



Your essential guide to buying a used car

Network Q. The best place to buy a used Vauxhall.

We ensure that every vehicle meets our high standards so you can drive off our forecourts with confidence and reassurance. Not only is every vehicle subject to a rigorous Multi-Point Check conducted by Vauxhall trained technicians, we also check the history of all our vehicles and provide you with a Network Q Warranty to ensure you have complete peace of mind.

However, should you be shopping around for your next used vehicle, we've produced the following list of handy hints and tips to help ensure the vehicles you are viewing are safe and reliable.



BODYWORK

View the car in daylight and, preferably, when it's not raining. It's a good plan to take a chamois leather with you, in case you have to wipe off rain droplets for a better view of paintwork condition.

- Check for signs of rust, poorly repaired body damage and paint colour continuity, especially under the petrol flap, which is always exposed.
- Check front of bonnet for stone chipping.
- Lie on a mat or blanket and inspect sills and underside of the car for corrosion.
- Check body panel gaps are consistent and that panels line up properly.
- Check outside of exhaust system for rust and listen for 'blowing'. A cloth briefly placed over the tailpipe with the engine running will highlight this. Please take care as the exhaust will be hot.
- Look (and smell) for signs of oil, coolant and petrol leaks.
- Push down heavily at each corner of car and check that the dampers are operating. If the car continues to bounce up and down, the dampers are worn. You should also be able to see whether the shock absorbers are leaking any hydraulic fluid.

- The number plates normally have the supplying retailer's details. If the number plate's blank, it's been changed, maybe innocently. But the car may have been repaired after an accident.
- Look at the number of door keys. Usually when a lock's been changed, the car owner inherits another key. So a big bunch of keys indicates that the lock (or locks) has been changed in the past.
- Has the car got any road tax? If not, use it as a sales lever. If it has, keep quiet.

INTERIOR

The inside of a vehicle can quickly reveal how well a car's been looked after, and other more sinister happenings.

- Examine the speedometer closely. Are the instrument housing screws unmarked on the screw heads? If they're scuffed, it indicates the housing has been removed – maybe innocently, but it could mean that the car's been 'clocked'.
- If an alarm is fitted, ask the vendor for a demo to see if – and how – it works.
- Look at the steering wheel and gear lever knob. If either has worn to a highly polished finish, it indicates the car has covered a very high mileage.

- If seat covers have been fitted, lift them and check the condition of the seat fabric below. They're often used to disguise torn seats.
- Look at the pedal rubbers. As with the steering wheel and gear lever knob, they shouldn't be too worn (or too new).
- Carpets should be fresh looking and not worn through. Feel them. If they're damp, try and find the source of the water leak. It could be the cooling system/heater matrix.
- If you are buying the car for a petite person, make sure they can reach the pedals with the seat fully forward.

ROAD TEST

Always try a car before you buy it and always check your insurance to ensure you are covered.

The road test should include a brake and steering check and, ideally, be five miles or more distance to allow the mechanicals to thoroughly warm up.

- Depress clutch, select a gear and lightly lift off the pedal. Feel when the clutch bites. If it's near to the top of the pedal's movement range, it indicates that the clutch is worn.
- On automatics, check that the car won't start in gear (make sure the footbrake is applied!), and listen for 'clunks' when selecting 'drive' and 'reverse'. On the road, automatics should change gear smoothly and the 'kickdown' should work. To test this, floor the accelerator while cruising at 40mph.
- Feel the steering wheel for free play. If the car has power steering, gently turn the steering from lock to lock and listen to see if the pump audibly complains. The wheel shouldn't 'kick' in your hand, either.
- Pull away. On a smooth, straight road, with nothing behind you, try the brakes. The car should pull up in a straight line without any judders.
- Listen for mechanical noise. There should be no wheel bearing, gearbox or differential groan. The engine should be quiet and smooth.
- In a car park, try driving with the steering fully turned in both directions, while listening for knocking noises.
- Steering should be positive. Listen for clonking noises from the suspension when the car goes over a road bump.
- Try the exterior lights, horn and operation of all accessories, like electric windows, sunroof, mirrors and air-con.





UNDER THE BONNET

A well-loved car will have a clean engine bay with evidence of recent maintenance, a shiny oil filter or battery, for example.

- Examine engine bay closely for signs of fluid or oil leakage. Engine bay condition should reflect the car's age. Be rightly suspicious if it's just been steam cleaned.
- Make sure the engine is cold before attempting to start. Sometimes bad starters are pre-warmed by devious vendors.
- Listen to the starter motor. It shouldn't screech or groan and the engine should turn over freely and consistently.
- As the engine starts, check the oil warning light extinguishes. A momentary top-end rattle is normal on a cold engine. But it shouldn't be noisy for much longer.
- Listen to engine note. It should be regular. Tap throttle. There shouldn't be blue smoke from the exhaust.
- Allow the engine to idle and warm up thoroughly before driving. Check that the electric fan cuts in and the engine doesn't overheat.

- With a hot engine, again tap throttle. There shouldn't be much smoke. If it's blue, it indicates oil is being burnt; if it's black, it indicates the fuel mixture's too rich and if it's steam-coloured, it indicates water's being burnt, which may mean that the cylinder head gasket is faulty. Costly!
- A whiny, buzzy noise may mean that the cambelt is adjusted too tightly; a rustling noise which rises and falls with the engine revs could be a slack timing chain.

WHEELS AND TYRES

Kerbed alloys and worn low-profile tyres are expensive. Enquire about replacement costs first.

- If you can jack the car up, so much the better. If not, try rocking the top of the front wheels in and out with the steering turned on lock to check for bearing play.
- Tyres, ideally, should be of the same make and tread pattern.
- Check tyre condition. Tread should be good, wear patterns normal and sidewalls shouldn't be scuffed.
- Check the spare wheel tyre condition and look for the jack and wheelbrace (where applicable).

Buyers essential checks

• YOUR DOCUMENTS PLEASE

Never buy a car without a logbook and always try and view the car at the seller's home address – not a 'convenient' meeting place suggested by the vendor. If information is falsified at such a meeting by the vendor, you will have no way of comeback.

• CHECK THE V5 FORM

The registered keeper should be the seller. The address they are selling the car from should be the address on the V5.

• VEHICLE IDENTIFICATION NUMBER

The description of vehicle and Vehicle Identification Number (VIN) must tally with the car you inspect.

• MOT CHECK

Check that the MOT is current and that the engine number and reg numbers match.

• SERVICE HISTORY

Examine the car's service history and any other bills associated with the car's upkeep.

• KEEP YOUR RECEIPTS

If you pay a deposit, insist on a receipt.

• PAYMENT

Insist on a full written receipt when payment is made to vendor.

A little advice

- It's helpful to know the approximate value of the car before buying and to make a note of any defects which have come to light and use the information to negotiate a price with the vendor.
- Always consider having a vehicle inspection carried out by a motoring organisation. Costs vary and we suggest you telephone the organisation concerned for an accurate quote. The cost of an inspection is invariably saved by renegotiating the car's asking price.
- If you buy from an auction, don't expect to be able to make the same leisurely checks as if you had bought the car from a private vendor.
- When buying a car from an auction you have certain rights, but much less of a comeback than if you purchased privately or from a retailer. It's best to check with the auction house first because conditions vary from one auction to the next.
- Remember, if you have little specialist knowledge of cars, take along someone who does. Or, at the very least, see the car on your own and tell the vendor you'll be back with a friend for a closer look. Don't be panicked if the vendor says he has another buyer looking at the car. Take your time.
- When you agree an asking price with the vendor, arrange payment with a banker's draft in preference to cash. It's far safer and just as influential.



Network Q. The best place to buy a used Vauxhall.



Don't want to get taken for a ride? Visit your local Network Q Retailer.

As one of the most thorough and reliable used car programmes ever developed, you can be sure that any vehicle carrying the Network Q badge has been thoroughly checked by our Vauxhall trained technicians, allowing our customers to drive off full of confidence and reassurance.

However, if you're purchasing your car from anywhere else, why not print off this checklist and take it with you when you are out viewing used cars. These vital checks are what we carry out as standard, but may save you time and unwanted expense when searching elsewhere.

BODYWORK

- General paintwork condition.
- Overspray on trim/panel.
- Panel gaps/alignment.
- Look down both sides of the car for any ripples.
- Inspect bonnet/boot/door edges for corrosion/repair.
- Run a magnet over any suspect areas.
- Is trim level consistent with model badge?
- Inspect the windscreen for chips or cracks.
- Check panel sealant.
- Test exterior lights.
- Test exhaust operation.
- Look for evidence of welding/ recent underseal.
- Examine sill condition.
- Look for oil and water leaks.
- Inspect car underside.
- Test the shock absorbers (bounce corners of car).

WHEELS & TYRES

- Examine tyre tread depth.
- Examine tyre wear pattern.
- Inspect tyre sizes.
- Inspect spare wheel.
- Wheel rims – look for kerbing/ corrosion.
- Test for excessive play in bearings/steering.
- Check toolkit/jack, etc.

UNDER THE BONNET

- Look for corrosion at tops of suspension housings.
- Dipstick check – level/oil condition.
- Check the oil filler cap (look for 'mayonnaise' inside).
- Radiator cap – check level/ oil in the water.
- Look for engine oil, water and petrol leaks.
- Examine inner wings for damage/corrosion.
- Exhaust smoke on start-up.
- Ease of starting (cold).
- Initial engine rattles?
- Ease of starting (hot).
- Is there any exhaust smoke after full warm-up?

INTERIOR

- Wear on driver's seat.
- General upholstery condition.
- Shine on steering wheel.
- Carpets – look for wear and feel for dampness.
- Wear on pedal rubbers.
- Mileometer digit alignment.
- Look for signs of dashboard screw tampering.
- Headlining fit and condition.
- Free play in steering wheel.
- Dashboard illumination.
- Heater fan operation.
- Wipers/washers.

- Radio CD and speakers.
- Sunroof operation.
- Instrument operation.
- Mirrors – test operation and look for damage.
- Test horn operation.
- Test air-con operation.
- Test the central locking operation, if fitted.
- Headlamp wash/wipe.
- Security system operation.

DOCUMENTS

- V5 registration document.
- Chassis/VIN number and engine number.
- Name and address of keeper (make note).
- Look for last change of ownership date.
- Number of previous owners, colour, etc.
- Is there any road tax left?
- Is there a service book?
- Is service record complete?
- Are any pages missing?
- Did the main agents do all the servicing?
- Have corrosion check-ups been done regularly?
- Are there any bills/other history worth considering?
- How long before the next service is due?
- Has car an MOT certificate?

- How long does it last? Does mileage tally?
- Does locality of MOT tester tie in with area on V5?

ROAD TEST

- Clutch take-up point.
- Excess smoke (on overrun).
- Pulling to one side.
- Brake performance.
- Handbrake operation.
- Free movement in steering.
- Steering wheel alignment.
- Noises from suspension.
- Any vibrations?
- Gear change and synchromesh action.
- Is engine noise excessive?
- Any engine hesitancy?
- Are there any transmission 'clunks'?
- Does engine overheat?
- Excess smoke (when revving engine up).
- Any rattles, squeaks or rumbles?

REMAINING STEPS

- Call manufacturer/dealer to confirm service history.
- Call previous owner to verify details about car's mileage/ repairs.
- Ring history check company.

