



## The 20-Point "Anti-Lemon" Checklist

*Don't guess. Scout it. Use this list to separate the gems from the junk.*

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### PHASE 1: THE DIGITAL SCOUT (Ask Before You Meet)

If the seller can't answer these, don't waste gas driving there.

1. **Title Status:** Is it Clean, Rebuilt, or Salvage? (Never pay full price for Salvage).
2. **Title In-Hand:** Does the seller physically have the title? (No title = No deal).
3. **Ownership History:** How long have they owned it? (Watch out for "flippers" <Less than 2 months ownership).
4. **The "Why":** Why are they selling? (Listen for hesitation).
5. **Maintenance:** Do they have service records or receipts?

### PHASE 2: THE WALKAROUND (Exterior Check)

Do this in daylight. Tell the seller: "Please leave the engine **COLD.**"

6. **The Cold Hood / Hose Test:** Touch the hood or open it and feel the radiator hose. Is it warm or hot? (Warm engines hide starting issues/smoke/clicking noises).
7. **The Penny Test:** Stick a penny in the tread (Lincoln's head down). Can you see his hair? (Yes = Bald or badly worn tires).
8. **Panel Gaps:** Are the gaps between the doors and fenders even? (Uneven = Accident history).
9. **Fluid Check:** Pull the oil dipstick. Does it look like "chocolate milk"? (Yes = Blown Head Gasket). Low Level? Maintenance issues or leak.
10. **The Puddle Check:** Look underneath. Red fluid = Transmission / issues or leak. Green = Coolant / water pump issues. Black = Oil / leak.

### PHASE 3: THE INTERIOR SCOUT

Get inside, close the door, and turn off the radio.

11. **The Sniff Test:** Smell - heavy air freshener? or mold? (Could hide cigarette smoke or flood damage mildew).
12. **The Dashboard Light Check:** Turn key to "On" (Engine off). Do Check Engine/ABS lights glow? (If not, the bulb was removed, or covered up with tape).

13. **Climate Stress Test:** Blast the A/C (Cold?) and then the Heat (Hot?).
14. **Window/Lock Check:** Do all 4 windows roll down? Do all doors lock/unlock?
15. **Carpet Dampness:** Press hand into footwell carpets, Left & Right sides. Damp? (Heater core leak or window leak).

#### **PHASE 4: THE DRIVE**

Drive for at least 15 minutes. Highway and City speeds.

16. **Hands-Off Braking:** Brake firmly on a straight safe road, hands slightly gripping the wheel. Does the car pull Left or Right?
17. **Shift Quality:** Does the transmission "clunk," "slip," or delay when shifting?
18. **The Circle Test:** Turn steering wheel fully left and drive in a slow circle. Then do the same fully right. Listen for "clicking" (CV Joints).
19. **Highway Vibration:** At 60mph+, does the steering wheel or seat shake?

#### **PHASE 5: THE DEAL BREAKER**

The final verification.

20. **The VIN Match:** Does the Dashboard VIN match the Door Sticker VIN and the Title?

#### **FOUND ANY RED FLAGS?**

***Bonus:** CHECK ENGINE LIGHT? If you don't have your own OBD2 code scanner – Your test drive should be to "AutoZone" or any Auto parts store and ask for a free ODB2 code scan, write those codes down and look them up. If the owner refuses to allow that walk away.*

**OR**

*Use the "[Car Value Scout](#)" app to read and describe scan codes and deduct the repair cost from the asking price instantly. Then print the "[CarValueScout PDF](#)" to negotiate a better price with the seller or walk away.*

Also -

Run a Full [Vehicle History Report](#) (\$15.99)

## **"Car Value Scout"**