

Used Car Test Drive Scorecard

Printable checklist for a 45-90 minute test drive | Updated Jan 21, 2026

How to use this sheet

1) Do the pre-drive walkaround first. 2) Drive a planned route (neighborhood + rough road + highway). 3) Park, pop the hood, and do the post-drive heat-soak checks. Write notes. If anything feels unsafe, stop the drive and walk away.

Vehicle		VIN (last 8)		Odometer	
Seller/Dealer		Date		Weather	
Planned route (roads)		Notes (deal-breakers)			

Pre-drive (10-15 minutes)

	Check	Notes
■	Cold start if possible: starts quickly, idle steady, no warning lights staying on	
■	Walkaround: panel gaps even, no fresh overspray, rust hotspots checked (rockers, wheel arches, under doors)	
■	Tires: even wear across tread, no sidewall bulges, matching brand/model pairings	
■	Lights, wipers, washer spray, mirrors, windows, locks all work	
■	Cabin: damp smell? signs of water intrusion under mats/spare tire well	
■	Electronics: screen, Bluetooth/CarPlay/Android Auto, backup cam, parking sensors	
■	VIN matches paperwork and windshield tag; service records present	

During the drive (30-60 minutes)

	Check	Notes
■	Low speed: steering centered, no clunks on bumps, no pull under braking	
■	Brakes: smooth stops, no vibration, no grinding, parking brake holds	
■	Transmission: shifts cleanly (auto) or clutch take-up smooth (manual), no slip	
■	Engine: accelerates cleanly, no hesitation, no surging, temp gauge normal	
■	Highway: tracks straight, no wheel shake, no wind roar from doors/windows	
■	Hard turn/figure-8: listen for CV joint clicking or binding	
■	ADAS (if equipped): cruise control, lane assist, blind spot alerts behave normally	
■	HVAC: heat output strong, defrost clears quickly, AC engages without odd noise	

Post-drive (10-20 minutes)

	Check	Notes
■	Heat soak: check for coolant/oil smell, fan cycling, steam or drips	
■	Fluids: look for fresh leaks under engine/trans; check oil cap for sludge	
■	Underbody glance: exhaust hangers secure, no fresh wet spots	
■	Tires hot check: uneven heat across tread may hint alignment issue	
■	Scan (if allowed): check for stored/pending codes with an OBD reader	
■	Paperwork: confirm title/status, recall completion, outstanding liens where applicable	

Quick scorecard (circle one)

Area	Good	Borderline	Walk away
Start/idle			
Brakes			
Steering/suspension			
Transmission/clutch			
Highway stability			
HVAC/defrost			
Electronics/ADAS			
Leaks/odors			
Paperwork/history			

Safety note: If you smell exhaust in the cabin, see a flashing warning light, or feel braking/steering that is not predictable, end the drive. This sheet is general information, not a substitute for an independent pre-purchase inspection by a qualified mechanic.