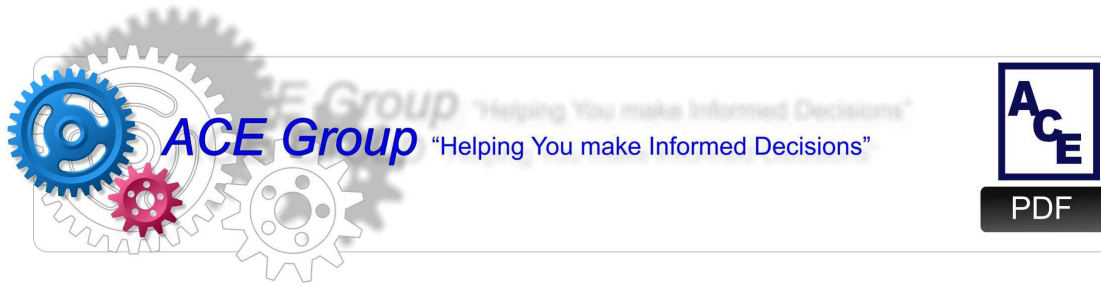


Buying a second-hand car?

Buying a second-hand car need not be traumatic but care and research are the buzzwords. Clearly the biggest danger in buying a second hand car is buying with your heart. We have all done it even the experts. It might look like a dream vehicle and the seller may seem genuine, but never just get out your cash on that basis. Remember that cash was hard to come by and is very hard to get back, but with a bit of caution and planning you can improve the chances of buying a good vehicle. Even we experts can't always tell if a problem is pending but we can find the ones present. This is not a replacement for having a professional report done and I would always recommend that course of action but it will give you an idea of what to look for if you want to do it yourself. Remember this is not by any means a complete guide and carrying it out implies no warranty or guarantee. You are buying at your own risk and for that reason think about employing an expert. Tony Farndale.

Before you go to look at anything!

1. Draw up a short list of the types of vehicle you would like e.g. Corsa, Fiesta, Saxo and then the engine size 1.2, 1.6 etc get an insurance quote for the type of vehicle you want right now, we know what were looking for, what's our budget. During the searching faze you will get a good idea of vehicle values or for further help use Parkers Guide. Select 5 or 6 examples if possible and restrict the distance to 15 -20 miles away get this list down to 2 or 3. This is so if things go wrong you don't have far to travel to complain. Look at the advertisement, is the vehicle a trade sale, these have to be marked, it's not a bad thing but remember they are selling for a profit.
2. Always complete an identity check HPI, AA or MyCheck can help. The links are listed at end of this article.
3. Take a friend with you to look at the vehicle; it is always better to have 2 pairs of eyes, preferable an engineer. This is not fool proof but gives you a better chance. When narrowed down to the final choice **consider a pre-purchase inspection by ourselves, the AA or RAC etc** links listed at end or even book the vehicle in with a local garage or quick fit centre or at least get it MOT'd.
4. Always have an identity check done and check the documentation before paying any money. If visiting someone's home address, check in the phone book that the telephone number matches the address. Never see or buy a car at a car park, motorway services or outside someone else's address.
5. Have a plan for inspecting cars, write down what you see and you will find it easier to compare afterwards.
6. Use your instincts there probably right, if it's too cheap it probably is.
7. Don't buy the same day sleep on it.
8. Once you have bought, stop looking, you will always find a better car or deal.



What to do on site....

Start with the documents, who's the vehicle registered to should be the current keeper if not be careful. Make sure all the paper work ties up with the car you're viewing. The Vehicle Identification Number (VIN) in the registration document should match with the one stamped on the metal VIN plate or screen plate, which you'll find under the bonnet or at the base of the [windscreen](#).

If it looks like it's been tampered with be careful. All cars more than three years old have to have an annual MOT certificate. Beware of forgeries they often look wrong compare with your own if you had a car previously if not borrow one and copy it. Some sellers use an old tactic of "It'll only take £20 to get it through the test", clearly If that was true they would have had it completed. Cars with an MOT are easier to sell always consider an MOT prior to purchase if they are reluctant "caution Will Robinson" for people under 40 its an old kids TV program. Ask if the vehicles had any accident damage re-instatement work completed if possible get this in writing.

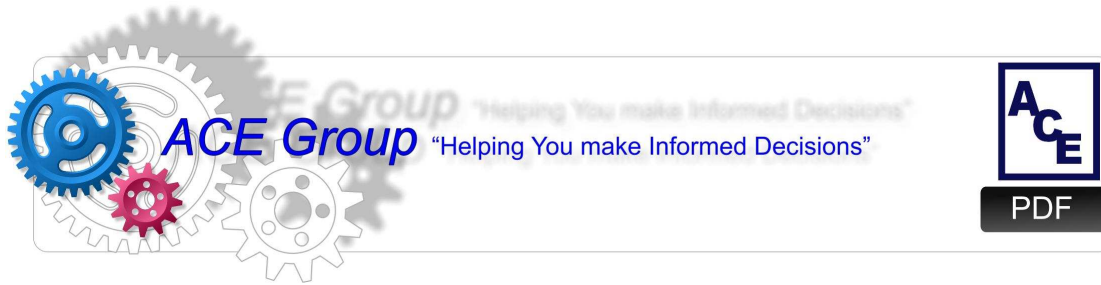
BEFORE TESTING:

Bodywork

Is the car [all one](#) colour, it should be it should have a reasonable luster, look at the panel gaps are they even do the doors fit in the apertures check for differing sealer at panel joints always start at all 4 corners looking for repairs open the bonnet and boot look for differences in panel fit or sealing both sides should be similar. Check the boot floor for creases or damage. Look for strange creases in the roof, door apertures or floor this could be a sign that your vehicle is 2 vehicles / damaged ones welded together. Rust is a big problem. If you spot holes in the sills, the floor pan or at the top of the suspension's strut towers, be prepared for an expensive repair.

Interior

Try out all the electrical equipment and make sure they work. It can be a nightmare to track down faults associated with electrical faults and expensive too. Look for water ingress damp carpets head linings and pillar mouldings water leaks are also expensive to find and fix if fitted with a sun roof make sure it works and is not noisy in operation. Check the interior for abnormal wear to carpets or seats. Does the driver's seat feel saggy - a sure sign of high mileage. Adjust the seat and steering column/wheel to a comfortable position does it work correctly. Check mirror positions does it suit you. Check the heater and ventilation / air conditioning system. Check the audio system unless you're a great singer. Modern materials make it hard to judge a cars true mileage.



Mileage and dash instruments

What it might say on the dial isn't always what the cars really mileage. 'Clocking' is a very common practice. See if the seller has any old MOT certificates or service invoices or if ones left in the car which registers the mileage. Check the instruments work those fancy electronic dashes are great but expensive to fix. Check that heating, air conditioning and ventilation systems work correctly.

Engine

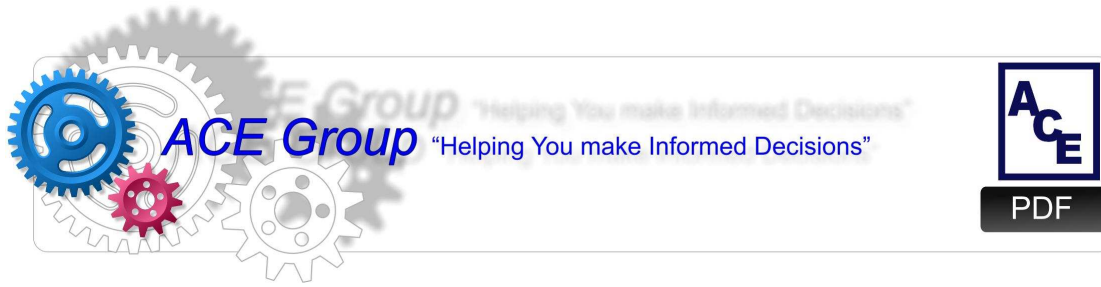
Show up half an hour early so owner doesn't have time to start the [engine](#) and get it warm and warm it through before you arrive. A healthy [engine](#) should turn over on the first twist of the key or press button and start almost immediately, initially the idle will be fast then settle down to a smooth, even idle speed slight variations are acceptable but should be smooth. Any perceptible smoke from the exhaust is a worry, as are odd rattling and knocking sounds from the engine. So bring along a friend to spot these signs just in case owner tries distracting you. When you come back from [test drive](#) (make sure you get a test drive!) take the cap off the oil filter. If it's coated with goo / creamy residue or flack carbon, the engine has or is developing a fault most likely very expensive to fix. Ask the owner if he knows how often the [cam-belt](#) should be changed and ask for proof that it's been replaced if required in alignment with the manufactures recommendations very important.

Fluids

Check the oil level and the level of water in the radiator or expansion tank, and ensure the brake fluids up to the max mark. If the vehicles fitted with [power steering](#), don't forget to check that level too. Any signs of contamination and worry about the repair costs. If you need a guide check some else's before you go for the types of colour to expect. Some hydraulic fluids can be green, yellow or red but they should not be cloudy or have metal particles visible.

Exhaust

Too loud and it probably means the exhaust system has failed and leaking. If the car is fitted with a catalytic converter, make sure it has a recent MOT; if not, get emissions check done – replacement catalytic converters are very expensive. If fitted with a DPF system check that the owner has had no regeneration issues and if due for replacement at a set interval that it's been done.



Lights

Walk around the car and make sure that all the lights are in full working order and not damaged or have extensive water or moisture. If not, working correctly there could be a major electrical fault. Even test the brake lights remember that friend you brought told you they have a use.

Tyres

If the police stop you, bald / illegal **tyres** are not likely to make the officer your friend for life and could cost you £1,000 a corner. Also, look at the way they've worn at the front and back. If the outside or inside edges are badly worn; it could mean the suspension or tracking issues. On the modern batch of cars wear to the shoulders is not unusual and the law allows for this centre three quarters must be above 1.6mm around the whole circumference. Check for bulges, cutting and any white material or wire cord exposure.

Suspension and steering.

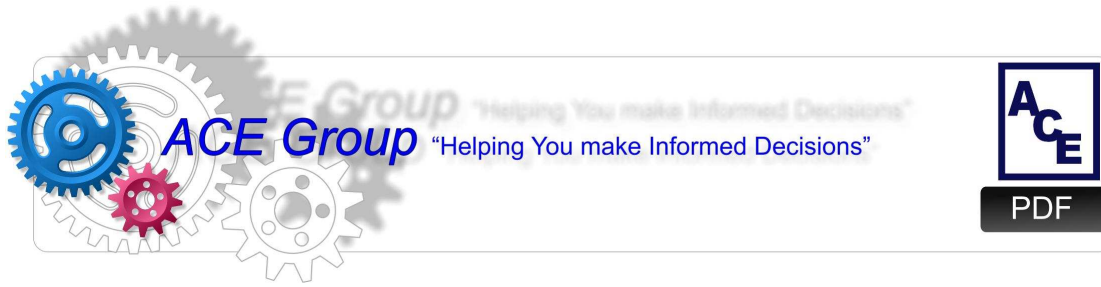
If the car looks uneven in height or the wheels don't seem to fit the arches (unless fitted with large wheels) be concerned.

ROAD TEST:

Before you start a road test check you are insured and the vehicle has road fund license (tax) and a current MOT do not test if the answer to any of these is NO and ask your self should I have someone do this for me! Remember all you Lewis Hamilton's that a 1.2 Corsa will not have the grip of a formula one car so horses for courses and remember if you damage it you probably own it. Make sure the vehicle is legal.

STARTING UP

Does the engine start easily from cold and then when warm. Diesels may sound a bit noisy at first but should settle down quickly. Take it easy until your confidence builds clutch operation, gear-change, steering and brakes may all feel different from your current car. Check the brake pedal feels good and solid, switch the engine off, pump the pedal until it feels different (usually hard) then hold pressure on and start the engine the pedal should sink. On some modern systems the pedal feels strange soft and may go right to the floor this is not every ones cup of tea if the pedal feels this way get confirmation its operating correctly MOT test for example.



Clutch, gearbox and automatics.

The clutch should be easy to depress and should bite / take up drive somewhere between the lower third and top third if it's near the top it could be worn. It should not judder or produce any mechanical noise today a judder may not just be a clutch issue it could be a double mass flywheel a costly repair. During the test the engine should not increase in speed without the vehicle responding possibly a sign of clutch slip. All the gears should be attainable and all should be present. The gear lever should slip easily between all the gears, and you definitely shouldn't be able to hear any whining noises or crunching you know the score more cost. Autoboxes should change smoothly and at reasonable road speeds up and down. The transmission should not be noisy or flare / slip. Variable transmissions should be smooth.

Brakes.

On the test drive, insist that you apply the brakes hard as in the emergency stop from your driving test you remember that traumatic day in the past or future. So apply the brakes hard but in a safe place at a reasonable speed. It should pull up straight and quickly without locking the brakes some camber bias is normal. A grinding noise isn't normal and often means the brake pads are worn out and disc damage is likely. The fault is dangerous and costly. Juddering through the brake pedal can mean the brake discs are distorted, again costly.

Handbrake.

Find a hill or slope to see if the handbrake will actually stop the car rolling away the number of clicks is not that important but should lock and not bind.

Suspension and steering.

If the vehicle wallows after you've gone over the bump, the shock absorbers and or springs are defective. Any suspension noise or road holding issues are a concern. The vehicle should feel safe, remember you Lewis Hamilton's that a 1.1 Corsa will not have the grip of a formula one car so horses for courses and remember if you damage it you probably own it. Does the steering feel positive and accurate, smooth and light the steering should not be noisy.