

# Inspect it yourself

Are you interested in buying a vehicle, and about to take it in for a professional inspection? CAA-Quebec recommends that you conduct your own check of certain preliminary (or additional) items.

**You can then hand in this completed document when you arrive at your CAA-Quebec Vehicle Inspection Centre.** Alternatively, if your own check reveals that the vehicle is in very poor condition, you'll know that it's probably not worth having it looked at by a professional.

This do-it-yourself pre-inspection doesn't require any in-depth knowledge of auto mechanics: all you need to do is pay close attention! Note that having a second person to help you will be very useful for some steps, such as checking the brake lights.

## Vehicle identification

Date:

Vehicle Identification Number (VIN, 17 characters):

Make:

Model:

Year:

Colour:

Odometer reading:

Number of remote starters or keys:

Working starter-kill system?  Yes  No

## The steps

### Vehicle exterior

What is the general condition of the vehicle? If the body has been extensively damaged by rust, it isn't worth having inspected before being sold or kept.

Examine the following:

- Body panels
- Fenders (especially the edges of the rear fender, where rust often starts)
- Roof (especially the front edge, near the windshield)
- Hood
- Trunk/hatch
- Doors

- Headlight and taillight clusters; look for damage, cracks or condensation (which means a cluster needs replacing)
- Windshield, windows and mirrors (cracks, see-through spots in mirrors)

Keep an eye out for blistering or bulging, which indicates the presence of rust under the paint, and probably rust perforations.

### **Undercarriage**

You can check the following elements beneath the vehicle by getting down on your hands and knees and, if necessary, using a mirror.

- Wheels and hubcaps (look for bumps or damage to the finish)
- Brakes (are the discs excessively rusty?)
- Leaking fluid, oil or grease
- An odour of gasoline
- Rust under the floor, on the chassis, on the rocker panels, etc.

### **Under the hood**

*Careful! Never inspect anything under the hood while the engine is still very hot; you could burn yourself.*

Take a look under the hood. This doesn't mean disassembling the engine, but simply conducting a visual check of certain elements that could be signs of mechanical problems. Check the following:

- Oil level
  - ➔ If the oil is low (or, worse, there is none) beware! It means the current owner is negligent when it comes to maintenance, and that's not a good sign.
- Leaking fluids (e.g., oil, antifreeze)
- An odour of burnt oil or gasoline (means there are leaks)
- Cleanliness of the engine (a clean engine means it has been well maintained)

### **Trunk and fuel tank**

Open the trunk and check for:

- Cleanliness
  - The spare wheel/tire or an emergency inflation system (which sometimes replaces the conventional spare wheel/tire)
  - A jack (if one is necessary) so that you can change a wheel/tire
- ➔ Keep an eye out for pieces of broken glass in the trunk (a clue that the vehicle has been in an accident) and traces of rust (signs of a possible water leak).

Open the fuel door and check that:

- The fuel cap is present (note, however, that some vehicles don't have one)

## **Interior**

If you've concluded, based on the exterior condition, that the vehicle may be worth buying, it's time to take a look at the interior!

Check that:

- The courtesy/map lamps and dome lamp are all working

Then check the cleanliness and condition of the following:

- Steering wheel
- Front and rear seats
- Seat belts
- Trim (carpeting, fabric, leather)
- Dashboard
- Armrests
- Doors
- Ceiling
- Sunroof (feel around the edges for traces of infiltration)

If the interior smells musty, this could mean water is leaking into the interior.

A dirty or smelly vehicle may need to have a full interior cleaning and detailing done. This job must be entrusted to professionals with specialized equipment. If need be, inquire about the cost of this treatment.

## **Pre-road test**

Start by starting the engine with the key (if there is one), and then check all the locks and remote controls. There should be two keys with the vehicle. If not, a new one can cost up to \$500!

Sit in the driver's seat and adjust it to your driving position.

Take the opportunity to check the following:

- Driver's seat adjustments (forward, rear, seat back angle, lumbar support). Also check the passenger seat!
- Mirrors
- Sun visors

Look at some of the vehicle's electronic components: turn the key to the first position, without starting the engine, and check:

- The audio system and all related controls (sound quality, Bluetooth connectivity, CD player, iPhone dock, etc.)

Now turn the key one position farther (still not starting the engine) and check to see that all the main dashboard warning lamps are operational:

- Check-engine
- Oil level
- Engine temp
- Brake fluid level
- ABS
- Airbags

Now start the engine. Be alert for any suspicious noises.

- ➔ After you start the engine, all of the warning lamps should go out; if not, make a note of which ones stay lit.

If you have someone with you, ask them to check for smoke coming out of the tailpipe when you start the engine. With that person's help, also check that the headlights, taillights, reverse lights and brake lights are all working properly.

Try all controls and accessories that can be manipulated:

- Heated/air-conditioned seats (if the vehicle is equipped with them)
- Fan switch (all speeds)
- Fan control louvers
- Windshield wipers, front and rear (if present)
- Air temperature control

- ➔ When it's set to "warm", the interior should be warm, and the same goes for "cool"—especially if the vehicle has air conditioning. Make note of your impressions.

- Raise/lower the windows (manual or electric)
- Open/close the sunroof (if the vehicle has one)

## Road test

It's now time to take the vehicle out on the road! Before your test drive (20 minutes or less), some reminders:

- Is there enough fuel in the tank?
- Is the engine temperature normal according to the gauge?
- Have you familiarized yourself with the various controls (e.g., windshield wipers)?

Turn off the audio system so that you can better hear any suspicious noises.

If everything is normal, sound the horn briefly to make sure it is working, and then start the road test.

Engage the parking brake. Run through all the gearshift positions with the brake pedal firmly depressed, and be alert for suspicious noises or vibrations while you do this. (If the vehicle is equipped with a manual transmission, do this with the clutch pedal depressed.)

Take the opportunity to check:

- The operation of any rear-view safety systems that may be present (e.g., camera, motion sensor)

Gently release the parking brake. The vehicle should move forward as you gently release the brake pedal (or the clutch pedal in the case of a manual transmission); if it does not, this means the parking brake is not working properly.

Test-drive the vehicle on a varied route, checking the following:

- Acceleration (noise, rumbling, power, handling)—obeying the speed limit, of course!
- Operation of the speedometer and odometer
- Steering wheel alignment (is it centred when you are driving straight ahead?)
- Braking (vibrations, sensations, noises)
- Engine while idling (vibration, irregular noise)
- Noise from the exhaust system
- Behaviour of the transmission as you shift through all forward gears as well as reverse (slipping, knocking, grinding, other sounds)
- Behaviour of the clutch if the vehicle has a manual transmission (feeling of the pedal, firmness, smoothness as you shift)
- Suspicious noises while driving at speed
- Knocking
- Behaviour in low-speed turns

Also drive on the highway, at a constant speed, which will allow you to check the following:

- Operation of the cruise control (it must hold vehicle speed correctly and respond to the acceleration and deceleration controls)
- Vibrations
- Suspicious noises
- Road handling
- Behaviour of the steering assembly (does the vehicle drift to one side or another?)
- Wind noise
- Operation of the safety systems, if present (lane departure warning, adaptive cruise control, blind spot warning)

After completing the test drive, park the vehicle safely and turn off the ignition. After exiting, take another look underneath the vehicle to check for possible oil or fluid leaks.

Lastly, take the time to record your impressions (and those of your “co-pilot”) before giving this document to the staff at your local Vehicle Inspection Centre.

