



Buying a used car

This is some advice on what you should think about before a used car.

Checklist

Run through the checklist below to help you decide if a used car is worth buying. If you find yourself answering 'yes' to a lot of questions in one or more sections, it may be best not to buy the car. If you don't feel confident about doing these checks yourself, get an expert opinion. You can get help from the AA or RAC though there is usually a charge. At the least you should ask a friend with more experience to go with you.

General condition of the car

- Are sills, wheel arches, or door bottoms rusty?
Is paintwork worn or rusty?
- Are there any oil leaks? Look under the bonnet to see if there is there any damage to hoses or drive belts?
- Are the tyres damaged or worn?
- Are the seat belts worn out?
- Do they have faulty mountings fixings?
- Do door and window seals show signs of leaking?
- Are the electrics (lights, dashboard warning lights) working properly?

Has it been in an accident?

- Have body any panels been repaired?

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- Is the colour or texture of paintwork patchy or different on some panels?
- Has there been any welding carried out on the engine or the boot?
- Does the boot close properly all the way round?
- Have repairs been carried out on the boot? (Check under the carpet.)

Has the identity of the car been changed?

Has the VIN (Vehicle Identification Number) been tampered with?

Many vehicles have their registration number etched into the windows to help prevent theft.

Have areas of glass been scratched off from windows, head lights, tail lights or sun roof?

Are windows etched with the wrong VIN – different from the number plates?

Do stickers on the car hide altered etching?

Test drive

While you are driving, think about the following points. (Make sure you are insured for the test drive.)

- Do the brakes work properly?
- Does the car pull to one side when you break?
Do the brakes squeal?
- Are there other unusual noises?



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- Does the handbrake work properly?
- Does the steering wheel shake or vibrate?
- Does the car pull to one side?
- Is it difficult to change gear?
- Does the gear lever skip (move out of place) when you brake or accelerate?
- Does the engine sound different if you press down the clutch pedal when the car is idling (when the car is in neutral with the engine running)?
- Is there a strong smell of petrol or oil coming from the car?

After the test drive

- Open the bonnet, leave the engine on and let it idle.
- Does the engine rattle or make other noises?
- Are there any water or oil leaks?
- Is there blue or black smoke coming from the exhaust (this means it might be a badly worn engine)?
- Is there grey smoke from the exhaust (this means there might be water leaking into the engine)?

Has the car been 'clocked'? That is, has the milometer been changed?



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- Are the numbers on the milometer out of line?
- Is there heavy wear and tear on the car, given the mileage shown on the clock?
- Have the pedal rubbers, gear lever knob or steering wheel been changed?
- Does the mileage on the last MOT certificate say something different to the milometer reading?
- Does the mileage on service documents say something different to the milometer reading?
- Does the mileage when the car was last sold say something different to the milometer reading?



Your rights when buying from a car dealer

The car must be

- of satisfactory quality,
- fit for its purpose, and
- As described.

This means it must:

- **Meet the standard a reasonable person would regard as satisfactory**, bearing in mind the way the car was described, how much it cost, the make, age, history, mileage, the intended use of the car and any other relevant factors.
- **Match any description made** about the car, whether in writing, in a conversation over the phone or in the showroom, in a newspaper, website, email or text, or in documentation. If the advert states "air conditioning and CD player" then the car should come with these features and they should be working.



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- **Be reasonably fit for any normal purpose.** The car should get you from A to B with a reasonable amount of comfort, ease of handling and reliability.
- **Be reasonably fit for any other purpose you make known to the dealer.** For example, if you want a vehicle for towing a caravan you should tell the dealer and they must make sure the car they are selling you is suitable for that.

Warranties and guarantees

Warranties and guarantees mean you can have faults corrected at little or no cost. They are in addition to your rights as set out above.



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Other things to consider

Is the car dealer a member of a 'good trader' scheme?

The East Sussex Trading Standards 'Buy With Confidence' scheme puts consumers in touch with approved traders who have agreed to provide high standards of customer service, including dealing quickly with any complaints.

Details are on the website at www.eastsussex.gov.uk/business/tradingstandards/buywithconfidence.

Trading Standards can also mediate (act as go-between) between you and the trader if there is a dispute that you cannot resolve yourself.



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