Look for overspray on seals, wiring, and the underside of the arches. | ☐ /5 Check badges, trim, and their fixing holes against the factory record. |
| ☐ /5 Compare the color in the door shuts and under the fuel flap. | ☐ /5 Inspect the wipers, the arms, and the washer jets. |
| ☐ Inspect shut lines for masking edges and fresh sealant. | ☐ /5 View the roof and the trunk lid from above for wave and ripple. |
| ☐ /5 Open and close every door, the hood, and the trunk twice. | ☐ Photograph each corner and each flank straight on. |
| | ☐ /5 Compare the seam sealer in the engine bay to the factory pattern. |
| | ☐ /5 Check the underside of the hood and the trunk lid for rust bloom. |

Documented accident repair belongs in the price you negotiate, provided somebody wrote down what happened and who put it right. Undocumented repair is the expensive kind, because you'll spend the rest of your tenure explaining a paint gauge reading you can't account for.

PAINT DEPTH READINGS • PANEL BY PANEL

ENGINE AND COOLING

The first ninety seconds of a cold start carry more information than the next hour of driving, so stand where you can see the exhaust, keep quiet, and let the seller turn the key.

GOLD BOXES TAKE A GRADE FROM 0 LOW TO 5 HIGH. PLAIN BOXES TAKE A TICK.

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| ☐ /5 Watch the exhaust for the first thirty seconds and name the smoke color. | ☐ /5 Squeeze every hose for softness, bulges, and age. |
| ☐ /5 Listen for top-end rattle in the seconds before the oil arrives. | ☐ /5 Inspect the radiator core, the fan, the shroud, and the header tank. |
| ☐ /5 Note the cranking time and whether the car needs the pedal to catch. | ☐ /5 Watch the temperature through a full warm-up and one fan cycle. |
| ☐ /5 Watch the oil pressure gauge or lamp from the moment it fires. | ☐ /5 Check the belts for cracking and the tensioners for play. |
| ☐ /5 Check the coolant level, color, and the inside of the filler neck. | ☐ /5 Look for leaks at the rocker cover, sump, timing cover, and rear main. |
| ☐ Look for oil in the coolant and emulsion under the oil cap. | ☐ /5 Watch the engine rock under load and judge the mounts. |
| ☐ /5 Pull the dipstick, read the level, and smell the oil for fuel. | ☐ /5 Read the spark plugs wherever access allows. |
| ☐ /5 Look down the filler for sludge, varnish, and fresh assembly lube. | ☐ /5 Listen at idle for vacuum hiss and for a manifold leak ticking. |
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Blue smoke on the overrun points at the valve guides or the bores, white smoke that lingers points at coolant going somewhere it shouldn't, and black smoke points at fueling, which is the cheapest of the three to put right. Note which one you saw, at what temperature, and for how long.

COLD START OBSERVATIONS

FUEL, EXHAUST, AND UNDERBODY

Get the car on a lift if you possibly can, because the underside holds the faults the seller has never looked at and the photographs never show.

GOLD BOXES TAKE A GRADE FROM 0 LOW TO 5 HIGH. PLAIN BOXES TAKE A TICK.

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| ☐ /5 Check the fuel tank, the filler neck, and the breather for weeping. | ☐ /5 Check flexible hoses for cracking, swelling, and date codes. |
| ☐ /5 Follow the fuel lines end to end for corrosion, chafing, and old rubber. | ☐ /5 Check the differential and gearbox casings for weeping seals. |
| ☐ Smell the trunk and the cabin for fuel. | ☐ /5 Inspect the driveshaft, the center bearing, and the universal joints. |
| ☐ /5 Inspect the exhaust from the manifold to the tip for blows and patches. | ☐ /5 Check the handbrake cable, its guides, and its adjusters. |
| ☐ /5 Check the exhaust mountings and the clearance to the floor and tunnel. | ☐ Look for impact marks on the floor pan and the chassis rails. |
| ☐ /5 Look at the catalytic converter and the heat shields where fitted. | ☐ Check the jack, the spare, and the tools against the factory list. |
| ☐ /5 Trace the brake and clutch lines along the chassis for pitting. | ☐ Photograph the underside in sections, front to rear, both sides. |
| | ☐ /5 Check the fuel pump mounting, its wiring, and any added inline filter. |
| | ☐ /5 Look at the transmission cooler lines and the power steering hoses. |
| | ☐ Look for a tow hitch, and for the damage that towing left behind. |
| | ☐ /5 Check the floor drain plugs, the grommets, and the blanking plates. |

UNDERBODY FINDINGS

TRANSMISSION AND DRIVELINE

Drive the gearbox rather than sampling it, because a synchro that feels fine at walking pace will crunch on a fast downshift into second.

GOLD BOXES TAKE A GRADE FROM 0 LOW TO 5 HIGH. PLAIN BOXES TAKE A TICK.

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| ☐ Select every gear at rest with the engine running and idling. | ☐ /5 Read the automatic fluid for level, color, and burnt smell. |
| ☐ /5 Feel the clutch for bite point, judder, and free travel. | ☐ /5 Feel every automatic shift for slip, flare, and thump. |
| ☐ /5 Load the clutch on a hill in a high gear and watch for slip. | ☐ /5 Listen to the differential on a steady throttle and on the overrun. |
| ☐ /5 Listen for whine in each gear and again on the overrun. | ☐ /5 Check for driveline shunt coming on and off the throttle. |
| ☐ /5 Check for the box jumping out of second and third on a trailing throttle. | ☐ /5 Turn full lock both ways and listen to the driveshafts. |
| ☐ /5 Test the synchromesh on a fast downshift into second. | ☐ Check the drain plugs for metal where the seller allows it. |
| ☐ /5 Time the automatic engagement into drive and into reverse. | ☐ /5 Note any vibration and the exact speed at which it arrives. |
| | ☐ /5 Engage the overdrive or the freewheel unit and test it both ways. |
| | ☐ /5 Check the transfer case and its linkage on a four-wheel-drive car. |
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Transfer boxes, overdrives, and freewheel units each fail in their own way, so read the model notes before you drive and test whatever the owners' club warns about. A gearbox rebuild sits high on the cost of putting right, so twenty minutes of careful listening pays better than anything else you'll do that afternoon.

DRIVELINE FINDINGS

CHASSIS, BRAKES, AND WHEELS

Suspension, brakes, and tires wear out on a schedule, carry a known price at the parts counter, and earn you a discount whenever you can name the fault precisely.

GOLD BOXES TAKE A GRADE FROM 0 LOW TO 5 HIGH. PLAIN BOXES TAKE A TICK.

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| ☐ /5 Bounce each corner and count how quickly it settles. | ☐ /5 Read the brake fluid color and the reservoir level. |
| ☐ /5 Check the dampers for weeping and the springs for sag. | ☐ /5 Hold the pedal down and feel for a slow sink under steady pressure. |
| ☐ /5 Rock each wheel at twelve and six and feel for bearing play. | ☐ /5 Set the handbrake on a slope and hold the car on it. |
| ☐ /5 Rock each wheel at three and nine and feel for steering joint play. | ☐ Read the brand, size, and date code on all five tires. |
| ☐ /5 Measure free play at the steering wheel before you drive. | ☐ /5 Measure tread depth across each tire and note uneven wear. |
| ☐ /5 Inspect the steering rack boots, the ball joints, and the bushings. | ☐ /5 Check the wheels for curb damage, cracks, and buckled rims. |
| ☐ /5 Check pad thickness, disc lip, and scoring on all four corners. | ☐ /5 Check wire wheels for loose spokes, worn splines, and hammered ears. |
| ☐ /5 Pull a drum where practical and check the shoes and cylinders. | ☐ Confirm the spare, its pressure, and the tools that fit it. |
| | ☐ /5 Check the anti-roll bar links, the bushings, and the mounts. |
| | ☐ /5 Look at the leaf springs for cracked leaves and a flattened arch. |
| | ☐ /5 Check the servo, the master cylinder, and the vacuum hose. |
| | ☐ /5 Measure ride height at all four corners and compare them. |

TREAD DEPTHS, TIRE DATES, AND BRAKE WEAR

ELECTRICS AND INSTRUMENTS

Old wiring fails quietly and expensively, and you inherit every roadside repair the last thirty years left in the loom, so open the fuse box and look at what previous hands did in there.

GOLD BOXES TAKE A GRADE FROM 0 LOW TO 5 HIGH. PLAIN BOXES TAKE A TICK.

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| ☐ /5 Test both headlight beams, the sidelights, and the fog lights. | ☐ /5 Check the battery date, the terminals, the tray, and the ground straps. |
| ☐ /5 Test the indicators, the hazards, the brake lights, and the reverse lights. | ☐ /5 Look through the loom for tape repairs, added fuses, and cheap connectors. |
| ☐ /5 Sound the horn and run the wipers through every speed. | ☐ /5 Check the fuel, temperature, and oil pressure gauges against what the car is doing. |
| ☐ /5 Run the heater, the blower, and the demister on all settings. | ☐ /5 Confirm every warning lamp lights at key-on and clears when it should. |
| ☐ /5 Test the air conditioning for cold air and a compressor that engages. | ☐ Pull stored fault codes on anything with a diagnostic port. |
| ☐ /5 Work every window, mirror, and lock, from every switch that operates it. | ☐ /5 Test the radio, the speakers, the antenna, and the interior lamps. |
| ☐ /5 Watch the ammeter or voltmeter at idle and again at road speed. | ☐ Identify any alarm or immobilizer and confirm you get its keys and codes. |
| | ☐ /5 Restart hot and listen for a lazy starter or a tired solenoid. |
| | ☐ /5 Check alternator or dynamo output against the figure in the manual. |
| | ☐ /5 Test the rear defroster, the heated seats, and the sunroof. |
| | ☐ /5 Check the grounding points for corrosion and paint under the terminals. |

ELECTRICAL FAULTS AND FAULT CODES

INTERIOR AND TRIM

Sit in the car for five minutes with the engine off and the door shut, because damp, mold, and a fuel smell all announce themselves to anybody who stays still long enough to notice.

GOLD BOXES TAKE A GRADE FROM 0 LOW TO 5 HIGH. PLAIN BOXES TAKE A TICK.

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| ☐ /5 Sit in every seat and work every adjustment through its travel. | ☐ /5 Check the dash for cracks, warping, and signs of previous removal. |
| ☐ /5 Check the seat frames, the runners, and the mounting points. | ☐ /5 Work all the switchgear and note whatever sticks or rattles. |
| ☐ /5 Lift the carpets front and rear and feel the padding underneath for damp. | ☐ /5 Look for water staining below the windshield and the rear screen. |
| ☐ /5 Smell the cabin for mold, fuel, and exhaust. | ☐ /5 Check the trunk for damp and lift the spare out of its well. |
| ☐ /5 Check the headliner, the visors, and the parcel shelf. | ☐ /5 Compare wear on the pedals, wheel, and seat against the odometer. |
| ☐ /5 Inspect the door cards, the pockets, and the inner window seals. | ☐ Separate original trim from replacement, and ask where the original went. |
| ☐ /5 Test every belt for retraction, webbing wear, and date codes. | ☐ Photograph the interior from all four corners and the trunk. |
| | ☐ /5 Check the door check straps, the hinges, and the drop at the latch. |
| | ☐ /5 Cycle a convertible top fully and inspect the frame and the rear window. |
| | ☐ /5 Check the hardtop and its fittings, and decide where it will live. |
| | ☐ Look under the seats for corrosion, rodent damage, and lost paperwork. |

Worn leather and a polished gear knob belong to a car that got driven, and the driving is the point, so price patina as evidence rather than damage. Damp is the fault that hides here, and damp means water is arriving from somewhere you haven't found yet.

THE ROAD TEST

Take the wheel yourself, drive the car the way you intend to own it, and spend the first mile listening instead of talking.

GOLD BOXES TAKE A GRADE FROM 0 LOW TO 5 HIGH. PLAIN BOXES TAKE A TICK.

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| ☐ Drive the first mile in silence with the windows down. | ☐ /5 Turn full lock both ways at walking pace in an empty lot. |
| ☐ /5 Rest your hands lightly on the wheel on a flat road and feel for pull. | ☐ /5 Reverse up a slope on the clutch and feel for slip. |
| ☐ /5 Brake hard from speed on a clear road with a loose grip. | ☐ /5 Cross rough surfaces and locate every knock, front or rear. |
| ☐ /5 Brake gently from low speed and listen for grinding. | ☐ /5 Sit in traffic and watch the temperature with the fan cycling. |
| ☐ /5 Accelerate through the gears and watch the mirror for smoke. | ☐ /5 Stop, restart hot, and listen to the starter and the fuel system. |
| ☐ /5 Lift off at speed and listen to the driveline and the exhaust. | ☐ Park on clean ground for five minutes and look underneath. |
| ☐ /5 Hold a steady thirty miles an hour and listen for wheel bearing rumble. | ☐ /5 Recheck the oil and coolant once the engine has cooled. |
| | ☐ Cross a speed bump slowly with the windows down and listen. |
| | ☐ /5 Hold top gear uphill under load and listen for pinking. |
| | ☐ /5 Test the clutch and the brake feel again at the end of the drive. |

Sellers who refuse a road test have made your decision for you, and sellers who insist on driving while you sit in the passenger seat have made most of it. Offer proof of insurance, offer to leave a deposit against the drive, and if the answer stays no, thank them and drive your own car home.

ROAD TEST NOTES • ROUTE, DISTANCE, AND CONDITIONS

FINDINGS AND GRADES

Grade the components as you inspect them, then price the car from the whole sheet. The findings below show what earns each grade, on the same scale printed on page two.

FINDING	GRADE	WHAT IT MEANS AND WHAT TO DO
Structural rust in sills, floors, or rails	0	Metal work, paint, and a season without the car. Walk unless the price collapses.
Title, VIN, and stamps disagree	0	An ownership problem money can't repair. Walk.
Finance outstanding against the VIN	0	A lender holds an interest in the car. Walk.
Blue smoke on the overrun, cold	1	Guides, bores, or a full rebuild. Get a written quote before you talk price.
Emulsion under the cap with coolant loss	1	Head gasket at the least. Get a written quote before you talk price.
Automatic slipping or flaring on shift	1	Rebuild or replacement. Get a written quote before you talk price.
Fresh underseal over unknown metal	2	An inspection you still haven't done. Put it on a lift first.
Years missing from the service history	2	A record you rebuild from nothing. Price the gap.
Paint depth spiking on one flank	2	Accident repair to verify. Ask for the invoice.
Tired dampers, bushings, and joints	3	A parts order and a few weekends. Budget it.
Tires over six years old, tread remaining	3	Replacement before you enjoy the car. Budget it.
Chipped glass, tired seals, faded trim	4	Patience and a slow parts hunt. Note it and move on.

One exception overrides the total: a zero ends the deal whatever else the sheet says, because no discount repairs a title that doesn't match or a chassis rail that has rusted through. A page of threes describes a car you can buy today and improve every winter after. Negotiate from written quotes rather than from opinions, since a seller argues with your judgment and concedes to a shop's estimate. Every fault you

name and document becomes a dated record the next buyer can read, and that record pays you back on the day you sell.

INSPECTION SUMMARY

Fill this page in before you leave the seller's driveway, while the car sits in front of you and the details stay sharp. Carry the grade from each section across, add them up for the price, and record the lowest grade you wrote anywhere, since a zero ends the deal whatever the total says.

VEHICLE • YEAR, MAKE, MODEL	INSPECTION DATE
VIN	INSPECTED BY
ODOMETER	ASKING PRICE
SELLER AND LOCATION	WALK-AWAY PRICE

SECTION	FINDINGS	GRADE
Paperwork and title		
Identity and numbers		
Structure and corrosion		
Body, paint, and glass		
Engine and cooling		
Fuel, exhaust, and underbody		
Transmission and driveline		
Chassis, brakes, and wheels		
Electrics and instruments		
Interior and trim		
Road test		

LOWEST GRADE ON THE SHEET

GRADES TOTALED

DECISION

FILING THE INSPECTION

Buy the car and this sheet stops being a negotiating tool, because the day the keys move it becomes the opening entry of your tenure and the baseline every later record measures against.

Photograph the completed pages, load them into the Vault alongside the title, the invoices, and the photographs you took in the seller's driveway, and date the entry to the day of the inspection rather than the day you got around to it. Walk away instead and you still hold a written baseline for the next car you look at. The Provenance Score rises the moment the record lands, and it keeps rising through every oil change, every parts receipt, and every winter you spend putting something right.

The Passport carries that record out into the world, where a buyer, an insurer, or a concours judge can read it without taking your word for anything. The Ancestry carries it further still, joining your chapter to the chapters written by the keepers before you, all of it keyed to the number stamped into the chassis, which will outlast every one of you.

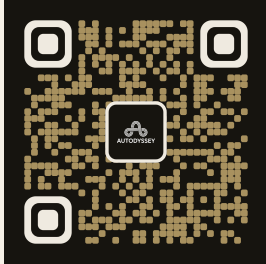
RECORD, BUILD, SHARE, ADD VALUE

Record what you found today, build the car through the years you hold it, share the parts of the record you choose, and add value for the car, the marque, and whoever holds the keys after you.

“Memory is a generous host and a poor archivist.”

THE KEEPER'S MANIFESTO · ARTICLE III

Write it down while it's fresh, then go and drive the car.



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