Used Volkswagen Transporter inspection checklist

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

COVERS **T5** 2004–2015 **T6** 2015–2019 **T6.1** 2019–2024

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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.

1 Exterior

- ☐ **Panel gaps.** Walk around the van checking panel gaps are even and paint colour matches across panels, especially around the front bumper and guards. Mismatched paint or wide gaps usually means a past crash repair. $
- ☐ **Sliding door seal.** Check the rubber seal around the sliding door for cracking or gaps, and feel inside the door card for damp carpet. A soft or stained door trim means water has been getting past the seal. $
- ☐ **Sliding door track.** Slide the side door open and shut by hand several times and check it runs smoothly, latching first time without dropping or binding. Dragging or sagging on the track means worn rollers. $
- ☐ **Body rust.** Look closely at the wheel arches, sills, door bottoms and roof gutter for bubbling paint or rust, including around any drilled holes for racks or ladders. Bubbles near drilled holes often mean long-term water ingress. $

2 Under the bonnet

- ☐ **Engine oil.** Pull the dipstick and check the oil sits between the marks and looks honey to light brown, not black and gritty. A milky film on the cap can point to a coolant leak into the oil. $
- ☐ **Coolant level.** Check the coolant reservoir is at the mark and the coolant looks clean, not rusty or oily. Diesel: a steadily dropping level can point to a leaking cooler in the exhaust gas recirculation system. $
- ☐ **Drivebelt condition.** With the engine off, look at the auxiliary drivebelt for cracking, fraying or a shiny glazed surface. A belt that squeals on cold start or looks glazed is close to failing. $
- ☐ **Extra wiring.** If a second battery, fridge, inverter or extra lighting has been fitted, check the wiring is neatly run and properly fused rather than loose and spliced. Messy wiring in a work van can cause electrical faults or fires. $
- ☐ **Cold start.** Ask to start the van from cold; it should fire within a couple of seconds and settle into a smooth idle. Heavy diesel knock or smoke that doesn't clear in a minute needs a mechanic's look. $

3 Underbody and wheels

- ☐ **Chassis rust.** Crouch down and look along the floor pan and chassis rails for rust, bent metal or fresh welds suggesting a past repair. Fresh underseal in one patch alone can be hiding damage. !
- ☐ **Suspension bushes.** Push down hard on each corner and let go; it should settle after one or two bounces without clunking. A clunk or looseness means worn bushes or joints. $
- ☐ **Brake discs.** Look through the wheel spokes at the brake discs for deep grooves or a raised lip on the outer edge. A loaded van wears brakes faster, so check this even on lower kilometres. $
- ☐ **Tow ball.** If a towbar is fitted, check the tow ball for heavy shine or wear and the wiring plug for corrosion. A badly worn ball means the van has done plenty of towing, which adds drivetrain strain. $
- ☐ **4Motion driveline.** 4Motion: look underneath for oil weeping around the rear differential and driveshaft boots for splits. A torn boot lets grease out and dirt in, wrecking the joint. !

4 Interior and electrics

- ☐ **Warning lights.** Turn the key or start button to "on" without starting; every dash warning light should come on, then go out once the engine runs. An airbag, brake or engine light that stays lit needs an explanation. !
- ☐ **Every seatbelt.** Pull every seatbelt out fully and let it retract, checking it latches and the webbing isn't frayed. On a Multivan or Caravelle, check every row of seats. A belt that sticks may not hold you in a crash. !
- ☐ **Window seals.** Check the rubber around any sliding or pop-out side windows for cracking, and feel the trim below for damp. Stained trim below a window points to long-running water ingress. $
- ☐ **Camper fit-out.** If fitted out as a camper, check the water, gas and 240V connections are secure and carry compliance plates. Loose gas fittings are a safety risk and can be costly to re-certify.

! **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.

5 Test drive

- [ ] **Manual clutch.** Manual: pull away from a stop several times and listen for a rattle at idle that disappears when you press the clutch. A rattle that fades with the clutch down points to a worn dual-mass flywheel. $
- [ ] **DSG gearbox.** DSG automatic: drive through all gears and check changes are smooth with no jerk, hesitation or shudder from a stop. Judder at low speed or a hard thump into gear is a warning sign. $
- [ ] **Brake feel.** Brake firmly from speed on a quiet road; the pedal should feel firm and the van should stop straight with no pulling or grinding. Pulling to one side means the brakes need attention before daily use. !
- [ ] **Steering feel.** Drive at a steady speed on a flat, straight road and check the van tracks straight without constant correction. A hum that grows with speed is often a wheel bearing rather than road noise. $

6 Documentation

- [ ] **Service history.** Check the logbook is stamped on time and look for receipts showing regular oil, filter and timing belt changes where applicable. Gaps in servicing matter more on a van that's worked hard. $
- [ ] **Commercial use.** Ask the seller directly whether the van was used for trade, courier or paid transport work, and ask to see any business log. A van used daily for paid work has usually lived a harder life. $

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5+

recalls on Transporters built since 2004*

14

common faults reported on Transporters built since 2004*

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