Used Hyundai Elantra inspection checklist

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

COVERS **HD** 2006–2011 **MD** 2011–2015 **AD** 2016–2020

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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

- ☐ **Lights.** Turn on every light including indicators, reverse and brake lights and check each one works and the lenses are clear. Hazy or yellowed lenses cut how far the lights actually reach at night. $
- ☐ **VIN plate.** Find the VIN plate in the door frame or under the bonnet and check it is undamaged and matches the rego papers. A re-riveted or re-stamped plate can point to a stolen or rebuilt car.
- ☐ **Panel gaps.** Look along panel gaps, paint colour and trim seals for uneven gaps, mismatched colour or overspray. Overspray on rubber seals is an easy sign of hidden crash repair. $
- ☐ **Windscreen chips.** Check the windscreen in the driver's line of sight for chips or cracks and look along the edges for signs of past replacement. A chip right in the driver's sightline can fail a roadworthy inspection. $

2 Under the bonnet

- ☐ **Engine oil.** Pull the dipstick and check the oil sits between the marks and looks brown rather than black or gritty. A low level between services can mean the engine is steadily burning oil. $
- ☐ **Coolant.** Check the coolant reservoir is at the mark and the coolant looks clean, not rusty or milky. Milky coolant can mean oil and water are mixing inside the engine. $
- ☐ **Belts.** Look over the drive belts for cracking, fraying or glazing without touching anything while the engine runs. A perished belt can snap without warning and strand you on the road. $
- ☐ **Cold start knock.** Ask to start the car from cold and listen closely for the first 10-20 seconds before it's warmed up. A deep knocking sound that fades once oil pressure builds points to worn bearings inside the engine. !

3 Underbody and wheels

- ☐ **Structural rust.** Look under the car for rust on the floor or around the suspension mounts, checking for bare or flaking metal. Structural rust here can weaken the car in a crash and is costly to repair properly. !
- ☐ **Suspension bounce.** Push down hard on each corner of the car and let go; it should bounce back once and settle, not keep bouncing. Oily residue on a shock absorber body means it is leaking and losing control. $
- ☐ **Brake discs.** Look through the wheel spokes at the brake discs for deep grooves or a raised outer edge. A lip you can feel with a fingernail means the discs are thin and due for replacement. $
- ☐ **Tyre wear.** Check tread depth on all four tyres is above the wear bars and wears evenly across each tyre. Wear on one edge only usually means the wheels are out of alignment. $

4 Interior and electrics

- ☐ **Warning lights.** Turn the key to "on" without starting; every dash light should come on then go out once the engine is running. An airbag, brake or engine light that stays on needs an explanation before you buy. !
- ☐ **Seatbelts.** Pull each seatbelt out fully and let it retract, checking the webbing for fraying and the buckle for a solid latch. A belt that doesn't retract smoothly may not hold properly in a crash. !
- ☐ **Steering feel.** With the car stationary, turn the wheel lock to lock slowly and feel for any notchy or heavy spots, or a rattle from the column. A grinding or heavy patch can mean the electric power steering assist is failing. $
- ☐ **Electrics.** Test the infotainment screen, air con, windows, mirrors and central locking, and count how many keys you're given. A dead screen or missing key is a common and sometimes costly fix. $

5 Test drive

- ☐ **Automatic gearbox.** Automatic: accelerate gently from a stop and feel for any shudder, flare or harsh thump as the gearbox changes up. Hesitation or a flare in revs before a gear engages points to a shifting fault. $
- ☐ **Dual-clutch judder.** Dual-clutch: pull away from a stop several times, including on a slight incline, and feel for shuddering through the car. Judder at low speed is a warning sign of a worn dual-clutch transmission. $

! **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

- [ ] **Manual clutch.** Manual: pull away in first gear and check the clutch bites smoothly without slipping or a burning smell. A clutch that bites right at the top of the pedal travel is close to worn out. $
- [ ] **Braking stability.** Brake firmly from speed on a quiet road; the car should stop straight without pulling, pulsing or grinding. A pull to one side can mean a sticking caliper or uneven brake wear. !
- [ ] **Highway noise.** Drive at highway speed on a quiet stretch and listen for any humming or droning that changes with speed. A hum that grows louder with speed is often a worn wheel bearing. $

6 Documentation

- [ ] **Seller's ID.** Check the seller's photo ID matches the name shown on the rego papers, and that the VIN on those papers matches the VIN plate on the car.
- [ ] **Service history.** Ask for the logbook and receipts showing services done on time, and ask when the transmission fluid was last changed. A transmission fluid that's never been changed raises the risk of shift problems later. $
- [ ] **Registration status.** Check the car's registration status online to confirm it is current, and ask for a roadworthy certificate if your state requires one for sale. An unregistered or soon-to-expire car adds cost and delay before you can drive it home. $

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

5+
recalls on Elantras built since 2006*

8
common faults reported on Elantras built since 2006*

8,387
owner complaints on Elantras built 2007–2020*

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, 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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