Used Ford Focus inspection checklist

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

COVERS **LS/LT/LV** 2005–2011 | **LW/LZ** 2011–2018 | **SA** 2018 on

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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

- ☐ **Panels.** Walk around the body in good light and check for uneven panel gaps or mismatched paint colour, including overspray on rubber seals and trim. A colour that shifts slightly from panel to panel usually means a crash repair. $
- ☐ **Wheels.** Check all four alloy wheels for kerb scrapes, dents or cracks around the rim edge. A badly kerbed wheel can be bent and need replacing. $
- ☐ **Lights.** Check every exterior light works and look inside the lenses for condensation or fogging. Fogged-up lenses mean a failed seal letting water in. $
- ☐ **VIN plate.** Find the VIN plate in a door frame or under the bonnet and check it is undamaged and matches the papers. A re-stamped or scratched plate is a red flag for a rebuilt or stolen car.

2 Under the bonnet

- ☐ **Engine oil.** Pull the dipstick: oil should sit between the marks and look brown, not black or gritty. Ask how often it gets topped up. Black, gritty oil suggests the car hasn't been serviced on time. $
- ☐ **Coolant.** Check the coolant is at the marked level and a clean colour, with no rust or oil film, and no crust around the hoses. An oily sheen on the coolant can point to an internal engine leak. $
- ☐ **Engine leaks.** Look over the engine and surrounding pipes for wet oil patches. A freshly degreased bay on an older car can be hiding a leak. Fresh oily residue low down near the sump or turbo is a common leak spot. $
- ☐ **Cold start.** Ask to start the car from cold. It should fire quickly and idle smoothly, with no rattling or blue or white smoke that doesn't clear. A rattle on start-up that fades after a second or two points to a worn timing component. $

3 Underbody and wheels

- ☐ **Tyre tread.** Check tread depth on all four tyres is above the wear bars and even across each tyre. Uneven wear can mean the wheels are out of alignment. Wear concentrated on one edge of a tyre usually means a wheel alignment or suspension issue. $
- ☐ **Crash repairs.** Look under the sills, floor pans and wheel arches for bent metal, fresh welds or a patch of new black coating in one spot. A single shiny patch of underseal among otherwise dirty metal usually hides repair work. !
- ☐ **Brake discs.** Look through the wheel spokes at the discs for deep grooves, a raised lip on the edge, or a blue tint from overheating. A blue tint on a disc means it's been run very hot, possibly from hard driving or a sticking caliper. $
- ☐ **Exhaust.** Look along the exhaust for rust-through, hanging sections or missing rubber mounts, and check it isn't unusually loud at idle. An aftermarket system fitted for extra noise can fail a roadworthy or local noise rules. $

4 Interior and electrics

- ☐ **Warning lights.** Turn the key to "on" without starting: every dash light should come on, then go out once running. Any light that stays lit needs explaining. A warning light taped over or a bulb removed can hide a real fault. !
- ☐ **Seatbelts.** Pull each seatbelt out fully, let it retract, and check the buckle latches firmly with no fraying in the webbing. A belt that doesn't retract smoothly may have been in a crash. !
- ☐ **Infotainment.** Check the touchscreen responds, pairs with a phone over Bluetooth, and the reversing camera, if fitted, shows a clear image. A frozen or slow screen often needs a software update or new unit. $
- ☐ **Spare wheel.** Open the boot, lift the floor and check for a spare wheel or repair kit, the jack, and any water pooling underneath. Water under the boot liner often means a failed tailgate or tail-light seal. $

5 Test drive

- ☐ **Automatic gearbox.** Automatic: drive off gently in traffic and reverse up a slight slope, feeling for any judder, jerk or clunk during take-off, with no warning light appearing. Shuddering or hesitation pulling away at low speed can be costly to fix. $
- ☐ **Manual clutch.** Manual: in a higher gear at low speed, accelerate firmly and check the car gains speed in step with the revs, not behind them. Revs rising faster than road speed means the clutch is slipping and needs 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

- [ ] **Braking.** Brake firmly from a reasonable speed on a quiet road. The car should stop straight with a firm pedal and no pulling, pulsing or grinding. A pedal that sinks slowly to the floor at the lights can mean a brake fluid leak. !
- [ ] **Wheel bearings.** At a steady speed on a quiet road, listen for a humming or droning noise that changes pitch with speed and rises on gentle turns. A constant humming noise that gets louder with speed usually means a worn wheel bearing. $

6 Documentation

- [ ] **Seller's ID.** Check the seller's identification matches the name on the registration papers, and confirm the VIN matches across the papers and the VIN plate on the car. A mismatch between seller and papers can mean the car isn't really theirs to sell.
- [ ] **Service history.** Check the logbook or service records show stamps roughly on schedule, and ask whether any gearbox software or clutch updates have been done. Gaps in servicing make future faults harder to pin on wear versus neglect. $
- [ ] **Registration.** Check the registration is current using an online rego check, and ask for a roadworthy certificate if your state requires one at sale. A roadworthy that's missing or very old can hide costly faults the seller hasn't disclosed. $

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

7+
recalls on Focuses built since 2005*

21
common faults reported on Focuses built since 2005*

16,671
owner complaints on Focuses built 2012–2018*

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.

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* Shufti analysis, October 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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