

Ask Ronny

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Answering Your Questions About Classic Car Care Service And Restoration

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Pre-purchase Road Test

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Pre-purchase Road Test Checklist

Engine performance:

During road test listen for abnormal tapping or knocking noises from the engine. Light tapping noises can indicate loose valves or worn lifters. Deep knocking noises can indicate worn pistons or bearings. Watch oil pressure gauge if fitted. Low oil pressure readings can indicate worn bearings or bad oil gauge. Look for excessive smoke and color of smoke out the exhaust during acceleration and at idle. White smoke usually indicates coolant loss and blue smoke indicates oil consumption. Blue smoke on acceleration usually indicates worn rings and at idle usually indicates worn valve guides or seals. Blue smoke on deceleration will also indicate worn valve guides and or seals. White smoke can indicate blown head gasket or cracks in block or head.

Transmission performance:

Manual Transmission:

Let car idle in neutral with clutch pedal out, listen for grinding or clicking noises. Then depress clutch to see if noises go away or if new noises appear. Any abnormal noises will indicate worn bearings in the transmission, clutch release or pilot. Drive the car and run the car through the gears. Listen for excessive vibration, grinding, clunking and growling noises during shifting and acceleration or deceleration. Grinding noises during shifting can indicate bent clutch release or shifting forks and or worn synchros. Growling noises can indicate worn transmission or driveline bearings. Clunking noises and vibration can indicate worn driveline mounts or u-joints.

Automatic Transmission:

Run shifter back and forth through gears, listen for clunking noises and look for looseness in linkage. Check to see if gear indicator pointer is accurate. Clunking noises can indicate worn mounts, u-joints or internal transmission parts. Road test car and notice shift feel. Extra harsh or soft shifts can indicate throttle valve linkage, vacuum modulating, governor, clutch, band or low fluid problems.

Steering:

Turn wheel back and forth while parked. Check for excessive free play and clunking noises. Excessive free play can indicate worn or out of adjustment steering box. It can also indicate worn steering linkages. On cars with power steering listen for screeching or groaning noises. Screeching noises can indicate loose belts and groaning noises can indicate low fluid. Low fluid will indicate the system has a leak.

While driving, look for any shimmy, wandering and abnormal noises from the steering system. Shimmies and wandering can come from worn or loose steering joints, bent wheels, bad tires, worn steering box and steering damper. Creaks, groans and clunks can also indicate worn parts. Let go of the steering wheel briefly on a straight level road (when safe!!!!) and see what the car does. It should track a straight line without drifting or darting left or right. Remember to do this when the car is running straight (regardless of steering wheel position). After completing a turn, the steering should return to neutral straight ahead position. If the car responds incorrectly to these tests, then alignment will be necessary with any needed parts replaced. Don't forget, bad tires can also cause problems.

Suspension:

Look at the car ride height before test drive, the car should look level with plenty of clearance between tires and wheel well. If the car looks like it is sagging, then springs could be worn or there could be serious frame damage. During the road test, listen for abnormal squeaking, groaning and clunking noises. Worn ball joints, king pins, control arm bushings, spring bushings and shocks can cause a myriad of noises. Check to see how the car responds to dips and bumps. Excessive rebound over bumps will indicate worn shocks.

Thank you for the questions and keep them coming. Please send your questions to Ronny at ronnyshaver@ronnysgarage.com.

Happy Motoring!
Ronny