CAR PRO Inspections

Used Car Inspection Checklist

Print it, bring it, tick each box as you look at the car. Write down what you find.

Section 1: Documentation Check

Look at the paper trail before you touch the car.

- ☐ **Title:** clean, no salvage, rebuilt or flood brand
- ☐ **VIN** on the title matches the dashboard and the driver's door jamb
- ☐ **Service records:** regular oil changes and brake jobs; dig into any gaps
- ☐ **History report** (Carfax, AutoCheck): accidents, airbags, odometer
- ☐ **Recalls:** check the NHTSA database by VIN; open ones get fixed before purchase

Section 2: Exterior Inspection

Walk around slowly, in daylight, never at night or in a dim garage.

- ☐ **Paint:** no color mismatch between panels
- ☐ **Body:** run your hand along it; no ripples or rough spots (filler)
- ☐ **Panel gaps:** even on both sides at doors, fenders, hood, trunk
- ☐ **Glass:** no chips, cracks or star fractures; windows roll smoothly
- ☐ **Lights:** low and high beam, signals, brake, reverse, fog, hazards
- ☐ **Rust:** wheel wells, rocker panels, door bottoms, around the windshield
- ☐ **Tires:** check tread depth on all four plus the spare
- ☐ **Wear pattern:** inside edge, cupping and feathering signal problems

Section 3: Under the Hood

Pop the hood and take your time.

- ☐ **Engine oil:** amber to dark brown, never milky or gritty
- ☐ **Coolant:** correct color for the car, not rusty
- ☐ **Brake fluid:** clear to light amber
- ☐ **Power steering and transmission fluid** (if accessible)
- ☐ **Serpentine belt:** no cracks, fraying or glazing
- ☐ **Radiator hoses:** firm but pliable, not rock hard or mushy
- ☐ **Battery:** no white or blue-green buildup; read the date
- ☐ **Leaks:** look under the car for drips or wet spots
- ☐ **Engine bay:** freshly cleaned on a high-mileage car is a red flag

Section 4: Interior Inspection

- ☐ **Seats:** no rips, stains or sagging; wear matches the odometer
- ☐ **Warning lights:** ignition on, engine off, they should come on, then go out after start; one that never lights up may have been disabled
- ☐ **Climate:** A/C on coldest, heater on hottest, every vent and fan speed
- ☐ **Electronics:** every button, switch and screen; Bluetooth, backup camera, windows, locks, sunroof, heated seats, driver assistance
- ☐ **Smell:** no musty or mildew, sweet (coolant) or burning

Section 5: Underneath the Vehicle

The section most buyers skip.

- ☐ **Frame and subframe:** no cracks, bends, fresh welds or mismatched undercoating
- ☐ **Exhaust:** no rust, holes, loose hangers or patchwork
- ☐ **Suspension:** no leaking shocks or struts, torn CV boots, worn bushings, loose tie rods
- ☐ **Bounce test:** push down each corner; it settles in one or two bounces
- ☐ **Brakes:** pad thickness, rotor grooves or blue discoloration, brake lines

Section 6: Diagnostic Scan

A scan reads the car's computer systems.

- ☐ **Codes:** ask for active, pending and historical codes
- ☐ **Watch for:** P0420/P0430, P0300 series, P0440 series, P0700 series
- ☐ **Cleared codes:** readiness monitors stay "not ready" until the car is driven enough
- ☐ **Reader limits:** a basic parts-store reader pulls powertrain codes only

Section 7: Test Drive

At least 15 to 20 minutes in different conditions.

- ☐ **Cold start:** no knocking, ticking or heavy smoke (especially blue)
- ☐ **City:** smooth, predictable shifts; no harsh shifts, delay or slipping
- ☐ **Highway:** no wind noise, vibration or pull to one side
- ☐ **Braking:** firmly from 40 mph on a safe, empty stretch; straight, no pulsing or grinding
- ☐ **Steering:** tracks straight; full turns both ways with no clicking or groaning
- ☐ **Parking:** turning radius; backup camera and sensors work

Section 8: After the Inspection

Step back and look at the full picture.

- ☐ **Add up the issues:** stacked mechanical problems raise the cost of ownership
- ☐ **Get repair estimates** for any significant findings
- ☐ **Negotiate:** use your written findings and estimates as leverage
- ☐ **Walk away:** frame damage, flood evidence, blown head gasket, transmission failure

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