

Used Tesla Model 3 inspection checklist

What to check on a used Model 3, what a problem looks like, and when to walk away.

COVERS

Original 2019–2023

Highland 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.

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 version:** rear-wheel drive, Long Range or Performance. Their battery sizes and new-car range differ, so look up the range it had new.
- ☐ **Ask the seller to charge it to 100%** just before you arrive, so you can read the full range on the screen.
- ☐ **Ask how it was charged and used:** home charging, mostly fast chargers, rideshare or fleet? Bring a torch and a friend.

1 Exterior

- ☐ **Panels and paint.** Uneven gaps, mismatched colour or overspray on seals and trim mean crash repair. **\$**
- ☐ **Glass roof.** No cracks, chips or water marks inside. The roof is large glass panels; a replacement is costly. **\$**
- ☐ **Hail and dents.** Look along the bonnet, boot and doors at a low angle to the light. **\$**
- ☐ **Wheels.** Kerbed alloys or missing wheel covers. A badly kerbed wheel can be bent, causing vibration. **\$**
- ☐ **Cameras and lights.** Camera lenses on the doors, pillars, bumper and behind the mirror are clean and uncracked; all lights work. **\$**
- ☐ **Charge port.** The flap opens and shuts; the socket is clean, dry and has no burn marks or bent pins. **\$**
- ☐ **VIN plate** (in a door frame or under the windscreen) is there, untouched, and matches the papers.

2 Under the bonnet

- ☐ **Front boot (under the bonnet).** Even panel gaps, untouched bolts and no paint on seals. This is the crumple zone; fresh welds or new parts mean a front-end crash. **!**

- ☐ **Water.** Front boot, rear boot and the well under the boot floor are dry, with no rust or tide marks. Tide marks can mean flood damage. **\$**
- ☐ **Small 12V battery.** Ask when it was last replaced. An alert to replace it means it's due; a flat one can stop the car waking up. **\$**
- ☐ **Fluids.** Washer fluid is topped up. Ask when the brake fluid was last checked or changed. **\$**
- ☐ **Rear boot.** Floor, latch and seals undamaged; the boot opens and closes cleanly from the screen and button. **\$**
- ☐ **Repair kit.** There's no spare wheel; check the tyre repair kit or inflator is there. **\$**

3 Underbody and wheels

- ☐ **Underfloor battery.** Look under the sills and floor for dents, deep scrapes, cracked or missing covers, or any leak. Damage here needs a Tesla or EV specialist check before you buy. **\$**
- ☐ **Lifting points.** The jacking points behind each wheel aren't crushed or cracked. Jacking in the wrong place can damage the battery. **\$**
- ☐ **Tyre tread** above the wear bars, worn evenly. EVs are heavy and quick; uneven wear 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.** Bent metal, fresh welds or new black coating in one spot; damage near the suspension mounts. **!**
- ☐ **Suspension.** Push down on each corner: it should bounce back once and settle. Oily shock absorbers leak. **\$**
- ☐ **Brakes.** Discs not heavily rusted or grooved. An EV slows itself mostly with its motor, so brakes can rust from too little use. **\$**

! 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

- ☐ Alerts. Open the alerts on the screen: no airbag, brake, steering, battery or drive-system messages. Ask about any alert you see.!
- ☐ Battery range. At 100%, compare the range shown with the range this version had new. A big gap can mean a worn battery; ask for a battery health report.\$
- ☐ Touchscreen starts up, responds without lag or freezing, with no flicker or dead patches. Almost every control is on the screen.\$
- ☐ Seatbelts pull out fully, retract and latch, with no fraying.!
- ☐ Wear matches the kilometres. Steering wheel, seat bolsters, armrests and rear seats. Rideshare cars wear the rear seats and door cards.\$
- ☐ Air con and heating blow cold and hot, without a musty smell.\$
- ☐ Keys and electrics. Key cards and phone key work; windows, mirrors, cameras and seat heaters work.\$

5 Test drive

- ☐ Power. Smooth, strong pull with no stutter, power warnings or sudden loss of power.\$
- ☐ Drive noises. A faint hum is normal. A loud whine, grinding or clunk as you speed up or slow down needs a specialist.\$
- ☐ Slowing down. Lift off the accelerator: the car slows smoothly and steadily, with no jerks.\$

- ☐ Brakes. Firm pedal; stops straight with no pulling, pulsing or grinding.!
- ☐ Steering and suspension. Drives straight; no knocks, creaks or clunks over bumps. A hum that grows with speed is often a wheel bearing.\$
- ☐ Charging. Plug it in at a charger: it starts charging, the port light turns green and no error shows.\$
- ☐ Afterwards, check for new alerts and that the range dropped about as much as the distance driven.\$

6 Documentation

- ☐ Seller's ID matches the rego papers, and the VIN matches on the papers and the car.
- ☐ Service and battery records. Service invoices and any battery or drive-unit repairs. The seller can show past service visits in their Tesla app.\$
- ☐ Battery warranty. The battery and drive unit have their own warranty, longer than the basic one, with a km limit. Check the start date.
- ☐ Account transfer. The seller must remove the car from their Tesla account at handover, or they can still unlock and track it.
- ☐ Charging gear. The portable charging cable and adapters are included and work.\$
- ☐ Paid features. Check which software upgrades are listed on the car, and confirm with Tesla which ones carry over to you.

What this guide can't tell you about the Model 3 you're looking at

13+

recalls on Model 3s built since 2019*

15

common faults reported on Model 3s built since 2019*

5,725

owner complaints on Model 3s built since 2019*

Money owing, stolen or a write-off?

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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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