Used Ford Fiesta inspection checklist

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

COVERS **WS/WT** 2009–2013 **WZ** 2013–2019

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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

- ☐ **Panel fit.** Walk around and sight down each panel gap, checking they're even with matching paint across adjoining panels. Overspray on seals or trim points to earlier crash repair. Uneven gaps usually mean a panel has been refitted after a crash. $
- ☐ **Rust.** Check the sills, wheel arches, door bottoms and tailgate for bubbling paint or rust. This is a small hatch often left outside, so check carefully for surface rust starting at seams. Rust starting at the bottom of doors often means it's eating through from the inside out. $
- ☐ **Rear door seals.** Check the rubber seals around the rear doors and tailgate for cracking or gaps, and run a finger along the boot floor seam for dampness. Water tracking in here points to a leaking seal. A damp smell or stained boot carpet often means water has been getting in for a while. $
- ☐ **Alloy wheels.** Look closely at each alloy wheel rim for kerb scrapes, cracks or corrosion bubbling under the clear coat. A badly kerbed wheel may be bent rather than just cosmetically damaged. Cracked or pitted rims can leak air slowly and fail an inspection. $

2 Under the bonnet

- ☐ **Engine oil.** Pull the dipstick and check the oil sits between the marks and looks brown, not black or gritty. Black, gritty oil suggests servicing has been skipped. Oil above the top mark can point to a fuel leak into the oil. $
- ☐ **Coolant.** Check the coolant sits at the mark in the overflow bottle and is brightly coloured, not rusty or oily. Ask if it ever needs topping up between services. Oily coolant can mean a blown head gasket, a costly repair. $
- ☐ **Drive belt.** With the engine off, look at the drive belt for cracks, fraying or glazing, and check nearby hoses for bulges. A cracked belt is an easy thing for a seller to have missed. A failing belt can strand you without warning. $
- ☐ **Battery.** Look for clean terminals and a date sticker on the battery, and check it's securely mounted. A battery older than about four years may need replacing soon. Corroded terminals can cause intermittent electrical faults. $

3 Underbody and wheels

- ☐ **Tyre tread.** Check tread depth is well above the wear bars on all four tyres and wears evenly across each one. Uneven wear across the tyre can point to worn suspension parts. Wear on one edge only suggests the wheels are out of alignment. $
- ☐ **Underbody rust.** Look underneath at the floor and around the suspension mounts for rust, bent metal, fresh welds or a patch of new coating in one spot. Any of these can mean hidden crash damage. Fresh undercoating in just one spot is often used to hide repair work. !
- ☐ **Suspension.** Look at the shock absorbers for oily residue and bounce each corner of the car; it should settle quickly without bouncing more than once or twice. A corner that keeps bouncing means a worn shock absorber. An oily shock is leaking and won't control the car properly. $
- ☐ **Brake discs.** Look at the visible edge of each brake disc through the wheel for deep grooves or a raised lip. A heavily grooved disc means it's due for replacement. A raised outer lip means the disc is worn thinner than it should be. !

4 Interior and electrics

- ☐ **Warning lights.** Turn the key to "on" and check every dash light comes on then goes out once the engine is running. An airbag, brake or engine light that stays lit needs an explanation. A light that's been taped over or a bulb removed is a red flag. !
- ☐ **Seatbelts.** Pull each seatbelt out fully and let it retract, then click it into the buckle. It should move smoothly with no fraying or stiffness. A belt that doesn't retract properly may not hold you firmly in a crash. !
- ☐ **Boot carpet.** Lift the boot floor liner and check underneath for water, rust or a musty smell. This small hatch's boot seal area is worth checking closely for staining. A damp smell under the boot liner often means a seal is leaking. $
- ☐ **Air con.** Run the air con for a minute or two and check it blows cold air without a musty smell. A weak or warm flow can mean the system needs regassing. A musty smell often means the cabin filter is overdue or mould has built up. $

! **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

- [ ] **Automatic gearbox.** Powershift automatic: drive off from a standstill several times, including on a slight incline, feeling for shuddering as it takes up drive. Shifts through the gears should feel smooth and quick. Judder at low speed is a warning sign. $
- [ ] **Gearbox fault light.** Powershift automatic: drive for at least fifteen minutes in stop-start traffic, watching for a transmission warning light or hesitation to respond to the accelerator. Any loss of drive is serious. A flashing gearbox light or sudden power loss can mean a control fault. !
- [ ] **Manual clutch.** Manual: in a higher gear at low speed, floor the accelerator briefly and feel if the revs rise faster than the car's speed. A clutch that slips under load will need replacing soon. A slipping clutch is a sign the car has been driven hard. $
- [ ] **Brakes.** Brake firmly from speed on an empty road; the car should stop straight with no pulling, pulsing or grinding. A grinding noise means the pads have worn down to metal. Pulsing through the pedal means the discs are warped. !
- [ ] **Steering.** Check the car tracks straight with no wandering, and the steering feels consistent at all speeds without going heavy or light suddenly. Heavy steering or assistance cutting in and out points to a power steering fault. A whine from the steering under load is a warning sign. $

6 Documentation

- [ ] **Seller's ID.** Check the seller's ID matches the name on the rego papers, and that the VIN matches across the papers and the VIN plate on the car. Any mismatch needs an explanation before you pay anything.
- [ ] **Service history.** Look through the logbook for stamps on time with matching receipts, and check the odometer readings climb steadily with no gaps. Missing stamps or a sudden jump in kilometres can mean skipped services or odometer tampering. $
- [ ] **Roadworthy certificate.** Check the registration status online and confirm a current roadworthy certificate is supplied if your state requires one for a private sale. An unregistered car or missing certificate can mean extra cost and delay before you can drive it home. $

What this guide can't tell you about the Fiesta you're looking at

5+
recalls on Fiestas built since 2009*

3
common faults reported on Fiestas built since 2009*

4,326
owner complaints on Fiestas built 2011–2019*

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