

Used Volkswagen Polo inspection checklist

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



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COVERS **6R 2010–2017** **AW 2018 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 what you're looking at:** petrol or diesel; manual or dual-clutch auto (DSG). Diesel, DSG and GTI checks below are marked.
- ☐ **Ask how it was used:** first car, city commuting or long country runs? For a GTI, 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. **\$**
- ☐ **Parking knocks.** Scraped bumper corners, dented doors and scuffed mirrors. Check behind small dents for bent metal. **\$**
- ☐ **Hail and dents.** Look along the roof and bonnet at a low angle to the light for small dimples. **\$**
- ☐ **Wheels.** Kerbed alloys. Low-profile tyres on a GTI make kerbed and bent wheels more likely. **\$**
- ☐ **Lights and glass.** All lights work, no condensation inside; windscreen free of chips in the driver's view. **\$**
- ☐ **Doors and tailgate** open, shut and lock cleanly, with the remote and the key. **\$**
- ☐ **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 marks, brown not black. Ask how often it's topped up; turbo engines don't forgive low or old oil. **\$**

☐ **Diesel: oil level** not above the top mark, and not smelling of diesel. A rising level usually comes from short trips interrupting the exhaust filter's self-clean. **\$**

☐ **Coolant** at the mark and a clean pink or purple colour. Rusty or oily coolant, or regular top-ups, needs a mechanic. **\$**

☐ **Brake fluid** (small tank at the back of the engine bay) is clear to light amber, not dark. **\$**

☐ **Leaks.** Wet oil on the engine or turbo pipes is a leak. **\$**

☐ **GTI: modifications.** Aftermarket intake, a loud "whoosh" valve or an extra box wired into the engine mean it's been tuned.

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

3 Underbody and wheels

☐ **Tyre tread** above the wear bars, worn evenly. Wear on one edge only means the wheels are out of line, often from hitting kerbs. **\$**

☐ **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.** Rust on the floor or around the suspension; bent metal, fresh welds or new black coating in one spot. **!**

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

☐ **Suspension.** Push down on each corner: it should bounce back once and settle. Oily shock absorbers leak. **\$**

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

☐ **Exhaust.** Heavy rust, holes or loose heat shields. 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.

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- ☐ **Water leaks.** Damp carpet, a wet boot floor or a stained headlining. Lift the boot floor.

\$
- ☐ **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.** Screen, Bluetooth/CarPlay, reversing camera, windows and mirrors. Count the keys.

\$

5 Test drive

- ☐ **Dual-clutch auto (DSG).** Smooth take-off with no judder or hesitation, including crawling in traffic and reversing up a slope. Judder, clunks or a flashing gear display are warning signs.

\$
- ☐ **Manual.** In 4th at 50 km/h, floor it: if revs rise faster than speed, the clutch is slipping. Gears go in without crunching.

\$
- ☐ **Engine.** Pulls cleanly with no stutter, hesitation or smoke, and no sudden power loss. Diesel: ask how often the exhaust filter light has come on.

\$

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

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- ☐ **Steering and suspension.** Drives straight; no knocks over bumps. A hum that grows with speed is often a wheel bearing.

\$
- ☐ **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, with receipts. Turbo engines and dual-clutch gearboxes don't forgive skipped services.

\$
- ☐ **Gearbox and engine work.** Ask whether either has been repaired or replaced, and get the paperwork.

\$
- ☐ **Modifications in writing.** Tunes, lowering and exhausts, with engineering sign-off where your state requires it.
- ☐ **Warranty.** A newer Polo 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 Polo you're looking at

12+

recalls on Polos built since 2010*

14

common faults reported on Polos built since 2010*

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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