

Used Ford Ranger inspection checklist

What to check on a used Ranger ute, 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** before you travel. A seller who won't share them is a red flag on its own.
- ☐ **Ask how it was used:** towing (how heavy, how often), off-road, beach, fleet or mine site. Heavy towing and mine work wear the gearbox, clutch and chassis faster.
- ☐ **Ask for a list of modifications** and their paperwork: lift kit, higher load limit (GVM upgrade), bigger tyres, bullbar, canopy, engine tune. Undocumented mods can make a ute unroadworthy or uninsurable.
- ☐ **Ask for the engine to be cold**, and bring a torch, gloves and something to lie on.

1 Exterior and tub

- ☐ **Chassis bend.** From side-on, the gap between the cab and the tub or tray should be even top to bottom. A gap narrower at the top points to a chassis bent by overloading or towing. **!**
- ☐ **Ride height.** Empty and on level ground, the rear shouldn't sit lower than the front. Tired rear springs are common on hard-worked utes. **\$**
- ☐ **Tub or tray.** Dents, cracks and rust at tie-downs and tailgate hinges. Lift any liner; it can hide damage. **\$**
- ☐ **Panels and paint.** Uneven gaps or paint on trim (crash repair), scrapes low on the body (off-roading), hail dimples on the roof and bonnet. **\$**
- ☐ **Bullbar** is made to work with the airbags and is solidly mounted. **!**
- ☐ **Mine-site signs:** holes for flag poles and beacons, reflective-tape residue, fleet numbers. Price in a hard life. **\$**

2 Under the bonnet

- ☐ **Coolant** at the mark. Needing regular top-ups can point to a known Ranger diesel fault with the exhaust cooler. **\$**
- ☐ **Oil level** not above the top mark, and not smelling of diesel. A rising level means diesel is getting in, often from short trips interrupting the exhaust filter's self-clean. **\$**

- ☐ **Soot.** Thick, oily black soot around the engine's air pipes. Ask if it's ever been cleaned out. **\$**
- ☐ **Turbo.** Oil inside the big air pipes, a loud siren-like whistle, or blue smoke. **\$**
- ☐ **Tunes and deletes.** An extra box wired into the engine, or the exhaust filter (DPF) removed. Removing emissions parts is illegal and can void insurance.
- ☐ **Water crossings.** Silt or mud in the air filter box or around the engine. **\$**
- ☐ **Extra wiring** for a second battery, lights or UHF radio is neat and fused. Messy wiring causes faults and fires. **\$**
- ☐ **Cold start.** Fires in a couple of seconds and settles to a smooth idle. Heavy knocking, rough running or smoke that won't clear needs a diesel mechanic. **\$**

3 Underbody and 4x4

- ☐ **Chassis** (the frame under the car). Kinks, cracks or fresh welds behind the cab and near the rear springs. **!**
- ☐ **Beach use.** Sand or salt packed into the frame rusts it from the inside. Surface rust is normal; flaking or holes are not. **!**
- ☐ **Rear springs.** Flat or upside-down curve, cracked leaves, worn mounts. Aftermarket springs need load-limit paperwork. **\$**
- ☐ **Front end.** Split rubber boots behind the wheels (grease sprayed around) and loose steering parts. Worse on lifted utes. **\$**
- ☐ **Oil leaks** from the axles and drive parts underneath. Oil inside a rear wheel can be a leaking seal or brake. **\$**
- ☐ **Underbody guards and towbar.** Dented guards show hard off-road use; a worn tow ball means lots of heavy towing. **\$**
- ☐ **Tyres** match the sticker in the door frame (or are engineered), wear evenly and are under ~6 years old. **\$**
- ☐ **Exhaust filter (DPF)** still fitted. Heavy soot at the tailpipe suggests it's damaged or removed. **\$**

! 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 and electrics

- ☐ **Warning lights.** Key to "on": engine, glow plug, ABS, airbag and 4WD lights come on, then go out once running. A DPF (exhaust filter) or engine light left on needs explaining.

!
- ☐ **Water leaks.** Damp carpet, a stained headlining or rusty seat bolts. Door and rear-window seal leaks are a frequently reported Ranger issue.

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- ☐ **Reversing camera** gives a clear picture. The wiring through the tailgate can fail on older Rangers.

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- ☐ **Wear matches the kilometres.** Seat bolster, steering wheel, carpet under mats; screw holes from removed radios.

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- ☐ **Air con** blows cold; heater gets hot. Count the keys and test the remotes.

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- ☐ **Spare wheel.** Lower it from under the tray: the mechanism can seize. Jack and wheel brace present.

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5 Test drive

- ☐ **Automatic gearbox.** No slipping or harsh clunks at low speed. A rumble-strip shudder at gentle throttle around 60–80 km/h is a warning sign. Ask about software updates.

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- ☐ **Manual.** In 4th at 50 km/h, floor it: if revs rise faster than speed, the clutch is slipping.

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- ☐ **Power and smoke.** Pulls strongly, with no flat spots, sudden power loss or black smoke.

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- ☐ **4WD.** On gravel or grass, select 4H then 4L: no clunks or grinding. Don't use part-time 4WD on dry bitumen.

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- ☐ **Steering and brakes.** No wandering at highway speed, or shaking through the brake pedal (common on towing utes).

!
- ☐ **Noises.** Clunks over bumps, a hum that grows with speed (wheel bearing), or a whine as you accelerate.

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- ☐ **Afterwards,** check for an exhaust filter (DPF) warning, a steady temperature gauge and new drips underneath. Ask how often the filter runs its self-clean.

\$

6 Documentation

- ☐ **Seller's ID** matches the rego papers, and the VIN matches on the papers, VIN plate and chassis.
- ☐ **Modification paperwork:** certificates for any load-limit (GVM) upgrade, lift or bigger tyres your state requires, and the insurer told.
- ☐ **Tunes and emissions.** Ask directly whether it's been tuned or had emissions parts removed, and get the answer in writing.
- ☐ **Service history.** Oil and fuel-filter changes on time. Water in diesel damages injectors; heavy towing should mean extra gearbox servicing.

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- ☐ **Warranty.** A newer Ranger may still be under Ford's new-car warranty. Check the start date and that servicing kept it valid.

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Plain-English explanations, not jargon	✓	✓	✓
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