



First Car Viewing Checklist



Lemon Avoidance



Before You Go

Print this checklist or save it to your phone.

What to Bring:

- ☐ This checklist
- ☐ Driving license
- ☐ Phone with torch/flashlight
- ☐ Another sensible adult (if possible)
- ☐ Pen for notes
- ☐ Debit or Credit Card for deposit (if buying)

Research Done:

- ☐ Checked insurance group and got quote
- ☐ Researched typical problems for this model
- ☐ Confirmed market value on AutoTrader/Parkers
- ☐ Checked the location of the dealership



Paperwork Check

Essential Documents (Don't buy without these!):

- ☐ **V5C (Log Book)**- check when the car was last bought or sold
- ☐ **MOT Certificate**- and check the MOT history online
- ☐ **Service History**- stamped book and/or receipts

Warning Signs (Walk away if):

- ✗ No V5C ("it's in the post")
- ✗ No service history on a car over 3 years old
- ✗ MOT expires within a couple of months
- ✗ Seller seems evasive about paperwork



Exterior Inspection

Body & Paint:

- ☐ **Rust spots**- check wheel arches, door frames, bumpers
- ☐ **Dents & scratches**- note location and severity
- ☐ **Paint match**- mismatched colors or overspray suggests accident damage
- ☐ **Panel alignment**- gaps should be even
- ☐ **Stone chips**- normal on front bumper/bonnet

Tyres:

- ☐ **Tread depth**- check wear indicators have some depth
- ☐ **Even wear**- uneven wear suggests alignment issues
- ☐ **Correct pressure**- should feel firm when pressed
- ☐ **Same brand**- mixed and/or unknown brand tyres suggest poor maintenance
- ☐ **Spare tyre**- check condition and pressure

Lights & Glass:

- ☐ **All lights work**- headlights, brake lights, indicators, hazards
- ☐ **Windscreen chips**- small ones OK, cracks fail MOT
- ☐ **Mirror condition**- cracked mirrors are dangerous
- ☐ **Number plates**- should be secure and normal looking font

Red Flags:

- ✗ Significant rust (expensive to repair)
- ✗ More than 2 tyres need replacing (£200-400 cost)
- ✗ Major dents/scratches (check for exposed metal)



Interior Check

Seats & Comfort:

- ☐ **Driver's seat**- not too worn, adjusts properly
- ☐ **All seatbelts**- clip in securely, no fraying
- ☐ **Steering wheel**- not excessively worn
- ☐ **Pedals**- not worn through to metal

Electronics:

- ☐ **Radio/infotainment**- works and stays on
- ☐ **Air conditioning**- blows cold air
- ☐ **All switches**- lights, wipers, windows, etc.
- ☐ **Warning lights**- none illuminated when running
- ☐ **USB/charging ports**- work properly

Practicality:

- ☐ **Boot space**- adequate for your needs
- ☐ **Rear seats**- fold down if needed
- ☐ **Storage compartments**- glove box, door pockets work

Red Flags:

- ✗ Excessive wear on pedals (high mileage or hard use)
- ✗ Dashboard warning lights on
- ✗ Windows don't work (expensive electrical repair)



Engine & Mechanical

Under the Bonnet:

- ☐ **Oil level**- should be between min/max on dipstick
- ☐ **Oil color**- should be amber/black, not milky
- ☐ **Coolant level**- visible in expansion tank
- ☐ **Belts**- no fraying or cracks
- ☐ **Unusual noises**- engine should run smoothly

Fluids & Leaks:

- ☐ **Check ground**- no oil/coolant puddles where parked
- ☐ **Exhaust smoke**- should be nearly invisible when warm
- ☐ **Brake fluid**- visible in reservoir, not black/thick
- ☐ **Power steering**- easy to turn when stationary

Red Flags:

- ✗ Milky oil or black gunk (head gasket problems - walk away)
- ✗ Oil/coolant leaks under car
- ✗ Blue smoke from exhaust (engine wear)
- ✗ Timing belt overdue (catastrophic if it snaps, check service history around the 60k mark)



Test Drive

Pre-Drive Checks:

- ☐ **Fuel range**- enough for test drive
- ☐ **Handbrake**- holds car on slight slope
- ☐ **Mirrors**- adjusted properly

During the Drive:

- ☐ **Clutch**- engages smoothly, not slipping
- ☐ **Gears**- select cleanly, no grinding
- ☐ **Brakes**- car stops straight, no grinding noise
- ☐ **Steering**- car drives straight, doesn't pull to one side
- ☐ **Engine**- accelerates smoothly, no hesitation
- ☐ **Temperature**- doesn't overheat during drive

Different Driving Conditions:

- ☐ **Cold start**- engine starts easily from cold
- ☐ **City driving**- smooth at low speeds
- ☐ **Motorway speed**- stable at 60-70mph
- ☐ **Hill starts**- clutch doesn't slip
- ☐ **Parking**- easy to maneuver

Red Flags:

- ✗ Clutch slips or is very high/low
- ✗ Car pulls to one side (alignment/brake issues)
- ✗ Loud grinding noises when braking
- ✗ Engine overheats or warning lights appear



Negotiation & Buying

Price Research:

- ☐ **Market value-** checked AutoTrader/Parkers guide price
- ☐ **Similar cars-** compared with others for sale locally
- ☐ **Condition adjustment-** factor in any issues found
- ☐ **Negotiation room-** some sellers expect haggling (check comparable cars first)

Final Checks:

- ☐ **Outstanding finance-** use HPI check or ask directly
- ☐ **Write everything down-** faults, agreements, contact details
- ☐ **Get receipt-** with seller details and what's included
- ☐ **Arrange insurance-** before you drive it home

Payment:

- ☐ **Card or bank transfer-** avoid unusual payment methods
- ☐ **Receipt given-** with full seller details
- ☐ **Keys & documents-** get all keys, manuals, documents

Red Flags:

- ✗ Price seems way too good to be true (usually is)
- ✗ Seller pressuring quick decision
- ✗ Won't allow proper inspection
- ✗ Unusual payment requests



Your Notes Section

Make/Model: e.g. VW Golf GTI

Year:

Mileage:

Price:

Insurance Group:

Issues Found:

Overall Rating:



Decision:

☐ Buy

☐ Keep Looking

☐ Think About It



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Final Safety Reminders

- ☐ **Never go alone**- bring another sensible adult if possible
- ☐ **Trust your instincts**- if something feels wrong, walk away
- ☐ **Don't rush**- there are always other cars
- ☐ **Budget for repairs**- even good cars need maintenance

Remember: It's better to keep looking than buy the wrong car!