



FREE PRINTABLE FROM ARDENT WORKSHOP

Walk-Around & Cold-Start Cards

Two free print-and-cut cards, condensed from the Used-Car Buying Field Kit's own check pages — the ten-minute walk-around and the cold start.

Print at 100% · cut on the marks · A4 edition



General guidance for inspecting and buying a used car. This kit is NOT a mechanical inspection and is no substitute for a qualified pre-purchase inspection by a mechanic.

How to use these two cards

These two cards are the busiest ten minutes of buying a used car: the walk-around you do on the first lap, and the cold start you do before anyone lets the engine warm up. Every check states what counts as a fail, condensed from the Used-Car Buying Field Kit's own check pages to fit a card.

Two sheets carry the cards. The first shows them filled in, as an example to read; the second is the one to print — the blank pair, with the CUT HERE line and the trim marks on it. Print that sheet at 100% on card stock and cut along the marks: it holds two separate cards, not one folded card. The walk-around card covers the outside, the tires and brakes, under the hood and the inside; the cold-start card covers what a cold engine tells you, plus the two things you meet in the first minutes of driving.

Two rows on the walk-around card cite NHTSA, and they are not the same kind of figure. The 2/32 in tread depth is NHTSA's own replacement threshold — not a legal minimum, and your state may set its own. The tire-age figure is not NHTSA's: NHTSA reports that some vehicle and tire manufacturers recommend replacing tires at six to ten years old regardless of tread, and the card takes the earlier end of that range. Check the owner's manual, and your state's rule, before you put either figure to a seller.

These two cards are no substitute for a qualified pre-purchase inspection by a mechanic — they catch what you can see and hear in ten minutes, not what a lift and a scan tool find.

Fill in the write-on lines with a pen while you're standing at the car. A detail you're sure you'll remember is the one you won't.

The next sheet shows both cards after one buyer's viewing — that buyer, that car and every answer on the card are invented. The blank pair to print is the sheet after it.

WHAT COUNTS AS A FAIL

A fail line names the measured value where the check has one — a tread depth, a tire's age — and the plain condition where it doesn't, like a smell or a lamp that stays lit. Read it before you look at the car, not after, and a vague worry turns into something you can point to.

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ONE LAP, BEFORE ANYONE TALKS PRICE

Ten-Minute Walk-Around

OUTSIDE

Panel gaps, door to door

Fails: One gap wider than its match, or not parallel top to bottom

Paint texture, panel to panel

Fails: Orange-peel texture, overspray on trim, rougher than its neighbor

Rust at arches, rockers, doors

Fails: Bubbling paint, flaking rust, or a rough patch you can feel

TIRES

Tread depth, all four tires

Fails: 2/32 in or less, or level with the tread bars · NHTSA's own threshold

Tire age, from the DOT code

Fails: Over six years old, whatever the tread · makers advise, per NHTSA

Even wear across the tread

Fails: Worn more on one edge than the other, or center versus the edges

UNDER THE HOOD

Oil level and color

Fails: Below the low mark, black and gritty, or milky rather than amber

Coolant color, under the cap

Fails: Rusty brown, or an oily film on top or under the cap

Visible leaks under the car

Fails: Any wet spot under the engine, transmission, or radiator

INSIDE

Warning lamps, key-on then off

Fails: A lamp that stays lit once running, or never lit at key-on

Water in the spare well, carpet

Fails: Standing water, a musty smell, or damp carpet under the mats

Smell, before you sit down

Fails: Damp or mildew, raw fuel, sweet coolant, or old smoke

What you found — write it down now

> Rear quarter panel sits slightly proud, wider gap on one side - a repaint the seller had not mentioned

> Light surface rust at the driver-side rocker panel, no bubbling or flaking

> Fronts measure 4/32 in, rears measure 2/32 in - rears FAIL the 2/32 in threshold

Ten minutes at the car, not a mechanical inspection. Cited figures are guidance, not legal minimums.

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EXAMPLE ONLY — print the next sheet, not this one

ENGINE COLD AT THE KEY, THEN THE FIRST FEW MINUTES OF DRIVING

Cold Start Checks

AT THE FIRST TURN OF THE KEY

Engine cold at the first turn

Fails: Already run today, by the seller or by you

Sound of the crank

Fails: A slow, labored crank, or repeated tries before it catches

Exhaust smoke, color and length

Fails: Blue-gray or lingering white smoke, or black smoke under load

Idle steadiness

Fails: Surges, hunts up and down, or rough enough to feel in the seat

ONCE RUNNING, AND ON THE MOVE

Warning lamps after start

Fails: Any lamp still lit once running, past the key-on bulb check

Cold-idle noise, fades when warm

Fails: A tick, tap, or rattle present cold that fades as it warms up

Steering wheel, straight-ahead

Fails: Wheel sits off-center to hold a straight line

Braking straight, no pull

Fails: Pulls to one side under moderate braking

What you heard and saw at start

> Confirmed cold - hood cool to the touch, seller had not started it today

> A light puff of white vapor for about two seconds, then clear

> Idle steady, no surge

> A slight pull to the right under braking

Ten minutes at the car and the first few minutes of the drive, not a mechanical inspection.

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CUT HERE — two separate cards, not a fold

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The rest of the kit

These two cards are the cheat-sheet version of two pages out of a bigger kit. The full kit is what turns what you found into a number: what the car is worth to you once every defect you found is priced in, measured against the ceiling you set for yourself in advance — the price above which you walk away, decided and typed in before you ever call. This free pair only tells you what to look for.

THE FREE STARTER, AND THE REST OF THE KIT

This free pair condenses two pages from the field kit itself — the ten-minute walk-around and the cold-start checks — onto a card you can clip to a board. The full **Used-Car Buying Field Kit** is the rest of it: a print-and-carry field kit covering the pre-contact phone screen, the paperwork, the walk-around, the cold start and the test drive, and the systems you can check without putting the car on a lift; five cut-out card designs (a pocket card of stop-the-deal red flags, plus four more clipboard sequences for the cold start, the test drive, the finance desk, and a private-sale handover); and a genuinely computed fillable working set, where a **Costed-Defect Ledger** sums the quotes you got into a computed **Max Offer**, read against a walk-away number you type in before you ever call; an **Add-On Ceiling** holds the dealer finance desk to a separate limit you set in the parking lot; and a **Candidate Comparison Log** ranks up to four cars by cost-adjusted price. It also ships a mechanic's PPI request sheet, EV/hybrid and classic/project pages, a full worked example, and a reference sheet citing 17 standards across 12 named public sources — all in US Letter and A4. [See the full kit](#) — \$12.95, a one-time purchase, at ardentworkshop.com/products/used-car-buying-field-kit/.

See the full range at ardentworkshop.com.

A note on what this is. General guidance for inspecting and buying a used car. This kit is NOT a mechanical inspection and is no substitute for a qualified pre-purchase inspection by a mechanic. Of the 20 checks on these two cards, 2 carry a figure cited to a named public source; the other 18 are plain observations — what to look at, and what makes it a fail — not published standards. Every public-standard figure in the full kit is cited to a named public source you can check for yourself. Registration, titling, safety inspection, and emissions rules are set by your state, not federally. The buyer, the seller, and every figure on the filled card are invented for this example.

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