RidePulse

Used-car test drive checklist: vibration

Car: _____ Date: _____ Tire size: _____

Before you drive

- [ ] Tires: matching brands, enough tread, no bulges; uneven or cupped wear
- [ ] Fresh balance weights, new rotors or new mounts: ask what was done and why
- [ ] Start the engine cold if you can: rough running, smoke, noises
- [ ] Check engine light comes on at key-on, then goes out

Parked, engine running · Outdoors, parking brake on.

- [ ] Idle with the AC off: steady, or shaking and hunting?
- [ ] AC on: a small change, or a big jump in vibration?
- [ ] Automatic, foot firmly on the brake: Drive and Reverse, any clunk or big shake? (Nobody in front of the car.)
- [ ] Steering wheel and mirrors still at idle?

Slow, in a parking lot

- [ ] Full-lock turns both ways: clicking or groaning?
- [ ] Over a speed bump: clunks, or bouncing more than once?
- [ ] Pulling away gently: shudder or judder?

City speeds, 25 to 40 mph

- [ ] A wobble or thump that keeps time with the wheels?
- [ ] Shudder when accelerating that stops when you coast?

Highway, 50 to 70 mph, within the limit

- [ ] Steering wheel shake at a steady speed? Speed: ____
- [ ] Seat or floor vibration? Speed: ____
- [ ] Does it change when you lift off the gas and coast?
- [ ] A hum or growl that changes when you gently change lanes?
- [ ] Pulls to one side, or steering wheel off center?

Braking · Quiet road, nobody close behind.

- [ ] Gentle stop from about 50 mph: steering wheel shake or pedal pulse?
- [ ] Pulls to one side when braking?
- [ ] Squeal or grinding?

After the drive

- [ ] Hot or burning smell from one wheel, oil or coolant?
- [ ] Notes for the inspector: what, where, at what speed

Note the speed where anything starts, and whether you feel it in the steering wheel, the seat or the pedal. Keep to the limits; a passenger takes notes. A vibration is a question for the mechanic doing the pre-purchase inspection, not a diagnosis. More: ridepulse.web.app/guides/used-car-test-drive-vibration-checklist/