

Used Volkswagen Golf inspection checklist

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



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COVERS **Mk6 2009–2013** **Mk7 2013–2021** **Mk8 2021 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.
- ☐ **Know the gearbox:** manual, regular automatic or dual-clutch automatic (DSG). Most Golf autos are DSGs; they have their own test-drive checks on page 2.
- ☐ **Ask how it was used:** private, ex-rental or fleet? For a GTI or R, ask about track days and 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, a scraped front lip on lowered cars, and kerbed alloys. A badly kerbed wheel can be bent. **\$**
- ☐ **Lights and glass.** All lights work, no condensation inside; windscreen free of chips in the driver's view. **\$**
- ☐ **Doors, tailgate and fuel flap** open, shut and lock cleanly from the remote; mirrors fold. **\$**
- ☐ **VIN plate** (in a door frame or under the bonnet) is there, untouched, and matches the papers.

2 Under the bonnet

- ☐ **Engine oil** at the right level, brown not black. Ask how often it's topped up. **\$**
- ☐ **Coolant** at the mark and a clean pink or purple. Pink crust or drips around the engine are a coolant-leak sign. **\$**

☐ **Brake fluid** (small tank at the back of the engine bay) is clear to light amber. On a GTI or R, dark fluid can mean hard track use. **\$**

☐ **Hoses and battery.** No swollen or oily hoses; clean battery terminals and a date sticker. **\$**

☐ **Modifications.** Aftermarket air intakes, a loud "whoosh" valve 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 or turbo pipes is a leak. **\$**

☐ **Cold start.** Starts easily and settles to a smooth idle. A rattle for the first few seconds needs a mechanic. **\$**

3 Underbody and wheels

☐ **Tyre tread** above the wear bars, worn evenly. Heavy inside-edge wear is common on lowered cars and 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 to the floor from speed humps. **!**

☐ **Drips** under the car, and oil stains where it's normally parked. **\$**

☐ **Suspension.** Oily shock absorbers, or cut or aftermarket springs. Lowered cars need to meet your state's ride-height rules. **\$**

☐ **Brakes.** Deep grooves, a raised edge or blue-tinged discs (overheated from hard driving). **\$**

☐ **Exhaust.** Aftermarket systems can be too loud to be legal. Diesel: heavy soot can mean a damaged or removed exhaust filter (DPF). **\$**

! 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 gearbox warning that stays on needs explaining. 
- ☐ **Screen and controls** respond without freezing, lag or restarting. 
- ☐ **Wear matches the kilometres.** Steering wheel, gear knob, pedals and driver's seat bolster. 
- ☐ **Seatbelts** pull out fully, retract and latch, with no fraying. 
- ☐ **Air con** blows cold within a minute or two, without a musty smell; heater gets hot. 
- ☐ **Electrics.** Bluetooth/CarPlay, reversing camera, sensors, windows and sunroof. Count the keys. 
- ☐ **Boot.** Spare wheel or repair kit and jack present. Lift the floor for water. 

5 Test drive

- ☐ **Dual-clutch auto (DSG).** Smooth take-off with no judder, jerk or clunk, including crawling in traffic and reversing up a slope. No gearbox warning. 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, sudden power loss or smoke. 
- ☐ **Brakes.** Firm pedal; stops straight with no pulling, pulsing or grinding. 
- ☐ **Steering and suspension.** Tracks straight; no knocks over bumps or clunks through the wheel. 
- ☐ **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. Ask whether the DSG has had its scheduled fluid changes, where needed, and any repairs. 
- ☐ **Modifications in writing.** Tunes, lowering and exhausts, with engineering sign-off where your state requires it.
- ☐ **Timing belt.** Some Golf engines, including the diesels, use one. Ask when it was last replaced. 
- ☐ **Warranty.** A newer Golf may still be under Volkswagen'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. 

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

19+

recalls on Golfs built since 2009*

21

common faults reported on Golfs built since 2009*

2,435

owner complaints on Golfs built since 2010*

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