

# 37 POINT BUYER CHECKLIST

## Body

- Check gaps between the panels: Run your finger between the panels and also visually check the space. There should be equal distance between the right and left sides. For example, the gap between the front of the door and the fender on the right side should be the same as the gap on the left side
- VIN Number Badges. On all newer cars there is a sticker on each and every body panel, fenders, trunk, door, and hood. The sticker has the VIN or vehicle identification number. If this sticker is missing or has been painted over you can quickly learn the car has been in some kind of accident. Stickers that are missing but replaced with an "r dot" sticker are factory replacement panels, which are usually higher quality. Not having all of the VIN stickers intact on a high end vehicle will lower its value.
- With a magnet you can check for body filler. If you suspect there has been body filler or Bondo used to make repairs, you can check by running a coated magnet (not scratching the paint) across the surface. If the magnetic pull weakens there is some kind of filler between the magnet and body panel. Keep in mind a lot of newer cars have plastic body parts including fenders.
- Look carefully for mismatched or differently faded body panels. As paint ages in the sun it fades. If you come across a panel that is still brightly colored while the other panels around it are faded, most likely it was repainted at some point.
- Pull up the carpet in the trunk. You are looking for evidence of a rear-end collision. Often you can tell from newly welded in sheet metal. Look closely at the seams where the metal is welded together from the factory. If the seams are unpainted or look like they've been broken or there are new patches of metal welded in there may have been work.
- Check the markings on all of the glass. Printed should be the manufacturer's mark or a consistent brand. If glass has been replaced outside of the dealership it may be of a different brand.
- Look closely at the front end, this is where most accident damages occurs. Look for misaligned headlights or missing plastic pieces. Also check under the hood for a replaced radiator support. This is the structural piece that holds all of the major components in front of the wheels.

## Interior

- With the engine running check the air conditioning. It should start to blow cold after 30 seconds, no longer than 1 minute. Carry a probe thermometer and stick it down the vent if you'd like to get an accurate reading. Check all electronics including windows, radio, seats, heater, mirrors, etc.
- Check the driver's side seat for evidence of an accident. Sometimes if the car has been in an accident the seat will be loose or the upper portion broken. Try to recline the seat and move it back and forth, see if there is any sign of resistance.
- Make sure that the airbag lights are not on.
- Look for the check engine light signal.
- If there is a bottle of oil or coolant in the trunk you can assume it's leaking or burning fluids, avoid this vehicle.
- Check to make sure the seats and pedals are worn relative to the mileage. If your car has only 30,000 miles and the seat and pedals are very worn there has been some kind of tampering.
- Look at the cigarette lighter to see if it's been used. Also check around the inside of the driver's side window for burn marks along with the back seat. Regardless of the smell this will indicate a smoker's car.
- Look for factory electronics/ stereos and navigation units. If they've been replaced make sure they are working and are high quality replacements.



*Gently used interior*

# Engine

- Visual Smoke Check Test. With the car COLD, have the owner start the vehicle while you keep your eyes beaming on the tail pipe. As soon as the car starts watch for any smoke. White smoke will mean water or a blown head gasket, blue oil means it burning oil either through the valves or the piston rings, and black smoke is generally carbon build up which can mean the car isn't tuned properly. Blue and white smoke mean run for the hills. Some water and condensation is usually normal, especially in colder climates.

- Tailpipe Swipe Test. Put your index finger into the tailpipe with it cold and before starting. Your finger should come out with a light dusting of gray or blackish soot. If the black carbon is very thick you can assume the same for the inside of the engine. Generally higher mileage vehicles have more carbon in the pipe than newer ones.

- Visual Undercarriage Inspection. Check under the car for leaks and damage. One of the most common areas for a leak is the oil pan or between the engine and the transmission, this is called the rear main seal and it's expensive to fix. Generally unless you are intimate with a certain car it's hard to tell where the oil is leaking from, sometime it comes from the valve cover gasket and runs down the engine, this is a \$50 fix.

- The engine should run smoothly, visually watch for vibration while idling.

- If it's an automatic you can check the dipstick for the transmission. To check for the proper level of fluid it usually needs to be idling. It's important to give it a sniff, it shouldn't smell burnt. Also, the color is generally light red. If it's black or dark brown it needs to be changed. Any milky white in the transmission or oil is evidence of water leaking into them and should be avoided.

- Next check the coolant with the engine cold. Notice if the reservoir to the side of the radiator on most cars is full or empty, this could mean its leaking. The color should be green or orange. There is commonly some dirt and build up of white deposits. Brown or dark in color generally indicates a needed flush.

- Check for a stamp on the timing belt cover that indicates the last time the belt has been changed. For most cars with a timing belt it's generally an 80,000 mile interval. Cars with timing chains can generally go without being changed for over 100,000 miles.

- A compression test can be done for more advanced buyers but only usually necessary above 130,000 on most

Japanese vehicles. If the smog or emission numbers are average or below average you are probably safe to test the compression later or not at all.

- Positive Crank Case Ventilation. Test with the car running, take off the oil cap on the valve cover. This will almost always be located on the top of the motor. Once you unscrew the cap you can see generally a baffle or the valve. Gently set the cap back on the opening, you should feel a slight air tug, pulling the cap closed. If pressure is pushing the cap away from the valve cover you've got a problem. Most of the time the pressure is subtle, so test with a light touch. The cap should not bounce around when loose.

- If possible, pull a spark plug. The electrode should be a grayish brown. White is running lean and black is running rich.

- Check for newish looking parts. If they aren't dusty to match the rest of the components under the hood they are probably new.

- There are many scanners available for around \$200-\$300 dollars. If you can afford it buy one. Then when you come across cars with check engine lights (OBDII, 1994 and newer models) on you can usually diagnose on the spot. A check engine light will cause a car to fail emissions tests. OBD0 or OBDI cars can be tested by counting the code and you'll need to refer to an online or factory resource to de-code.

- Make sure the oil is golden or brown with no signs of water which would indicate a blow head gasket. Milky or yellow oil can indicate water has leaked into the oil.



Locate fluid dipsticks and reservoirs

## Wheels/ Tires

- Check for even tire wear. Also check for the same brand/ model on all 4 tires. Front wheel drive cars may show more wear in the front, rear wheel drive cars in the back. All tires should also be wearing evenly across each individual tire. Uneven wear on one side of the car can indicate mis-alignment.
- Curb rash or markings from sloppy parking can be shown on the edges of the wheels. If you happen to find a car with no curb rash you can probably assume it's been very carefully driven

## Maintenance Records

- Check for records of service. This is very important for high dollar vehicles, most have a specific schedule they follow through the dealership. Look for gaps in service history, especially oil changes.
- Get a current emissions/ smog certificate. Make sure the car is passing and somewhere in the middle of the acceptable range. Vehicles that barely pass certain tests may not pass again depending on the situation.
- Look through documentation stored in the glove box. Sometimes owners will keep receipts or write in maintenance in the owner's manual

## Undercarriage

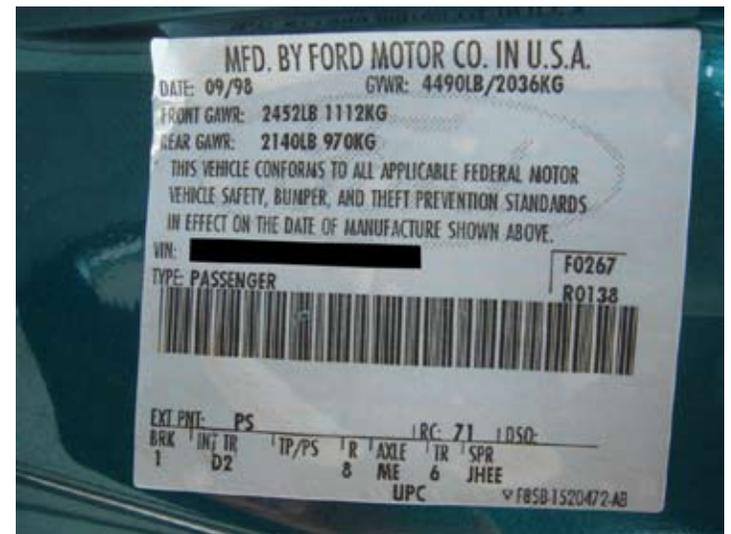
- Check the axles that lead to the drive wheels. Often there are CV boots. Check these cone-shaped boots for cracks. If they are newly broken you'll generally see massive amounts of thick grease.
- Look for leaks under the motor and transmission
- Check for rusted or dented under body parts. Exhaust should not be rattling or hanging. Look for jacking points where the car is typically lifted by a mechanic, these spots shouldn't be damaged.
- Check bumper attachment points. Look for original bolts and no dents that would indicate the bumper has been hit hard enough to be replaced.



Newer tires and clean wheels



Undercarriage from the rear



VIN sticker located inside of the driver's side door