

Tests for the Used-Car Buyer

ON-THE-LOT TESTS

Tests, how made

Unhook center harness wire from distributor. Engage starter for a second at least 10 times. Then turn engine with starter.

Hook up distributor and start engine. With hood up and window open, listen for knocks, slaps. Observe oil and ammeter gauges.

Allow engine to idle until thoroughly warm. Operate all electrical and vacuum accessories, all hardware, horn, all lights, seat adjustment, signals, etc.

While engine is warming, hold brake pedal down hard for two minutes.

While engine is warming, push clutch pedal down with hand. Swing steering wheel back and forth with fingers.

Open all doors, grasp under outside corners, lift, and close.

Shake fenders by outside edges. See if they are welded on.

Lift bumper, or by jumping on it, start back of car jouncing at its natural frequency. Release and watch. (Do same with front end.)

Push and pull hard on top of each front wheel (try to move top out and in).

Look at centered front wheels from ahead.

Look at and feel treads of all four tires.

Meaning

● Grinding and clashing noise means worn teeth. Failure to engage may mean teeth gone from ring gear. Slow turning means low battery or bad starter.

● Heavy knocks and slaps indicate loose bearings and pistons. Lighter knocks can mean loose pins. Ammeter should show a high charge when engine is speeded. Oil gauge should instantly show 15-30 pounds pressure.

● Find all non-operating accessories and have dealer repair them before buying.

● If it feels spongy, there is air in lines. If it slowly goes to floor, hydraulic system leaks. Reject car if pedal drops.

● Should be an inch free play at top before pressure is put on clutch springs. Steering wheel should not move over 4-5 inches before pressure is put on front wheels.

● Binding or looseness means bent frame or badly damaged body.

● Fenders must be secure. Replacing a welded fender is a major operation.

● When let go, body of car should return to normal level and stop. Failure to return, or continued up and down motion, means defective springs or shock absorbers.

● Watch for motion, listen for noise. If there is noticeable motion and noise, front end is badly worn.

● Wheels should look vertical. If they splay out at bottom, front end is worn.

● Bumpy, uneven wear on front wheels means front end out of alignment. (Check back wheels—dealer may have switched tires.)

ROAD TESTS

Tests, how made

Make 8 or 10 fast stops, from 40 to 50 mph.

On a flat, level road, make 3 stops in each direction with hands off the wheel.

Park on steep hill, and draw on hand brake. Test it facing both ways.

If car has automatic transmission, test "Park" position facing both up and down on a hill.

On a flat, level road, drive car at 15-20 mph with hands off wheel. Run test both directions on road.

Turn several corners, both ways, cramping the wheel. It should return exactly to center when released.

Stand 20-30 yards away and have car driven straight toward you. Then stand behind it and have it driven away from you.

Meaning

● Brakes should not lose their ability to stop car due to heating.

● Car should not swerve or pull in either direction. Any pull or grabbing means defective brakes.

● If it slips, have it adjusted.

● If it fails to hold, insist on repairs and then test ENTIRE TRANSMISSION again.

● The car should travel 400 feet without drifting much to either side. Drifting means misalignment, or worn front end.

● Failure to return or binding means adjustment has been drawn up too tight. Looseness and "sucky" spots indicate bad wear.

● Observe to make sure the rear wheels follow exactly in the tracks of the front ones. If they don't, this indicates warped frame.

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