Used Ford Escape inspection checklist

What to check on a used Escape or Kuga, what a problem looks like, and when to walk away.

COVERS **Kuga TE** 2012–2013 | **Kuga TF** 2013–2016 | **Escape ZG** 2016–2019 | **Escape ZH** 2020–2025

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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. Best to have a mechanic check it before you buy.

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

1 Exterior

- ☐ **Rust.** Check wheel arches, sills and the bottom edge of the tailgate for bubbling paint or rust spots. Rust starting at a seam usually means water has been sitting there for years. Bubbling under paint near a seam points to trapped moisture. $
- ☐ **Windscreen.** Look across the windscreen for chips or cracks, and check the area behind the mirror where a camera may sit is undamaged. A camera-equipped screen costs far more to replace and needs recalibrating. $
- ☐ **Tailgate.** Open and close the tailgate, powered or manual, and check it moves smoothly and holds its position without sagging or dropping. A powered tailgate that stalls partway usually needs new struts or a motor. $
- ☐ **Towbar wiring.** If a towbar is fitted, check the wiring plug and socket for corrosion and test the trailer light connection if possible. Corroded pins mean trailer lights may fail without warning. $

2 Under the bonnet

- ☐ **Engine oil.** Pull the dipstick and check the oil sits between the marks and looks brown, not black or gritty. A low level between services can mean the engine is burning oil. $
- ☐ **Coolant level.** Check the coolant reservoir is at its mark and the coolant looks clean, not milky or oily on top. Coolant that drops without a visible leak can be seeping into the engine internally. $
- ☐ **Battery.** Look for a date sticker on the battery and check terminals are clean, free of white crust and tight. A battery over four or five years old is near the end of its life. $
- ☐ **Cold start.** Start the engine from cold and listen for it settling to a smooth idle within a few seconds, with no smoke or rattle. A rattle or puff of smoke on cold start can point to an engine problem. $

3 Underbody and wheels

- ☐ **Tyres.** Check all four tyres are above the wear bars, worn evenly and roughly matched in age and brand. AWD models need four matching tyres, as mismatched ones strain the AWD system. $
- ☐ **Exhaust shield.** Crouch down and look under the car for a missing or hanging heat shield around the exhaust. A rattling or missing shield points to corrosion or a previous knock. $
- ☐ **AWD driveline.** AWD: look underneath for oil weeping from the rear axle or driveshaft area. A leaking rear differential is an expensive repair on AWD models. $
- ☐ **Underbody rust.** Look under the car for rust on the floor or around the suspension mounts, and for bent metal or fresh welds. A patch of new coating among otherwise dirty metal can hide crash repair. !

4 Interior and electrics

- ☐ **Warning lights.** Turn the key or push start without starting the engine, and check every dash light comes on then goes out once running. An airbag or brake warning that stays lit needs explaining before you buy. !
- ☐ **Seatbelts.** Pull each seatbelt out fully and let it retract, checking it latches firmly and shows no fraying. Fraying webbing means the belt may not hold in a crash. !
- ☐ **Infotainment.** Turn on the touchscreen and check it responds, connects to Bluetooth and shows the reversing camera clearly. A screen that freezes or won't pair can be costly to replace or repair. $
- ☐ **PHEV charge port.** PHEV: open the charge port flap and check the latch and cover seal are intact with no cracking or water staining inside. A damaged seal lets water into the charging electronics. $

5 Test drive

- ☐ **Automatic gearbox shudder.** Drive from a stop and through normal gear changes, feeling for any shudder or vibration at low speed. Judder at low speed is a warning sign of an ageing automatic nearing failure. $
- ☐ **DCT clutch judder.** Dual-clutch: pull away gently from a stop several times and feel for shuddering or hesitation before it settles into drive. Shuddering on take-off often means contaminated clutch fluid or worn clutch packs. $
- ☐ **Brakes.** Brake firmly from a safe speed and check the car stops straight with a firm pedal and no grinding or squealing. A high-pitched squeal on every stop usually means pads or rotors need replacing soon. !

! **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.

5 Test drive continued

- [ ] **PHEV electric drive.** PHEV: pull away on electric power alone and feel for the petrol engine joining in smoothly, with no surging or warning lights. Jerky handover between electric and petrol power can mean a hybrid system fault. $

6 Documentation

- [ ] **Service history.** Check the logbook is stamped on time with matching receipts, with extra servicing if the car has towed or done dirt roads. Gaps in the history can hide deferred maintenance. $
- [ ] **PHEV battery warranty.** PHEV: ask the seller for any hybrid battery health reports and check how much of the separate battery warranty period remains.
- [ ] **Roadworthy certificate.** Confirm a current roadworthy certificate is supplied if your state requires one on sale, and that its details match the car.

What this guide can't tell you about the Escape or Kuga you're looking at

12+
recalls on Escapes and Kugas built since 2012*

7
common faults reported on Escapes and Kugas built since 2012*

18,888
owner complaints on Escapes and Kugas built since 2013*

Money owing, stolen or a write-off?
A tidy car can hide all three.

What's each fault worth?
Shufti's negotiation coach turns it into leverage.

A Shufti inspection covers all of that, plus:

- Guided checks for the exact car you're inspecting
- PPSR and government recall checks included
- Crosschecks 3M+ recalls and owner complaints
- Spots issues from your photos and audio
- Test drive routes with turn-by-turn navigation
- Negotiation coach with repair cost estimates

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* Shufti analysis, November 2026, of official recall notices, complaints lodged by vehicle owners with vehicle safety regulators, and independent reviews and owner forums. Faults are counted when two or more independent sources report them.

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