

Australian used car inspection checklist

What to check, what a problem looks like, and when to walk away.



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☐ **Tick it if it's fine. Cross it if it isn't, and note what you found so you can price it into your offer.**

! Safety critical: affects how safely it drives or protects you in a crash. Don't buy until a qualified mechanic has checked it.

\$ Negotiate: costs money to fix, from wear to major repairs. Get a quote and take it off the price.

0 Before you go

- ☐ **Get the VIN and rego** from the seller before you travel. A seller who won't share them is a red flag on its own.
- ☐ **Look up common problems** for that model and year, so you know where to look hardest.
- ☐ **Ask for the engine to be cold** when you arrive. Many faults (rattles, smoke, hard starting) only show on a cold start.
- ☐ **Go in daylight, in dry weather**, at the seller's home address. Rain and dim light hide paint and panel damage.
- ☐ **Bring:** licence, torch, paper towel, gloves, something to kneel on, a charged phone for photos, and a friend.

1 Exterior

- ☐ **Panels and paint.** Gaps between panels are even and the colour matches all round. Paint on rubber seals or trim means a respray, usually after a crash. **\$**
- ☐ **Hail and dents.** Look along the roof, bonnet and boot at a low angle to the light for small dimples. **\$**
- ☐ **Rust and bubbling** in wheel arches, sills, door bottoms, the boot lip and around the windscreen. **\$**
- ☐ **Windscreen and glass.** Chips or cracks, especially in the driver's view, can fail a roadworthy. **\$**
- ☐ **All lights work:** headlights (high and low), indicators, brake, reverse and fog lights. Water or silt inside a lens can mean flood damage. **\$**
- ☐ **Doors, bonnet and boot** open, shut and lock cleanly, with no sagging hinges. **\$**
- ☐ **VIN plate** (in a door frame or under the bonnet) is there, untouched, and matches the one you checked.

2 Under the bonnet

- ☐ **Touch the bonnet first.** Warm when you arrive? It's been run, possibly to hide a cold-start problem.
- ☐ **Engine oil** between the dipstick marks, brown not black or gritty. Milky gunk under the oil cap can mean a blown head gasket. **\$**

- ☐ **Coolant** (the coloured liquid in the see-through tank) is at the mark. Rusty brown or oily is bad news. **\$**
- ☐ **Brake fluid** (small tank at the back of the engine bay) is clear to light amber, not dark. **\$**
- ☐ **Rubber belts and hoses.** No cracks or fraying; hoses feel firm, not swollen. **\$**
- ☐ **Battery.** Clean terminals and a date sticker. Over 4–5 years old, it will likely need replacing soon. **\$**
- ☐ **Leaks and cleanliness.** Wet oil on the engine is a leak. A freshly degreased engine on an older car can be hiding one. **\$**
- ☐ **Cold start.** Starts easily and idles smoothly. A rattle in the first few seconds, blue smoke or white smoke that won't clear are all warning signs. **\$**
- ☐ **Electric or hybrid?** Skip the oil checks. Check the 12V battery and coolant, look for damaged charging-port pins, and ask for a battery health report or the range shown on a full charge. **\$**

3 Underbody

- ☐ **Tyre tread** is deeper than the small bars in the grooves (1.5 mm legal minimum). Wear on one edge only means the wheels are out of line. **\$**
- ☐ **Tyre age.** The 4-digit code on the side is the week and year made (2319 = week 23, 2019). Over ~6 years old: budget for new ones. **\$**
- ☐ **Serious rust** on the car's frame, floor or around the suspension. A little surface rust on the exhaust is normal. **!**
- ☐ **Crash repairs.** Bent or crumpled metal underneath, fresh welds, or new black coating in just one spot. **!**
- ☐ **Drips** under the car, and oil stains on the ground where it's normally parked. **\$**
- ☐ **Suspension.** Push down hard on each corner: it should bounce back once and settle. Oily shock absorbers are leaking. **\$**
- ☐ **Brakes.** Look through the wheels: deep grooves or a raised edge on the brake discs mean they're due. **\$**
- ☐ **4WD, ute or tow car?** Scraped underbody guards, sand or salt in gaps, and a well-used towbar all mean a harder life for the engine and gearbox. **\$**

! Stay safe. Never go under a car held up only by a jack, and never open the radiator or coolant cap on a hot engine. Keep hands, hair and loose clothing clear of fans and belts when the engine is running, and do checks under the bonnet with it switched off where you can. On the test drive, hold a current licence, confirm the car is registered and insured, obey road rules, and only brake hard when the road behind is clear. Meet in a safe, public-facing place, take someone with you, and don't carry large amounts of cash to a viewing.

4 Interior

- ☐ **Warning lights.** Key to "on": every dash light comes on, then goes out once the engine runs. An airbag, brake or engine light that stays on (or never lights) needs explaining.

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- ☐ **Flood signs.** Musty smell, damp carpet, silt under seats or in seatbelt tracks, rusty seat bolts.

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- ☐ **Wear matches the kilometres.** A worn wheel, pedals or driver's seat on a "low-km" car can mean a wound-back odometer.
- ☐ **Seatbelts** pull out fully, retract and latch, with no fraying.

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- ☐ **Air con** blows cold within a minute or two; heater gets hot; demister clears the screen.

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- ☐ **Electrics.** Windows, locks, screen, Bluetooth/CarPlay, reverse camera, sensors, horn, wipers.

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- ☐ **Keys.** How many, and do the remotes work? A replacement smart key can cost hundreds.

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- ☐ **Boot.** Spare wheel (or repair kit), jack and wheel brace present. Lift the floor for water or rust.

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5 Test drive

- ☐ **Gearbox.** Auto: smooth changes, and revs don't jump without the car speeding up. Manual: no grinding or crunching.

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- ☐ **Brakes.** Firm pedal; stops straight with no pulling, pulsing or grinding. Try one firm stop when it's safe.

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- ☐ **Engine.** Pulls smoothly with no hesitation. Ask your passenger to watch behind for smoke under hard acceleration.

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- ☐ **Steering.** Drives straight without pulling. Clicking on tight turns or a wobble at speed means worn parts.

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- ☐ **Suspension.** Over bumps: no clunks, knocks or floaty bouncing.

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- ☐ **Noises at speed.** At 80+ km/h, a hum that grows with speed is often a worn wheel bearing.

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- ☐ **Afterwards,** leave it running: check for new drips, steam, hot smells or a fan that never stops.

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6 Documentation

- ☐ **Seller's ID** matches the name and address on the rego papers.
- ☐ **One VIN everywhere:** rego papers, the VIN plate, the number stamped on the car, and your PPSR certificate.
- ☐ **PPSR is clear:** no money owing, not stolen, not written off. A "repairable" write-off is legal but worth less.
- ☐ **Recalls done.** Ask for proof, or ask a dealer to check the VIN. Open airbag recalls are a serious risk.

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- ☐ **Service history.** Logbook stamped on time, with receipts, and kilometres that climb steadily.

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- ☐ **Timing belt.** If it has one, when was it replaced? A snapped belt can wreck the engine.

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- ☐ **Rego and roadworthy.** Rego checked online; roadworthy supplied if your state requires one on sale (e.g. VIC, QLD).

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Guided, model-specific checks Built from that make, model and year's known faults, with help a tap away.	✓	✓	×
PPSR and government recall checks Rules out finance owing, write-offs and open recalls before you buy.	✓	×	×
Crosschecks over 3 million recalls and owner complaints Flags known issues for that model before you even see the car.	✓	×	×
Smart detection of issues from your photos and audio Snap a photo or record a noise and Shufti flags what might be wrong.	✓	×	×
Test drive route planning and navigation A route designed to surface issues a car park lap won't, with turn-by-turn directions.	✓	×	×
Instant report generation A shareable summary of every finding, ready the moment you finish.	✓	×	×
Negotiation copilot and repair cost estimates Estimates what each finding will cost to fix and what to say to the seller.	✓	×	×
Plain-English explanations, not jargon	✓	✓	✓
No booking or waiting required	✓	×	✓

Disclaimer. This checklist is general information only and is not professional, mechanical, legal or financial advice. It covers common checks, not every possible fault, and a car can pass every item here and still have serious problems. It is not a substitute for a pre-purchase inspection by a qualified mechanic, which we strongly recommend before you buy, especially for anything tagged **Safety critical**. Repair costs vary widely; get your own quotes. Roadworthy, registration and transfer rules differ by state, so check with your state road authority. Private sales generally don't come with the consumer guarantees that apply when you buy from a dealer. You use this checklist at your own risk and, to the extent permitted by law, Shufti accepts no liability for any loss, damage or injury arising from its use.