

Used Toyota Prado inspection checklist

What to check on a used Prado 4x4, what a problem looks like, and when to walk away.



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COVERS **150 Series 2009–2024** **250 Series 2024 on**

☐ **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.
- ☐ **Ask how it was used:** towing a caravan (how heavy, how far), outback trips, beach driving or school runs. Heavy towing and corrugated roads wear a Prado much faster than suburban kilometres.
- ☐ **Ask for a list of modifications** and their paperwork: lift kit, higher load limit (GVM upgrade), bigger tyres, bullbar, roof rack, long-range tank, engine tune.
- ☐ **Ask for the engine to be cold**, and bring a torch, gloves and something to lie on.

1 Exterior

- ☐ **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. **\$**
- ☐ **Side-opening rear door.** It shouldn't sag, and should close cleanly. The spare wheel's weight on the door wears the hinges, especially with a bigger tyre fitted. **\$**
- ☐ **Roof and rack.** Dents, cracked paint or leaks around rack mounts. An overloaded roof rack on corrugations can crack the roof. **\$**
- ☐ **Bullbar** is made to work with the airbags and is solidly mounted. **!**
- ☐ **Outback wear.** Stone-chipped paint and windscreen, cracked lights, red dust in door seals and the engine bay. **\$**
- ☐ **VIN plate** (in a door frame or under the bonnet) is there, untouched, and matches the papers.

2 Under the bonnet

- ☐ **Coolant** at the mark and a clean pink colour. Rusty or oily coolant, or regular top-ups, needs a mechanic. **\$**
- ☐ **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, fridge, 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, especially near the towbar and rear suspension. **!**
- ☐ **Beach use.** Sand or salt packed into the frame rusts it from the inside. Surface rust is normal; flaking or holes are not. **!**
- ☐ **Suspension.** Oily shock absorbers, sagging rear, cracked mounts. Higher-spec models with linked hydraulic suspension (KDSS): look for oily lines near the front and rear. **\$**
- ☐ **Front end.** Split rubber boots behind the wheels (grease sprayed around) and loose steering parts. Worse on lifted 4x4s. **\$**
- ☐ **Oil leaks** from the axles, transfer case and drive parts underneath. **\$**
- ☐ **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. Check the spare too. **\$**
- ☐ **Exhaust filter (DPF)** still fitted, with no white smoke or heavy soot. Ask about any exhaust filter repairs. **\$**

! **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, ABS, airbag and 4WD lights come on, then go out once running. An exhaust filter (DPF) or engine light that stays on needs explaining. 
- ☐ **Water and dust.** Damp carpet, a stained headlining or fine dust inside. Check holes drilled for racks, a snorkel or aerials. 
- ☐ **Third-row seats** (if fitted) fold and lock; belts work. Worn cargo area and seat trim show a hard family life. 
- ☐ **Seatbelts** pull out fully, retract and latch, with no fraying. 
- ☐ **Wear matches the kilometres.** Seat bolster, steering wheel, carpet under mats; screw holes from removed radios. 
- ☐ **Air con** blows cold front and rear; heater gets hot. Count the keys and test the remotes. 

5 Test drive

- ☐ **Automatic gearbox.** Smooth changes, no slipping or thump into gear. Towing wears autos; ask when the fluid was changed. 
- ☐ **Power and smoke.** Pulls strongly, with no flat spots, sudden power loss or black smoke. 
- ☐ **4WD.** On gravel or grass, lock the centre diff and select low range: no clunks, and the 4WD lights stop flashing. A light that keeps flashing means it hasn't engaged. 

- ☐ **Steering and brakes.** No wandering at highway speed, or shaking through the brake pedal (common on towing 4x4s). 
- ☐ **Body roll and knocks.** Leans evenly both ways in corners; no clunks over bumps. Uneven lean can point to a KDSS fault. 
- ☐ **Noises.** A hum that grows with speed (wheel bearing), or a whine as you accelerate. 
- ☐ **Afterwards,** check for an exhaust filter (DPF) warning, a steady temperature gauge and new drips underneath. 

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. Heavy towing should mean extra gearbox and diff servicing. 
- ☐ **Warranty.** A newer Prado may still be under Toyota's new-car warranty. Check the start date and that servicing kept it valid.

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

2+

recalls on Prados built since 2009*

15

common faults reported on Prados built since 2009*

154

owner complaints on the Prado's Lexus twin, the GX, since 2010*

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