



What  
am I to do?

Thinking of buying a used car? Check out our consumer advice before you set out.

### Checklist

I'm considering purchasing a used car, but am unsure of what to look for in terms of potential problems. What are the key areas of concern?

When buying a used car, bringing a checklist of the areas to check is a good idea. Here are a few things to examine:

- Body: look for rust, dents or scratches.
- Windscreen: check for chips or cracks.
- Tyres: check for pressure, tread, cuts or cracks. Are they all the same make?
- Exhaust and muffler system: check for leaks. When you test drive, the quieter the better.
- Interior: examine the dashboard meters and gauges, lights and radio. Check the condition of seats and belts.
- Engine: Check all the hoses and the oil. Remove the oil filler cap with the engine running, if large amounts of bluish gas emit, the engine is badly worn. When you test drive, how powerful does the engine feel? Is there any struggle during acceleration?
- Transmission: When you test drive, try all the gears for slips or delays when shifting.
- Request a maintenance report. This provides a background on what work was done, how the owner treated the car, and what parts have been replaced.

Report by  
Justin Paulsen 

### Cost control

When bringing my car in for repairs, I never know if I was fairly charged. How can I tell how long a repair takes, or the price of a particular part?

Most car owners are familiar with feelings of disbelief when studying a car repair receipt. It can be hard to decipher exactly what was done, how long it should have taken, and the average cost of parts. A few simple tips can help you avoid this situation.

- Before committing yourself, call competitors and get price quotes. This allows bargaining room when you ask for an estimate.
- Ask for details beforehand. How long does this usually take in terms of labour hours? How much will the part cost? Can I buy a used part instead? Can you guarantee me a price?
- Ask the mechanic to call if any additional issues arise or if they believe the cost will rise due to unforeseen problems. Request a call if any previously discussed work changes, and that they not continue until they've spoken to you.
- Ask for a warranty, just in case something was installed incorrectly. If mistakes were made in the repair, you should not be responsible for paying for them.

### Maintenance

What can I do in terms of simple maintenance to extend the life of my car and keep it running well?

There are a few things the average car owner can do to maximize the life of their vehicle, ensuring it runs smoothly for as long a period of time as possible.

Most preventive maintenance is inexpensive and easy, and will pay off in the long run. Here are a few suggestions to keep in mind:

- Change the oil every 5,000 to 8,000km to keep engine parts running smoothly for longer.
- About every 50,000km, replace the brake fluids. They get dirty and water seeps in, which can damage your vehicle.
- Refill antifreeze regularly.
- Check for leaks (oil, battery fluid, or antifreeze).
- Keep tyre pressure constant to avoid wear.
- Wash your car regularly to prevent dirt build-ups, which can cause rust.