Used-Car Inspection Checklist

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Year / Make / Model: _____ Mileage: _____

VIN: _____ Asking price: $_____

Exterior & body

- ☐ No rust on the frame, wheel wells, or under the doors
- ☐ No dents, mismatched paint, or uneven panel gaps
- ☐ All four tires match and have even tread wear
- ☐ All lights work: headlights, brake lights, turn signals
- ☐ Windshield and windows: no cracks or chips
- ☐ No leaks or stains on the ground under the car

Under the hood

- ☐ Engine oil: level between the marks, not black or gritty
- ☐ Coolant: level OK, no milky or rusty color
- ☐ Belts: no cracks, fraying, or squealing
- ☐ Hoses: firm, no cracks, bulges, or leaks
- ☐ Battery: terminals clean, no corrosion, holds a charge
- ☐ No strange smells and no smoke from the exhaust

Interior

- ☐ All electronics work: windows, locks, radio, wipers
- ☐ Air conditioning blows cold, heat blows hot
- ☐ Seats, seatbelts, and mirrors in good shape
- ☐ No musty, mold, or heavy air-freshener smell
- ☐ Dashboard: no warning lights stay on after starting
- ☐ Trunk: spare tire, jack, and tools are there

Test drive

- ☐ Brakes stop straight, no grinding or pulsing pedal
- ☐ Steering feels tight, no pulling to one side
- ☐ No knocking, grinding, or squealing noises
- ☐ Transmission shifts smoothly, no jerking or slipping
- ☐ Accelerates without hesitation or stalling
- ☐ Drives straight on a flat road with hands briefly off the wheel

Documents

- [ ] Clean title in the seller's name, no salvage brand
- [ ] Service records available and up to date
- [ ] Recall check done at nhtsa.gov (free VIN lookup)
- [ ] Emissions / inspection paperwork current for your state

Tip: if anything on this list fails, get a price for the fix before you agree on a price — or walk away.