

Used Kia Cerato inspection checklist

What to check on a used Cerato, including the GT, what a problem looks like, and when to walk away.



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COVERS **TD 2009–2013** **YD 2013–2018** **BD 2018–2024**

☐ **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.

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.
- ☐ **Know the gearbox:** manual, regular automatic or dual-clutch automatic (DCT, on turbo GT models). The DCT has its own test-drive checks on page 2.
- ☐ **Ask how it was used:** private, ex-rental, fleet or a learner's first car? For a GT, ask about tunes.
- ☐ **Ask for the engine to be cold,** go in daylight, and bring a torch, paper towel and a friend.

1 Exterior

- ☐ **Panels and paint.** Uneven gaps, mismatched colour or overspray on seals and trim mean crash repair. **\$**
- ☐ **Stone chips and hail.** Chips along the bonnet's leading edge and front bumper; dimples on the roof and bonnet in low light. **\$**
- ☐ **Bumpers and wheels.** Parking scrapes, cracked bumper tabs and kerbed alloys. A badly kerbed wheel can be bent. **\$**
- ☐ **Rust** on older cars: sills, wheel arches, door bottoms and the boot lip. **\$**
- ☐ **Lights and glass.** All lights work, no condensation inside; windscreen free of chips in the driver's view. **\$**
- ☐ **Doors and boot** open, shut and lock cleanly from the remote. **\$**
- ☐ **VIN plate** (in a door frame or under the bonnet) is there, untouched, and matches the papers.

2 Under the bonnet

- ☐ **Engine oil** between the dipstick marks, brown not black. Ask how often it's topped up. **\$**

- ☐ **Coolant** at the mark and brightly coloured. Rusty or oily coolant, or regular top-ups, needs a mechanic. **\$**
- ☐ **Brake fluid** (small tank at the back of the engine bay) is clear to light amber, not dark. **\$**
- ☐ **Belts, hoses and battery.** No cracked belts or swollen hoses; clean battery terminals and a date sticker. **\$**
- ☐ **Modifications.** Aftermarket air intakes or an extra box wired into the engine mean it's been tuned. Tunes can void the warranty and must be declared to insurers.
- ☐ **Leaks.** Wet oil on the engine is a leak. **\$**
- ☐ **Cold start.** Starts easily and settles to a smooth idle. Knocking that speeds up with revs needs a mechanic first. **\$**

3 Underbody and wheels

- ☐ **Tyre tread** above the wear bars, worn evenly. Wear on one edge only means the wheels are out of line. **\$**
- ☐ **Tyre age.** The 4-digit code on the side is the week and year made (2319 = week 23, 2019). Over ~6 years: budget for new ones. **\$**
- ☐ **Rust and crash repairs.** Rust on the floor or around the suspension; bent metal, fresh welds or new black coating in one spot. **!**
- ☐ **Drips** under the car, and oil stains where it's normally parked. **\$**
- ☐ **Suspension.** Push down on each corner: it should bounce back once and settle. Oily shock absorbers leak. **\$**
- ☐ **Brakes.** Deep grooves or a raised edge on the discs mean they're due. **\$**
- ☐ **Exhaust.** Aftermarket systems can be too loud to be legal; check for heavy rust or loose heat shields. **\$**

! 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": every dash light comes on, then goes out once running. An airbag, brake or engine light that stays on needs explaining.

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- ☐ **Wear matches the kilometres.** Steering wheel, gear knob, pedals and driver's seat bolster.

\$
- ☐ **Seatbelts** pull out fully, retract and latch, with no fraying.

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- ☐ **Air con** blows cold within a minute or two, without a musty smell; heater gets hot.

\$
- ☐ **Electrics.** Screen, Bluetooth/CarPlay, reversing camera, sensors, windows and mirrors all work.

\$
- ☐ **Rattles.** Listen for buzzing from the dash and doors on rough roads; it's often a loose trim clip.

\$
- ☐ **Boot.** Spare wheel or repair kit and jack present. Lift the floor for water or rust.

\$

5 Test drive

- ☐ **Dual-clutch auto (DCT).** Smooth take-off with no judder or hesitation, including crawling in traffic and reversing up a slope. Judder or hesitation at low speed is a warning sign.

\$
- ☐ **Regular auto.** Smooth changes with no slipping or thump into Drive or Reverse.

\$

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

\$
- ☐ **Engine.** Pulls smoothly with no stutter, hesitation or smoke.

\$
- ☐ **Steering.** Tracks straight. A clunk felt through the wheel on rough roads can be a worn steering part.

\$
- ☐ **Brakes.** Firm pedal; stops straight with no pulling, pulsing or grinding.

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- ☐ **Noises.** Knocks over bumps (worn suspension parts); a hum that grows with speed (wheel bearing).

\$
- ☐ **Afterwards,** check for new drips, a steady temperature gauge and no hot smells.

\$

6 Documentation

- ☐ **Seller's ID** matches the rego papers, and the VIN matches on the papers and VIN plate.
- ☐ **Service history.** Logbook stamped on time. Turbo engines and dual-clutch gearboxes don't forgive skipped services.

\$
- ☐ **Modifications in writing.** Tunes, lowering and exhausts, with engineering sign-off where your state requires it.
- ☐ **Warranty.** Kia's new-car warranty is long, so a newer Cerato may still be covered. Check the start date and that servicing kept it valid.
- ☐ **Rego and roadworthy.** Rego checked online; roadworthy supplied if your state requires one on sale.

\$

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

5+
recalls on Ceratos built since 2009*

17
common faults reported on Ceratos built since 2009*

3,645
owner complaints on Ceratos (also sold as the Forte) built since 2010*

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