

Used Toyota RAV4 inspection checklist

What to check on a used RAV4, petrol or hybrid, what a problem looks like, and when to walk away.



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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. Don't buy until a qualified mechanic has checked it.

\$ 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 what you're looking at:** petrol, diesel or hybrid; 2WD or AWD. Hybrid and AWD checks below are marked.
- ☐ **Ask how it was used:** towing, dirt roads, ex-rental or rideshare? RAV4 hybrids are popular rideshare cars: high kilometres, worn rear seats.
- ☐ **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. **\$**
- ☐ **Hail and dents.** Look along the roof, bonnet and tailgate at a low angle to the light. **\$**
- ☐ **Rust** on older cars: wheel arches, sills and the bottom edge of the tailgate. **\$**
- ☐ **Side-opening tailgate** (older RAV4s with the spare on the door): it shouldn't sag, and should close cleanly. The spare's weight wears the hinges. **\$**
- ☐ **Lights, glass and sensors.** All lights work; windscreen free of chips; the windscreen camera area and front sensors aren't damaged. **\$**
- ☐ **Dirt-road wear.** Stone-chipped lower doors and scraped bumpers and sills; roof-rack marks. **\$**
- ☐ **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. Some older RAV4 petrol engines are known to burn oil; a low level between services is a clue. **\$**

- ☐ **Coolant** at the mark and a clean pink colour. Pink crusty residue or drips at the front of the engine can mean a leaking water pump. **\$**
- ☐ **Hybrid: second coolant tank.** Hybrids have a separate coolant tank for the hybrid system. Check it's at the mark too. **\$**
- ☐ **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. A weak 12V battery can stop a hybrid reaching "READY". **\$**
- ☐ **Leaks.** Wet oil on the engine is a leak. A freshly degreased engine on an older car can be hiding one. **\$**
- ☐ **Cold start.** Petrol or diesel: starts easily and idles smoothly, no rattle or smoke. Hybrid: press start and "READY" should show; the engine may start and stop by itself, which is normal. **\$**

3 Underbody and wheels

- ☐ **AWD:** no oil leaking from the rear axle or drive parts underneath. **\$**
- ☐ **Tyres** above the wear bars, worn evenly and under ~6 years old. AWD models need four matching tyres; mismatched ones strain the AWD system. **\$**
- ☐ **Wheels.** Kerbed or cracked alloys. A badly kerbed wheel can be bent, causing vibration. **\$**
- ☐ **Rust and crash repairs.** Rust on the floor or around the suspension; bent metal, fresh welds or new black coating in one spot. **!**
- ☐ **Scrapes and drips.** Dents underneath from dirt roads; drips where it's normally parked. **\$**
- ☐ **Suspension and brakes.** Oily shock absorbers; deep grooves or a raised edge on the brake discs. **\$**
- ☐ **Exhaust.** Heavy rust, holes or loose heat shields that rattle. **\$**

! 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, engine or hybrid warning that stays on needs explaining.

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- ☐ **Hybrid: battery cooling vent** near the rear seat is clear of dust, pet hair and clutter. Blocked vents are a commonly reported cause of hybrid battery trouble.

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- ☐ **Wear matches the kilometres.** Steering wheel, pedals and driver's seat. Rideshare cars also wear the rear seats, door handles and belts.

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

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- ☐ **Cargo area.** Scratches, pet damage, water under the floor; rear seats fold and lock; power tailgate (if fitted) works.

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- ☐ **Electrics.** Screen, Bluetooth/CarPlay, reversing camera, sensors, windows and sunroof. Count the keys.

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- ☐ **Air con** blows cold within a minute or two, without a musty smell. A damp headlining can mean blocked sunroof drains.

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5 Test drive

- ☐ **Automatic.** Pulls away smoothly with no jerk, shudder, slipping or hesitation, and no whine that grows with speed.

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- ☐ **Hybrid.** Moves off on electric power at low speed, and the engine joins in smoothly with no surges, cut-outs or warnings.

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- ☐ **AWD.** In a car park, drive slowly on full lock both ways: no clunking or juddering.

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

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- ☐ **Steering and suspension.** Drives straight; no knocks over bumps or clunks through the wheel.

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- ☐ **Noises at speed.** A hum that grows with speed is often a worn wheel bearing.

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

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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, with receipts. Towing or dirt-road use should mean extra servicing.

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- ☐ **Hybrid battery health checks.** Ask for any reports. Toyota's extended battery warranty depends on them.

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- ☐ **Fleet or rideshare records.** Ex-fleet cars are often well maintained; ask for the log.

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- ☐ **Warranty.** A newer RAV4 may still be under Toyota's new-car warranty. 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.

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Instant report generation A shareable summary of every finding, ready the moment you finish.	✓	×	×
Negotiation copilot and repair cost estimates Estimates what each finding will cost to fix and what to say to the seller.	✓	×	×
Plain-English explanations, not jargon	✓	✓	✓
No booking or waiting required	✓	×	✓

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