

Super second-hand cars

There's nothing better than tracking down a bargain used car. We've picked our favourites to suit most budgets – and give handy buying tips

Interested in a used car? Then you're not alone. For every brand-new car driven off a forecourt, three used cars are sold. That's because most people realise a factory-fresh car is not a good financial investment – far better to buy a car that has already lost a large chunk of its value.

There's certainly no shortage of choice. In 2006 (2007 figures weren't published as we went to press), a bumper 7.5 million used cars

were sold – despite a fall in sales of new cars.

Here, we show you which cars to look for in popular price brackets from less than £2,500 up to £16,000 and beyond. Our choices are based on our unique and exhaustive testing, reliability information derived from nearly 100,000 owners, and price information from www.which.co.uk/cars. Stick to our advice and you should avoid a painful used-car experience.

Insider information

Our used-car expert, George Marshall-Thornhill, on how we pick the best

Why is Which? testing different from that of any other magazine? Because we put each car through a rigorous set of tests on road, track and at a high-tech lab. Some of these focus on dynamics – such as braking, acceleration and handling. Others measure vitally important aspects such as visibility, ease of using controls and boot capacity.

By combining the results of our tests with unique reliability data, compiled with the help of thousands of Which?



members, we award each car a verdict out of five. You also tell us whether you'd recommend your car to a friend – the litmus test for a trustworthy purchase. So we recommend a car only if it does well in our tests and you've told us it's not a lemon.

What you should look for

BODYWORK DAMAGE

Rust isn't the problem it once was, but paint repairs can be costly and metallics are tricky to match. Use damage to haggle over the price

ENGINE HEALTH

If you find mayonnaise-type gunk under the oil cap, it could point to expensive head gasket replacement. Check the dipstick (for oil level and condition) and look out for dirty coolant

TYRE TYPE/WEAR

Are the tyres in good nick and what type are they? Low-profile tyres can cost a lot to replace

ELECTRICAL GREMLINS

Check for dashboard warning lights and try out all electrical gear – central locking, windows, lights. Take a CD to check the stereo, too

WHEEL CONDITION

Plastic wheel trims (for steel wheels) can be replaced, but scuffed alloys cost around £50 a wheel to touch up. Really big gouges may require replacement

USING OUR SUMMARIES

Guide price Typical price range for a car of this age and mileage (private sales tend to be cheaper than dealer sales). **We spotted it for** Price as advertised – we used *AutoTrader* and manufacturers' approved-used schemes to find cars. Prices are always subject to negotiation, so use these as a starting point. **Reliability** We use data from our annual *Which? Car* survey to determine model reliability. Where possible, we separate petrol and diesel models. **Troublespots** Items that often go wrong – look out for these on a used car. Data is taken from the annual *Which? Car* survey. **Safety ratings** We give two safety ratings here. **Euro NCAP** This gives the adult occupant protection score, out of a maximum of five stars. Scores can be compared only with a car from the same class, eg superminis. **Which?** This is our overall safety rating, covering many different crash scenarios. The score is out of five stars and can be compared across classes (small cars usually score lower).

**UP TO £2,500**

Vauxhall Corsa

Which? verdict ★★ ★★**Owner recommendation** 54%**Version** 1.0 Club 3-door hatchback**Year/mileage** 2003/30,000 miles**Guide price** £2,900 - £3,300**We spotted it for** £2,495

The popular Corsa is a fairly practical supermini, with a well-designed and comfy interior. This low-spec 'Club' has power steering and remote locking. The 1.0-litre, 58bhp, three-cylinder engine is quite sedate but should return around 50mpg.

VERDICT There are plenty on sale, so go for condition over specification.

Reliability (2002-2004 petrol) **Breakdowns** Excellent **Faults** Excellent **Niggles** Excellent **Troublespots** Cam belt (petrol), washers/wipers, manual gearbox, some other gears/clutch components, steering **Safety ratings** Euro NCAP ★★ ★★ **Which?** ★★ ★★

WHICH?
**BEST
BUY**

**FROM £2,500 TO £5,000**

Honda Civic

Which? verdict ★★ ★★ ★★**Owner recommendation** 81%**Version** 1.7 CTDi Imagine 5-door diesel**Year/mileage** 2003/77,000 miles**Guide price** £4,300 - £5,000**We spotted it for** £4,989

In some ways, the old Honda Civic is better than the current car. It's more spacious – almost limo-like in the back – and reliability is better. Safety rivals its younger brother's, too. The special-edition 'Imagine' comes with air-con, alloy wheels and side airbags.

VERDICT A superb used car with a very flexible interior and Honda's usual reliability. Check the air-con works.

Reliability (2002-2004) **Breakdowns** Excellent **Faults** Excellent **Niggles** Excellent **Troublespots** Air conditioning **Safety ratings** Euro NCAP ★★ ★★ **Which?** ★★ ★★

WHICH?
**BEST
BUY**

**UP TO £2,500**

Toyota Avensis

Which? verdict ★★ ★★**Owner recommendation** 75%**Version** 1.8 GLS 4-door saloon**Year/mileage** 2000/85,000 miles**Guide price** £2,100 - £2,700**We spotted it for** £2,200

Those in the know (including minicab drivers) appreciate the Avensis's family-friendly layout, motorway refinement and reliability. With a full service history this car should provide a good few years of trouble-free motoring.

VERDICT Anonymous but reliable family saloon. The 1.8 petrol claims nearly 40mpg, and post-2000 GS-spec and above have satnav as standard.

Reliability (1999-2001) **Breakdowns** Excellent **Faults** Excellent **Niggles** Average **Troublespots** Washers/wipers, manual gearbox **Safety ratings** Euro NCAP ★★ ★★ **Which?** ★★ ★★

WHICH?
**WORTH
CONSIDERING**

**FROM £2,500 TO £5,000**

Ford Focus

Which? verdict ★★ ★★**Owner recommendation** 73%**Version** 1.6 Zetec 5-door hatchback**Year/mileage** 2003/27,000 miles**Guide price** £4,600 - £5,200**We spotted it for** £4,995

If you like driving you'll love the Focus, with its sharp responses and great steering. We found a popular 1.6 Zetec version, fitted with optional air-con (£500 when new). Petrol models from 2002 to 2004 fare best for reliability, but check for the troublespots listed.

VERDICT A fantastic driver's car, but shop around for a good example.

Reliability (2002-2004 petrol) **Breakdowns** Excellent **Faults** Excellent **Niggles** Excellent **Troublespots** Cooling system, washers/wipers, some other non-engine electrics, rainwater seals, paintwork chipped/lost shine, light surface rust **Safety ratings** Euro NCAP ★★ ★★ **Which?** ★★ ★★

WHICH?
**BEST
BUY**

**Ford's
Mondeo is
a revelation
to drive –
smooth,
quiet and
great fun**

**UP TO £2,500**

Ford Mondeo

Which? verdict ★★ ★★**Owner recommendation** 64%**Version** 2.0 Zetec 5-door hatchback**Year/mileage** 2001/85,000 miles**Guide price** £2,300 - £2,900**We spotted it for** £2,400

Ford's Mondeo is a revelation to drive – smooth, quiet and great fun. Although it can suffer from annoying faults (listed below), petrol versions have few actual breakdowns. They're ten a penny, too, so you can afford to be choosy.

VERDICT A fault-free Mondeo makes an excellent driver's car. It's spacious, well equipped and cheap.

Reliability (1999-2001 petrol) **Breakdowns** Excellent **Faults** Poor **Niggles** Average **Troublespots** Exhaust system (diesel), central locking, software, audio equipment, air conditioning, clutch, braking system, suspension, seat belts, rainwater seals **Safety ratings** Euro NCAP ★★ ★★ **Which?** ★★ ★★

WHICH?
**WORTH
CONSIDERING**

**FROM £2,500 TO £5,000**

Honda Jazz

Which? verdict ★★ ★★ ★★**Owner recommendation** 90%**Version** 1.4 DSI SE 5-door hatchback**Year/mileage** 2002/29,000 miles**Guide price** £4,700 - £5,100**We spotted it for** £5,000

The Jazz has long been a Which? favourite, thanks to unbeatable reliability and interior flexibility – check out its multifold rear seats. Aside from a slightly jiggly ride, there's not much to moan about, which is why used values are on the high side. SE spec includes air conditioning.

VERDICT An excellent supermini with the flexibility to be a household's only car. It's impeccably reliable, too.

Reliability (2002-2004) **Breakdowns** Excellent **Faults** Excellent **Niggles** Excellent **Troublespots** None **Safety ratings** Euro NCAP ★★ ★★ **Which?** ★★ ★★

WHICH?
**BEST
BUY**



FROM £5,000 TO £8,000

Jaguar XJ8

Which? verdict ★★★★★

Owner recommendation 79%

Version 3.2 V8 4-door auto saloon

Year/mileage 2000/65,000 miles

Guide price £5,800 - £6,900

We spotted it for £5,300

Why restrict yourself to a run-of-the-mill hatchback when a luxury Jag is within reach? This 3.2 V8 engine really purrs along, but remember that fuel bills will be high (claimed economy is 23.5mpg) and servicing costly. On the plus side, it has electric seats, auto headlights and a 320-watt Alpine sound system.

VERDICT Surprisingly affordable and reliable, the XJ has timeless looks and superb long-distance cruising ability.

Reliability (1999-2001 petrol) Breakdowns Average
Faults Excellent Niggles Average Troublespots None
Safety ratings Euro NCAP Not tested Which? Not tested



FROM £5,000 TO £8,000

Mazda2

Which? verdict ★★★★★

Owner recommendation 72%

Version 1.4 Sakata 5-door hatchback

Year/mileage 2006/1,600 miles

Guide price £5,700 - £6,400

We spotted it for £5,600

The all-new Mazda2 looks set to continue the original's success, but it doesn't share this version's unusually large cabin and boot. It won't win any beauty contests, but the 2 drives well, and the Sakata special edition we found seemed great value, with just 1,600 miles on the clock.

VERDICT A civilised and spacious car, unfairly ignored by many mini buyers. Should give years of faithful service.

Reliability (2005-2007) Breakdowns Average Faults Excellent Niggles Excellent Troublespots None
Safety ratings Euro NCAP ★★★★★ Which? ★★★★★



FROM £8,000 TO £12,000

Nissan Note

Which? verdict ★★★★★

Owner recommendation 75%

Version 1.5dCi SE 5-door hatchback

Year/mileage 2006/8,500 miles

Guide price £9,100 - £9,800

We spotted it for £9,499

The Note was one of 2006's most significant new cars.

What it may lack in street cred it makes up for in sheer utility. Its long, square-backed profile offers great boot space – it should cope with anything a family of four can throw at it. It's good to drive, and this frugal diesel should do 51mpg.

VERDICT The Note is super value – the 8,500-mile example we saw saves nearly £3,000 on the current list price.

Reliability (2005-2007 cars) Breakdowns Excellent
Faults Excellent Niggles Excellent Troublespots None
Safety ratings Euro NCAP ★★★★★ Which? ★★★★★



FROM £8,000 TO £12,000

Toyota Auris

Which? verdict ★★★★★

Owner recommendation Too new

Version 1.4 D-4D T3 3-door hatchback

Year/mileage 2007/250 miles

Guide price £12,000 - £12,500

We spotted it for £11,995

Are you just as concerned about miles per gallon as miles per hour? Then you needn't look too far for an economical, practical solution. The Toyota Auris is very impressive and, in 1.4 D-4D (diesel) form, you could go 680 miles between fill-ups. It has a driver's knee airbag to protect against leg injuries in a crash.

VERDICT The Auris is spacious, with good safety and low emissions. Bland looks hide a very competent car.

Reliability (for the Toyota brand) Excellent Troublespots Too soon to say Safety ratings Euro NCAP ★★★★★
Which? ★★★★★



The Note should cope with anything a family of four can throw at it



FROM £5,000 TO £8,000

Toyota Yaris

Which? verdict ★★★★★

Owner recommendation 81%

Version 1.3 T3 5-door hatchback

Year/mileage 2006/7,200 miles

Guide price £7,200 - £7,900

We spotted it for £7,200

Toyota's original Yaris was a great supermini, although compared with some of its rivals it lacked interior space. The Mk2 version has tackled this by growing outwards and upwards. Now it's got usability as well as excellent reliability. The rear seat slides back to vary the boot space.

VERDICT The petrol engines can be harsh when stretched, but the Yaris is strong in most areas – including safety.

Reliability (2005-2007 petrol) Breakdowns Excellent
Faults Excellent Niggles Excellent Troublespots None
Safety ratings Euro NCAP ★★★★★ Which? ★★★★★



FROM £8,000 TO £12,000

BMW 3 Series

Which? verdict ★★★★★

Owner recommendation 76%

Version 320d ES Touring 5-door

Year/mileage 2004/46,500 miles

Guide price £10,400 - £11,100

We spotted it for £10,750

The 3 Series combines driver appeal with a tasteful cabin and, in diesel form, very good economy. This 320d ES Touring (estate) is more practical, with arguably the best engine, the 150bhp 2.0 diesel. The one we found had air-con and full BMW service history.

VERDICT It's certainly not a choice for individualists – it outsold the Mondeo – but is still a quality used motor.

Reliability (2002-2004 diesel) Breakdowns Excellent
Faults Average Niggles Average Troublespots Fuel system (diesel), suspension Safety ratings Euro NCAP ★★★★★ Which? ★★★★★





FROM £12,000 TO £16,000

Ford S-Max

Which? verdict ★★★★★

Owner recommendation 83%

Version 2.0 TDCi Zetec 5-door

Year/mileage 2006/8,250 miles

Guide price £16,600 - £17,100

We spotted it for £15,395

The S-Max has injected some fun into MPV motoring. It's sporty looking and handles better than anything else in its class. Popular Zetec trim includes dual-zone climate control, a trip computer, sports seats and 16-inch alloys. The

WHICH?
BEST
BUY

2.0 TDCi engine has a healthy 140bhp output and an average economy of 42.2mpg in our tests.

VERDICT Certainly the sportiest-looking MPV, with dynamics to match.

Reliability (2005-2007) Breakdowns Average Faults Average Niggles Average Troublespots None Safety ratings Euro NCAP ★★★★★ Which? ★★★★★



£16,000 +

VW Golf GTI

Which? verdict ★★★★★

Owner recommendation 71%

Version 2.0 GTI turbo 3-door hatchback

Year/mileage 2005/31,000 miles

Guide price £14,300 - £16,500

We spotted it for £16,150

The GTI is our favourite hot hatch. It's fast, refined, fun and practical. Rivals can't match its all-round ability – but sadly, it's expensive new and still pricey used (most have several extras). The car we saw had optional leather, satnav, CD-changer and bigger 18-inch alloys.

VERDICT A must-have car for driving enthusiasts who also need to do the school run. Seek out a model that's been cared for.

Reliability (2005-2007) Breakdowns Average Faults Average Niggles Average Troublespots Non-engine electrics, rainwater seals Safety ratings Euro NCAP ★★★★★ Which? ★★★★★

WHICH?
BEST
BUY


FROM £12,000 TO £16,000

Mazda MX-5

Which? verdict ★★★★★

Owner recommendation 93%

Version 2.0i Sport + Climate/Bose

Year/mileage 2006/6,800 miles

Guide price £14,000 - £14,600

We spotted it for £13,395

Mazda's MX-5 is a great little sports car, with a rare blend of reliability and fun. Spec is a bit limited on some models, so go for the best you can afford. Base models don't have side airbags – well worth having. Climate control and a Bose stereo were a £1,115 option pack – look for one with this, too.

VERDICT Brilliant for weekend blasts.

But the two seats and 150-litre boot render it pretty useless as an only car.

Reliability (2005-2007) Breakdowns Excellent Faults Excellent Niggles Excellent Troublespots None Safety ratings Euro NCAP Not tested Which? ★★★★★

WHICH?
BEST
BUY


£16,000 +

Lexus IS

Which? verdict ★★★★★

Owner recommendation 94%

Version IS250 SE-L 4-door saloon

Year/mileage 2006/10,550 miles

Guide price £21,300 - £22,000

We spotted it for £19,975

Want a premium saloon loaded with goodies? Then look no further than this IS from a Lexus main dealer – saving nearly £9,000 on the new list price. The IS will cosset and cheer stressed executives, with its refined cruising ability. It should be reliable, too.

VERDICT Cramped rear seats don't taint owners' love for it. The SE-L has leather seats and a hi-fi grade stereo.

Reliability (2005-2007) Breakdowns Average Faults Average Niggles Excellent Troublespots Seat belts Safety ratings Euro NCAP ★★★★★ Which? ★★★★★

WHICH?
BEST
BUY

The MX-5 has that rare blend of reliability and fun



FROM £12,000 TO £16,000

Honda Accord

Which? verdict ★★★★★

Owner recommendation 82%

Version 2.2 i-CTDi EX Tourer 5-door

Year/mileage 2006/27,000 miles

Guide price £16,000 - £16,500

We spotted it for £15,995

The Accord 'Tourer' is a large estate in the old-fashioned mould – it's huge. You also get an electrically operated tailgate – great if you have your hands full. This top-spec EX has integrated satnav and leather seats. Steer clear of the glitzy 17-inch alloys, which worsen the Accord's firm ride. The 2.2 diesel Tourer returned 42.8mpg in our tests.

VERDICT This enormous Accord is reliable and thoughtfully designed.

Reliability (2005-2007 diesel) Breakdowns Excellent Faults Average Niggles Average Troublespots None Safety ratings Euro NCAP ★★★★★ Which? ★★★★★

WHICH?
BEST
BUY


£16,000 +

Mercedes E-class

Which? verdict ★★★★★

Owner recommendation 72%

Version E280 CDI Avantgarde auto

4-door saloon

Year/mileage 2005/22,000 miles

Guide price £22,100 - £23,000

We spotted it for £22,950

This big, comfy Merc is surprisingly thrifty with the 3.0 diesel – it claims nearly 40mpg, even with the smooth Tiptronic auto box.

This one has heated leather seats and xenon headlamps. According to the Which? Car survey, later E-classes are more reliable than early examples.

VERDICT Equipment varies widely, so look for cars with the options you want.

Reliability (2005-2007) Breakdowns Average Faults Average Niggles Average Troublespots None Safety ratings Euro NCAP ★★★★★ Which? ★★★★★

WHICH?
WORTH
CONSIDERING



TRICKS OF THE TRADE

Katie Glynn 32, *customer correspondence officer*
Car bought 2006 Toyota Yaris 1.3 T-Spirit (5,500 miles)
Price paid £8,500

Katie needed a replacement car after a change in family circumstances, after which she was left with a VW Golf that didn't suit her needs. 'The Golf was too big,' she says, 'so I looked for something smaller. After trying a Ford Fiesta and Fiat Punto, I found that the Yaris fitted the bill perfectly.'

Katie has some great used-car buying tips. She says: 'Do some research using *Which? Car* and the internet, because there are so many different variations on models, let alone manufacturers. Then make a list of what you really want the vehicle to have – for instance, air conditioning, alloy wheels and so on. Talk to family, friends and neighbours who own similar vehicles to hear their experiences. Test drive a couple of different models before you commit to buying one.'

Having previously worked in the motor trade, Katie knows how to bargain hard. 'Never pay the asking price, barter and be aware of other similar cars for sale locally,' she advises. 'Also, try to get any repair that needs doing included in the sale. Get an AA or similar inspection done if you don't know much about cars. Ask about the previous owner, and see when it was last serviced. Finally, check to see if the car has ever been smoked in – the ash and odour will linger in it for ages.'

WHICH? ONLINE

For our latest and most detailed reviews of new and used cars, visit www.which.co.uk/cars and enter the *Car Buying Guide*. If you're buying or selling a used car, you can check how much it should be worth using our used-car values. These are supplied by our trusted trade experts and are updated at the start of every month. See www.which.co.uk/loginhelp if you would like help logging in.

OUR RESEARCH

When selecting cars to test, we consult manufacturers, market intelligence reports and industry experts, then consider availability and sales. Tested models include top-sellers from the most popular brands, models with innovative features, cars from some lesser-known brands and widely available Best Buys from our previous road tests.

Checklist

Buying a used car should be easy if you follow these simple rules

- **LOCATION** Always view the car at the seller's address. Don't meet them in a dark car park.
- **VEHICLE ID NUMBER** Check that the Vin (often shown at the base of the windscreen and stamped under the bonnet) matches the number on the registration document (V5c).
- **SERVICE HISTORY** Stamps in the service book can be faked, but invoices are harder to forge. Also, is there an expensive service due soon?
- **INSURANCE** If you want to drive a private seller's car, you must arrange cover beforehand. And don't forget to shop around for quotes before buying.
- **BE INQUISITIVE** Why is the person selling? Where did they buy it? Were they happy with it?
- **SHOP AROUND** If you have a particular car in mind, look at several. Seemingly similar cars can vary wildly in their condition.
- **HISTORY CHECK** An Experian or HPI check shows outstanding finance or insurance write-offs.
- **PAYMENT** If you decide to buy, use a payment method both you and the seller are happy with. This may take time if it requires a visit to the bank (for example, to pay in cash).
- **WARRANTY** Sometimes used-car traders will offer a warranty – but does it cover items that are expensive to fix, such as the air-con and automatic gearbox?
- **COMEBACK** Dealers should help out if you have problems after purchase. But don't expect the same from a private seller.

