



Used Semi Truck Pre-Purchase Inspection Checklist

Work top to bottom: cheap checks first (paperwork, VIN), expensive ones last (shop inspection). Walk away early from a bad truck. Check a box only when you've seen it yourself.

USE IT FOR A PRE-PURCHASE INSPECTION

Take it to your mechanic

1. **Know the real condition** before you pay, not after the first breakdown.
2. **Hand it to your mechanic** so nothing gets skipped, then write down everything they find.
3. **Every finding is a reason to ask for a lower price**, even a minor one. Add it to the repair table and the Decision box on page 3.

VIN (17 CHARACTERS)	YEAR / MAKE / MODEL	ENGINE / TRANSMISSION
SELLER (NAME & PHONE)	ODOMETER / ECM MILES / HOURS	ASKING PRICE · DATE

☐ = checked & OK ☒ = problem, write it in Notes ? = couldn't check, ask the seller or your shop

1 · PAPERWORK & IDENTITY

before you drive out

- ☐ **VIN check**
Year, make, model & engine match the listing. Run it free at getsemilife.com.
- ☐ **VIN matches everywhere**
Title, door/frame plate, registration and engine records show the same VIN.
- ☐ **Title**
In the seller's (or dealer's) name. No lienholder, or a signed lien release.
- ☐ **Lien / UCC search**
Search UCC filings with the Secretary of State in the seller's state.
- ☐ **NMVTIS title history**
Salvage, rebuilt or flood brands; odometer records.
- ☐ **Open recalls**
By VIN; proof that completed recalls were done at a dealer.
- ☐ **Roadside inspection history**
Past defects tied to the VIN and who ran the truck.
- ☐ **Maintenance records**
Oil changes, overhauls, DPF/EGR work, warranty claims.
- ☐ **Current annual inspection**
Report per 49 CFR 396.17.

⚠ **RED FLAG** Seller won't give the VIN, title isn't in their name, or there's a lien with no release.

2 · ECM REPORT

pulled by YOUR shop

- ☐ **Engine hours vs. miles**
High hours for the miles = heavy idling or slow work.
- ☐ **Idle %**
High idle share = more wear, soot and regens.
- ☐ **Lifetime fuel economy**
Much worse than similar trucks points to problems.
- ☐ **Overspeed & hard-brake events**
Lots of them = hard driving.
- ☐ **Fault codes, active & inactive**
Repeating EGR, turbo, injector or aftertreatment codes.

☐ Regen history

Frequent forced regens = clogged DPF or upstream issue.

☐ ECM miles ≈ odometer

Big gap needs proof (cluster or ECM replaced).

⚠ **RED FLAG** Seller only offers a screenshot or photo of the ECM report, or won't let your shop plug in.

3 · ENGINE, TURBO & LEAKS

- ☐ **Cold start**
Ask that it isn't started before you arrive. Hard start, white/blue smoke, knocking?
- ☐ **Blow-by**
Heavy smoke or pressure from the breather tube = worn rings.
- ☐ **Leaks**
Oil, coolant, fuel: under the truck, head, turbo, oil cooler.
- ☐ **Oil & coolant**
Milky dipstick or oil in coolant. Ask about EGR cooler history.
- ☐ **Turbo**
Shaft play, oil in the intake, whistling.
- ☐ **Oil sample to a lab**
Coolant, fuel dilution or wear metals.

4 · AFTERTREATMENT: DPF / DEF / EGR

- ☐ **DPF**
When last cleaned or replaced? Receipts.
- ☐ **SCR / DEF**
DEF quality, NOx sensor and SCR codes, DEF pump/heater.
- ☐ **EGR valve & cooler**
Codes, leaks, coolant loss.
- ☐ **All emissions parts present**
No "delete" or tuner. Deletes are illegal under the federal Clean Air Act.

⚠ **RED FLAG** "Deleted" truck or straight pipe: hard to register, insure, sell or legally run. California requires 2010+ engines for most heavy trucks.

5 · FRAME, SUSPENSION & DRIVELINE

- ☐ **Frame rails**
Cracks, welds, fish plates, rust at crossmembers & suspension mounts.
- ☐ **Air suspension**
Bags (cracks), leveling valves, shocks, bushings.
- ☐ **Steering & front end**
Kingpins, tie rods, steering box play.
- ☐ **Driveline**
U-joint play, carrier bearing, hub seals, rear-end noise.
- ☐ **Fifth wheel**
Wear, play, lock function, mounting bolts.
- ☐ **Transmission & clutch**
AMT fault codes; clutch engagement, grinding.

⚠ **RED FLAG** Welded or plated frame rails with no repair paperwork.

6 · BRAKES & TIRES

top roadside violations

- ☐ **Brake stroke & slack adjusters**
Pushrod stroke within limits on every axle.
- ☐ **Drums / rotors & linings**
Cracks, heat checks, thin linings, grease.
- ☐ **Air system**
No leaks; normal build-up time and governor cut-out.
- ☐ **Tread depth**
Min. 4/32" steer, 2/32" others (49 CFR 393.75).
- ☐ **Tire age & condition**
DOT date code, cuts, bulges, mismatched tires, uneven wear (= alignment).

7 · ELECTRICAL, LIGHTS & GLASS

- ☐ **All exterior lights**
Headlights, markers, turn, brake, trailer plug.
- ☐ **Wiring & batteries**
Corrosion in harnesses & connectors; battery age, cranking.
- ☐ **Dash & gauges**
No warning lights; all gauges work.
- ☐ **Glass & mirrors**
No cracks in the driver's view.

8 · CAB & SLEEPER

- ☐ **HVAC & APU**
Run heat, A/C and APU. Note hours on the APU.
- ☐ **Inverter, windows, locks**
Everything electric works.
- ☐ **Water leaks**
Stains on headliner or sleeper floor.
- ☐ **Seats, bunk, cabinets**
Wear and smells show how it was lived in.

9 · TEST DRIVE

30+ min, loaded if possible

- ☐ **Power under load**
Smooth pull on a hill; no smoke.
- ☐ **Temperatures**
No coolant temp creep or overheating.
- ☐ **Tracking & braking**
Straight with light hands; no pull when braking.
- ☐ **Engine brake**
Works on all settings.
- ☐ **Shifting**
Clean shifts up and down.
- ☐ **Codes rechecked after**
No new warning lights or fault codes.

10 · INDEPENDENT INSPECTION

- ☐ **Shop chosen by YOU**
Not one the seller recommends.
- ☐ **Written report with repair estimates**
Use it to negotiate or walk away.

⚠ **RED FLAG** Seller pushes for a deposit before your inspection, or "someone else is coming today."

11 · ASK THE SELLER

- ☐ **Why are you selling?**
Fleet trade-in, retiring, or "it keeps breaking"?
- ☐ **How many owners? What work did it do?**
Long-haul highway miles wear differently than local or vocational.
- ☐ **Any accidents, overhauls or major repairs?**
Ask for invoices.
- ☐ **Can my shop inspect it and pull the ECM?**
A "no" is your answer.

use the total to negotiate

Show this sheet to the seller: itemized findings + estimated costs = your counteroffer.

☐ Buy at asking
 ☐ Buy if price drops to \$_____
 ☐ Walk away

- Important:** This checklist is general information to help you organize a used truck purchase. It is not a substitute for a professional inspection by a qualified heavy-duty mechanic, or for legal, tax or financial advice. Regulations cited (49 CFR 393.75, 396.17; Clean Air Act; CARB Truck and Bus Regulation) can change; verify current rules. © 2026 SemiLife · getsemilife.com · Free VIN check, carrier lookup & full guide: getsemilife.com/guides/used-semi-truck-buying-checklist