Used Nissan Pathfinder inspection checklist

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

COVERS **R51** 2005–2013 | **R52** 2013–2022 | **R53** 2023 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

- ☐ **Towbar mount.** Check any fitted towbar is bolted solidly with no rust or cracks around the mounting points under the rear bumper. A loose or rusted towbar mount suggests heavy or unapproved towing use. $
- ☐ **Bullbar fitment.** If a bullbar is fitted, check it's bolted on properly and hasn't been mounted over the airbag or sensor housings. A poorly fitted bullbar can stop the airbags or crash sensors working correctly. !
- ☐ **Panel gaps.** Walk around the body checking panel gaps are even and paint colour matches across every panel and door jamb. Mismatched colour or uneven gaps usually point to a crash repair. $
- ☐ **Roof racks.** If roof racks or a roof box mount are fitted, check the roof skin around the mounting feet for cracking, dents or rust. Cracked paint around the feet suggests a heavy load has been carried regularly. $

2 Under the bonnet

- ☐ **Engine oil.** Pull the dipstick and check the oil sits between the marks and looks brown and clean, not black, gritty or sludgy. Thick sludgy oil clinging to the dipstick points to carbon and sludge build-up inside the engine. $
- ☐ **Coolant.** Check the coolant in the overflow bottle sits at the mark and looks a clean colour, not rusty, milky or oily. Oily or discoloured coolant can mean an internal leak that's expensive to fix. $
- ☐ **Transmission fluid.** Check the automatic or CVT fluid level and colour if a dipstick or sight glass is provided, looking for a clean red colour rather than brown or burnt-smelling fluid. Dark or burnt-smelling fluid suggests the transmission has been run hot or neglected. $
- ☐ **Diesel turbo pipes.** Diesel: look inside the large rubber air pipes near the turbo for oily residue, and listen for a loud whistle or watch for blue smoke on startup. Oily pipes or a screaming whistle point to a tired turbo. $
- ☐ **Cold start.** Ask to start the engine from cold and check it fires promptly, settles into a smooth idle, and shows no rattle or smoke. A persistent rattle on every cold start points to timing chain wear. $

3 Underbody and wheels

- ☐ **Chassis rust.** Crouch down and check the chassis rails, especially near the towbar and rear suspension, for rust, kinks or fresh welds. Flaking rust or fresh welds usually mean a serious corrosion or impact repair. !
- ☐ **4WD transfer case.** Part-time 4WD: look underneath at the transfer case and driveshafts for oil weeping onto the metal casing. A fresh oil film here suggests a seal leak that needs attention. $
- ☐ **Tyres.** Check all four tyres, including the spare, wear evenly, match the size on the door-frame sticker, and aren't more than about six years old by the sidewall date code. AWD models need matching tyres on all four corners to avoid straining the drivetrain. $
- ☐ **Tow ball wear.** Check the tow ball for scoring or an oval shape rather than perfectly round. A worn tow ball points to a lot of heavy trailer or caravan towing. $

4 Interior and electrics

- ☐ **Warning lights.** Turn the key or press start without the engine running and check the engine, ABS, airbag and 4WD lights all come on, then go out once running. A light that stays on needs an explanation before you buy. !
- ☐ **Infotainment screen.** Turn on the infotainment screen and use it for a few minutes, checking it doesn't freeze, go blank or restart on its own. A screen that reboots or freezes points to a software or hardware fault worth asking about. $
- ☐ **Third-row seats.** Fold and unfold the third-row seats and check they latch and release properly, with belts that work. Stiff folding or worn trim points to heavy family use. $
- ☐ **Seatbelts.** Pull each seatbelt out fully and let it retract, checking it latches firmly with no fraying or cuts in the webbing. A belt that doesn't retract smoothly or snags could fail to hold you in a crash. !

5 Test drive

- ☐ **CVT behaviour.** CVT models: accelerate firmly from a stop and feel for a shudder, droning noise or flare in revs that doesn't match road speed. Judder at low speed is a warning sign of a failing CVT. $

! **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

- [ ] **Automatic gearbox shifts.** On automatic models, drive through a range of speeds and check gear changes are smooth, not harsh, jerky or hesitant. Harsh or hunting gear changes point to a transmission needing attention. $
- [ ] **4WD engagement.** Part-time 4WD: on gravel or grass, engage 4WD and check it locks in without clunking and any warning light stops flashing. A light that keeps flashing means the system hasn't properly engaged. $
- [ ] **Braking feel.** Brake firmly from speed on a quiet road and feel for shaking through the pedal or the car pulling to one side. Shaking under braking often means warped rotors, which is worth checking before you buy. !
- [ ] **Steering tracking.** At highway speed, check the car tracks straight without wandering or needing constant correction. Wandering at speed can mean worn steering or suspension parts. !

6 Documentation

- [ ] **Modification paperwork.** Ask for certificates for any towbar, suspension or load-rating changes, and check your state and insurer were told about them.
- [ ] **Service history.** Check the logbook or receipts show oil and filter changes on time, with extra transmission servicing if the car has towed heavily. Gaps in servicing are a strong bargaining point. $

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

7+
recalls on Pathfinders built since 2005*

11
common faults reported on Pathfinders built since 2005*

7,936
owner complaints on Pathfinders built since 2005*

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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