CAR PRO Inspections

Questions to Ask the Seller

For any used car, from a dealer or a private seller. Print it, ask each question, tick the box and write the answer down.

Ask, then check. A seller's answer shows you how far to trust the seller. It doesn't tell you the condition of the car. Each question has a Check line: what to look at to test the answer.

1. On the Phone, Before You Go

Saves you a wasted trip.

- ☐ **Is it still for sale, and what is the VIN?**
  Check: Run a history report and an NHTSA recall check by VIN before you drive out.
- ☐ **Is the title in your name, and is there a loan on it?**
  Check: The name on the title when you get there. If a lender holds it, ask for the payoff letter.
- ☐ **Why are you selling it?**
  Check: Listen, and remember. Compare it with what you see at the car.
- ☐ **Can you leave it unstarted until I get there?**
  Check: Feel the hood when you arrive. A warm engine can hide a hard start, smoke or a noise.
- ☐ **Can I have my own inspector look at it before I buy?**
  Check: A no is an answer too.

2. About the Car

Ask before you look it over, then look.

- ☐ **Are there any known problems with the car?**
  Check: Warning lights at start-up, worn tires, a fresh drip. If the answer and the car don't match, the seller doesn't know the car or isn't being straight.
- ☐ **Has it been in an accident, or had paint or body work?**
  Check: Paint that doesn't match, uneven gaps between panels. Not every accident reaches a history report.
- ☐ **Were any warning lights on lately, or the battery disconnected?**
  Check: The warning lights should come on with the key and go out once it starts. One that never lights up may have been disabled. A scan tool can show whether codes were cleared recently.
- ☐ **When was it last serviced? Do you have the records?**
  Check: Dates and mileage on the records line up with the odometer.
- ☐ **How long have you owned it, and how many owners before you?**
  Check: The history report.
- ☐ **Any open recalls? Were they done?**
  Check: The NHTSA recall check by VIN.
- ☐ **How many keys come with it?**
  Check: Count them, and try each one.

3. At a Dealer

- ☐ **Did you inspect this car? Can I see the report?**
  Check: Do they hand it over, say no, or black parts of it out?
- ☐ **What is the out-the-door price, with every fee by name?**
  Check: Get it in writing, and ask which fees are optional.
- ☐ **Is it sold as is, or with a warranty?**
  Check: The Buyers Guide sticker on the window.
- ☐ **Do you have the title in hand?**
  Check: If not, get in writing when it will be transferred to you.
- ☐ **Can my inspector come to the lot?**
  Check: Agree the time with the dealer before you book.

4. At a Private Sale

- ☐ **Are you selling it for yourself, or for someone else?**
  Check: One sign proves nothing. Several together point to a dealer posing as a private seller: the name is not on the title, the same phone number is on several listings, a roadside or parking-lot meeting, a price far below market.
- ☐ **Has it ever been in a flood?**
  Check: A flood or salvage brand on the history report, a musty smell, damp or silty carpet.
- ☐ **Can we meet where the car is kept?**
  Check: Plenty of honest sellers prefer a public place. Weigh it with the signs above.
- ☐ **How do you want to be paid, and when do you sign the title over?**
  Check: The title is signed over when you pay. If a lender holds it, finish the sale at the lender.

5. Answers Worth Writing Down

Hear one of these? Slow down and have the car checked.

- ☐ **"Nothing wrong with it" while a warning light is on.**
- ☐ **A no to an independent inspection.**
- ☐ **"Someone else is coming to look today."**
- ☐ **No records, and no idea when it was last serviced.**

Notes: year, make, model, VIN, asking price, and what the seller told you

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