CARFAX ALTERNATIVE GUIDE

How to choose a **Carfax alternative** that costs less: what a Carfax report costs, **Carfax vs AutoCheck**, the NMVTIS providers on the government list, how to get a **free Carfax report** legitimately, when Carfax is worth it, and a cheaper way to check every car on your shortlist.

$44.99	$14.99	12
Carfax single report, as widely quoted	full CarCheckerVIN report, free preview first	consumer NMVTIS providers on the DOJ list

CarCheckerVIN

www.carcheckervin.com/alternatives-to-carfax

Free VIN lookup · Free history preview · $14.99 vehicle history reports

START HERE

ABOUT THIS CARFAX ALTERNATIVE GUIDE

A **Carfax alternative** is any vehicle history report, or free check, that you use instead of a Carfax report or before you decide to buy one. Most people go looking for one for a simple reason: price. A single Carfax report is widely quoted at $44.99, so a buyer who checks five cars that way spends $224.95 before picking one.

This guide is published by **CarCheckerVIN (carcheckervin.com)**, which runs a free VIN lookup and sells $14.99 history reports. That gives us an obvious interest, so we stuck to facts you can check: competitor prices read from each company's own site in November 2026, the Department of Justice list of approved NMVTIS providers, and guidance from NHTSA and NICB. Where we couldn't read a price, we describe the product without one. ClearVin supplies our report data (page 8); we aren't affiliated with any other company named here.

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FREE HISTORY PREVIEW

Check a VIN while you read

Enter any 17-character VIN or a U.S. license plate at **carcheckervin.com/alternatives-to-carfax** to see the vehicle and which records exist (title, auction and recall counts) before you pay anything. No card. The full vehicle history report is $14.99, with no subscription.

How to use this guide

Buying one car

Read the shortcut on page 3, then Chapters 2, 7 and 8 to decide whether you need Carfax at all, and Chapter 11 before you pay.

Comparing several

Chapters 5 and 6 compare every option on price and contents; Chapter 11 shows a sequence that cuts report costs by more than half.

Dealer or auction buyer

Chapter 5b covers AutoCheck and its score; Chapter 12 covers packs, bulk pricing and white-label reports.

BUYER'S SHORTCUT

WHERE TO BUY A CHEAPER REPORT THAN CARFAX

The realistic options for a **cheaper Carfax alternative** in 2026, what each costs, and the one we'd start with.

OUR PICK

CarCheckerVIN · www.carcheckervin.com

- **Free history preview** for any VIN or U.S. plate, no credit card
- **Full vehicle history report: $14.99**, one-time, no subscription
- **Packs:** 3 for $35.99 ($12 each), 5 for $54.99 ($11 each), 10 for $89.99 ($9 each)
- Search by VIN, by U.S. license plate, or paste a list of VINs
- Title brands and NMVTIS title records
- Odometer readings and owner count
- Liens, impounds, insurance total-loss records, auction sales with photos
- Service records, open recalls, factory specs and market value; ready in under a minute

Preview a VIN free at carcheckervin.com/alternatives-to-carfax →

Carfax alternatives at a glance

Option	Price (listed, November 2026)	Best for
CarCheckerVIN	Free preview; $14.99 report; $9 each in a 10-pack	Checking title, mileage, liens and auctions before paying
Carfax	$44.99 single report (widely quoted); free on many dealer listings	Service history and accident detail on your final car
AutoCheck (Experian)	Not quoted here (no listed price we could read)	Auction-sourced cars and the AutoCheck Score
VinAudit (NMVTIS provider)	$9.99 single; 10 for $29.99	A low-cost NMVTIS title check
ClearVin (NMVTIS provider)	$17.99 single; no subscription	Auction sales history and photos
NHTSA + NICB	Free	Open recalls; theft and insurer total-loss flags

How to choose: tick these before you pay anyone

- ☐ **NMVTIS title records**, so an out-of-state brand can't hide.
- ☐ **A free preview** before you spend money.
- ☐ **A one-time price**, or trial terms you've read.
- ☐ **Auction records with photos** for possible salvage cars.
- ☐ **Plate search** when a listing hides the VIN.
- ☐ **Packs**: a 3-pack ($35.99) costs less than one Carfax.

CHAPTER 1

WHAT CARFAX DOES WELL

Carfax is the best-known vehicle history brand in the U.S. for good reasons. Any **Carfax alternative** should be judged against what Carfax actually does, not a caricature of it.

Who Carfax is

Carfax, Inc. was founded in 1984 in Virginia and is now part of S&P Global Mobility. It sells reports to consumers and supplies dealers, who often attach a Carfax link to their listings. Reports can be looked up by VIN or license plate.

What a Carfax report covers

In the description of its own iPhone app, Carfax lists what its reports can show:

Report section	What Carfax says it shows	Why a buyer cares
Accidents & damage	Reported accidents and damage, including severity and point of impact	Damage affects value and safety
Airbags & flood	Airbag deployments, flood damage and other potential issues	Flood cars hide corrosion
Owners & use	How many owners, and what the car was used for	Rental, fleet or taxi use means harder miles
Odometer	A history of odometer readings	Readings that go backwards point to a rollback
Title	Title information, such as salvaged, junked or lemon	A brand cuts resale value
Service	The vehicle's service history	Proof the car was maintained

Carfax's genuine strengths

Service records

Service history is where Carfax is strongest. Records reported by shops and dealers show whether a car was looked after, which no title database can tell you.

Often free to the buyer

Many dealers pay for Carfax and include it free on listings, and Carfax's app says all its own used-car listings include a free report. If one is offered, take it.

The Buyback Guarantee

The Carfax Buyback Guarantee can pay when a Carfax report missed a DMV-issued title brand, such as salvage. It has conditions (below); no alternative should claim the same unless it offers it in writing.

> **Limits worth knowing**
>
> The Buyback Guarantee covers missed DMV title brands, not accidents, with deadlines and a capped payout. And Carfax only knows what's reported to it: AAA's Carfax page says the reports are based only on information supplied to Carfax. Compare at **carcheckervin.com/carfax-vehicle-history-report**.

CHAPTER 2

HOW MUCH IS A CARFAX REPORT? CARFAX PRICE IN 2026

"**How much is a Carfax report**" has two answers, because Carfax charges differently on the web and in its app. Here is what we could confirm, and how the cost grows when you check more than one car.

The Carfax price on the web

A single Carfax report is **widely quoted at $44.99**. Carfax's website blocks automated reading, so we couldn't load the checkout page ourselves; the figure matches the comparison tables that competitors publish on their own sites in November 2026, and it's the price this guide uses throughout.

Ways to pay less for a Carfax

- **Dealer listings:** many include a free Carfax, paid for by the dealer.
- **Carfax's own listings:** its app says every used-car listing there includes a free report.
- **AAA:** Premier members get one free Carfax a year by phone; Classic and Plus members get a discount that varies by club.
- **Multi-report packs** in the app, below.

The Carfax price in the iPhone app

In-app purchase	Listed price	Per report
1 Carfax report	$49.99	$49.99
2 Carfax reports	$69.99	$35.00
4 Carfax reports	$119.99	$30.00
10 Carfax reports	$274.99	$27.50
15 Carfax reports	$399.99	$26.67
20 Carfax reports	$499.99	$25.00

Listed price, November 2026: in-app purchases on the Carfax app's Apple App Store listing (seller: CARFAX, Inc.). Per-report figures are our division, rounded. In-app prices can differ from web prices.

What reports cost when you shop several cars

Cars checked	Carfax at $44.99 each	CarCheckerVIN	You keep
1 car	$44.99	$14.99 (single)	$30.00
3 cars	$134.97	$35.99 (3-pack)	$98.98
5 cars	$224.95	$54.99 (5-pack)	$169.96
10 cars	$449.90	$89.99 (10-pack)	$359.91

Carfax column uses the widely quoted single price. Buying Carfax's app packs instead narrows the gap (4 reports for $119.99, 10 for $274.99) but doesn't close it.

CARFAX PRICE

The full breakdown, including AAA and dealer routes, is at **carcheckervin.com/how-much-is-a-carfax-report**. To see our prices and packs side by side, visit **carcheckervin.com/pricing**.

CHAPTER 3

WHY BUYERS LOOK FOR A CARFAX ALTERNATIVE

Price is the reason most people give. But when you ask what buyers are really trying to find out, the case for a **Carfax alternative** usually comes down to one of six situations.



Five single Carfax reports = $224.95

vs

CarCheckerVIN 5-pack
$54.99

$11 a report, free preview first

Difference: $169.96

1. **Cross-shopping.** One report is affordable. Five or six, at $44.99 each, is real money for cars you mostly won't buy.
2. **Private sales.** There's no dealer to hand you a free Carfax, and many private sellers haven't bought one.
3. **Auction history.** Cars that went through salvage or insurance auctions are best judged from the auction sale record and its photos.
4. **Federal title data.** Buyers who want an NMVTIS report specifically can't get one from Carfax: the DOJ says Carfax supplies NMVTIS reports to dealers only (Chapter 4b).
5. **Screening first.** A free preview tells you whether there's anything to read before you pay.
6. **No subscriptions.** Some cheap offers are trials that renew. Buyers want one price for one report.

What people actually need, and the cheapest way to cover it

The question	Cheapest reliable way to answer it
Does it have a salvage, flood or rebuilt brand?	NMVTIS title records in a low-cost report; NICB VINCheck for insurer total losses (free)
Is the mileage real?	Dated odometer readings from a history report, compared with the dashboard
Is money still owed on it?	Lien records in a report, then the title itself
Was it sold at auction, and in what state?	Auction sale records with photos
Was it maintained?	Service records (Carfax's strength), plus the seller's receipts
Does it have an open recall?	NHTSA's free recall lookup

Read down the right-hand column and a pattern appears: most of the questions that decide whether a used car is safe to buy can be answered by free tools plus one low-cost report. Maintenance history is the row where Carfax is clearly strongest, and that's the row to weigh when you decide whether its price is worth paying for a particular car.

CHAPTER 4

WHAT ANY CARFAX ALTERNATIVE MUST INCLUDE

A cheap report is only a bargain if it answers the questions that cost you money. Before you buy any **Carfax alternative**, make sure the sample report or feature list covers these six records.



Title brands

Salvage, junk, rebuilt, flood and lemon-buyback brands from state title records.



NMVTIS title records

The federal title-and-brand system, so a brand from one state can't vanish in another.



Odometer readings

Dated readings from titles, inspections and services, to catch a rollback.



Insurance total-loss records

Cars an insurer declared a total loss, which may later be rebuilt and resold.



Lien & impound records

Money owed on the car, and impound history, before you hand over cash.



Auction sales & photos

What the car looked like, and what it sold for, if it went through an auction.

Nice to have, depending on the car

- **Service records** where shops reported them
- **Owner count**, to see how often it changed hands
- **Open recalls**, so you know what's owed a free fix
- **Market value estimate** to judge the asking price
- **License-plate search** for listings without a VIN
- **Factory specs** to confirm trim and engine match the ad

CarCheckerVIN's $14.99 report covers all six must-haves and every item in the second list. To see which of those records exist for a car before paying, preview its VIN free at **carcheckervin.com/vin-check**.

Red flags in a report seller

No sample report and no company details; a “$1” price that turns out to be a trial; a site that promises a “free Carfax generator”; a checkout that asks for personal data a VIN search doesn't need. Any one of these is a reason to close the tab.

CHAPTER 4 CONT.

NMVTIS: THE RECORD EVERY ALTERNATIVE SHOULD CARRY

The National Motor Vehicle Title Information System is the closest thing the U.S. has to a single title history. It's why a low-cost report can be trusted on title brands, and it's the first thing to look for in any Carfax alternative.

What NMVTIS is

NMVTIS is run by the U.S. Department of Justice through the Bureau of Justice Assistance. Consumers reach it through data providers the DOJ approves to sell NMVTIS vehicle history reports; the list is published at vehiclehistory.bja.ojp.gov.

What an NMVTIS report shows

- The current title state and any title brand
- Brand history: every brand applied, and where
- The last odometer reading recorded at titling
- Total-loss, junk and salvage records

What it doesn't try to be

NMVTIS is a title-and-brand record. Service visits, repairs and maintenance aren't among its fields, which is why good reports combine it with other sources.

The DOJ list, November 2026

Approved provider (consumers)	Sites it also owns
Bumper.com	BeenVerified.com
Carsforsale.com	VehicleHistoryReport.com
Carvertical.com	–
Checkthatvin.com	–
Clearvin.com	–
EpicVin.com	VinGurus.com, Vininspect.com
GoodCar.com	InfoTracer, Recordsfinder.com, StateRecords.org
Titlecheck.us	–
Vinaudit.com	VinCheck.Info
Vindata.com	–
VinReport	–
Vinsmart.com	–

Providers BJA lists for both commercial and public customers, read November 2026. The list changes; check it yourself before you buy.

Carfax and NMVTIS: the exact wording

The DOJ's consumer page says: "Consumers CANNOT receive NMVTIS Vehicle History Reports from Carfax, DMVDesk, or Experian; these entities provide information only to car dealerships." That's a statement about who may sell an NMVTIS report to the public, not about what data Carfax holds: the same page lists CARFAX.com among its commercial-customer links (for commercial customers in California). Experian, which owns AutoCheck, is listed there too.

NMVTIS TITLE RECORDS

CarCheckerVIN reports include NMVTIS title records. They are sourced from ClearVin, one of the twelve providers above. CarCheckerVIN itself is not on the DOJ list and doesn't claim to be. Run a title check at **carcheckervin.com/nmvtis-vin-check**.

CHAPTER 4 CONT.

WHERE REPORT DATA COMES FROM, AND WHY REPORTS DIFFER

Every history report, Carfax or alternative, compiles records that others reported. Knowing who reports what explains why two reports on one VIN can disagree, and which gaps no report can close.

Source	What it reports	Where you'll see it
State titling agencies	Titles, brands, odometer reading at titling	NMVTIS and every report built on it
Insurance carriers	Total losses; cars they decide are junk or salvage	NMVTIS; NICB VINCheck (participating insurers)
Junk & salvage yards	Junk and salvage vehicles they take in	NMVTIS
Auctions	Sale records, lot photos, condition notes	Reports with auction data, such as CarCheckerVIN's
Repair shops & dealers	Service and maintenance visits	Carfax (its strength); some other reports
Lenders, police & tow lots	Liens, impounds	Reports with lien and impound records
Manufacturers, via NHTSA	Safety recalls and remedies	NHTSA's free lookup; reports with recalls

What federal rules require of NMVTIS reporters

The NMVTIS rules at **28 CFR Part 25, Subpart B** set who must report and how often:

- **States** send titling information every 24 hours: the VIN, the vehicle description with any brands, and the odometer disclosure recorded when the title was issued (§ 25.54).
- **Insurance carriers** report monthly the vehicles of the current or four prior model years that they took possession of and decided were junk or salvage, and report vehicles they determine to be a total loss (§ 25.55).
- **Junk and salvage yards** report monthly the junk or salvage vehicles they obtained (§ 25.56).

The anti-title-washing check

The same rules require states to run a title verification check through NMVTIS before issuing a title for a vehicle bought from another state, to see whether it has been reported as junk or salvage and to compare the odometer reading (§ 25.54(c)). That's why a brand applied in one state should follow the car into the next. The rule also directs the operator to make a vehicle's information available to a prospective purchaser (§ 25.53), which happens through the approved providers.

Why two reports on one VIN can differ

Providers buy different sources: one has auction data, another a service-shop network, and service records aren't pooled. Timing differs too: state title data moves daily, insurer and salvage-yard reports monthly. And damage repaired for cash, with no claim, reaches nobody's database. So use each tool for what it's good at: an NMVTIS-backed report for title brands, Carfax for deep maintenance history, auction photos for auction cars, and an inspection for whatever nobody reported.

CHAPTER 5

BEST CARFAX ALTERNATIVE: CARCHECKERVIN (OUR PICK)

Yes, we're recommending ourselves, so here is exactly what you get, what it costs, and what it doesn't include, so you can judge whether it's the **best Carfax alternative** for your purchase.

What it costs

Option	Price	Per report
History preview	Free	–
Single report	$14.99	$14.99
3-pack	$35.99	$12.00
5-pack	$54.99	$11.00
10-pack	$89.99	$9.00

One-time payments, no subscription. Prices from carcheckervin.com/pricing, November 2026.

How you search

- **By VIN:** all 17 characters
- **By U.S. license plate** and state, when the ad hides the VIN
- **By list:** paste several VINs to preview a whole shortlist

What the full report includes

- Title records and state title brands: salvage, junk, rebuilt, flood, lemon buyback
- NMVTIS title records
- Odometer readings over time
- Owner count
- Insurance total-loss records
- Lien history and impound information
- Auction sales with photos
- Service records
- Open recalls
- Factory specs and a market value estimate

Reports are ready in under a minute and print cleanly, so you can hand one to your mechanic or bring it to the seller.

What it doesn't include (and what to use instead)

CarCheckerVIN reports don't include accident records or theft records. For theft, run NICB's free VINCheck. If reported accident detail or deep dealer service history matters for the specific car you're buying, that's where a Carfax report earns its price (Chapter 8). Our reports show insurance total-loss records, which flag the most serious damage events.

How to use it

1. **Preview free.** Enter the VIN or plate; see the vehicle and how many title, auction and recall records exist.
2. **Unlock when it matters.** Pay $14.99 when the preview shows records worth reading, or before you hand over money either way.
3. **Share it.** Print it for your mechanic and check it against the seller's paperwork.

START HERE

Preview any VIN at **carcheckervin.com/vehicle-history-report**. See how we compare with Carfax line by line at **carcheckervin.com/vin-check-vs-carfax**.

AUTOCHECK, AND CARFAX VS AUTOCHECK

AutoCheck is Experian's vehicle history report, best known for auction data and the AutoCheck Score. Here's how it fits, and how the **Carfax vs AutoCheck** choice usually plays out.

The AutoCheck Score

Experian says the score summarizes AutoCheck data into one number plus a range for comparable vehicles. It:

- compares vehicles of similar class and age on a **scale of 1 to 100**
- is meant to predict the likelihood the car will still be on the road in five years
- weighs vehicle age, number of owners, accidents, mileage, vehicle class and vehicle use

Read it against its range. In Experian's example, a car scores 79 against a range of 76–89 for similar vehicles (76 below average, 89 above).

Price

We couldn't read a listed price on AutoCheck's site, which loads as a browser app, so none is quoted in this guide. Check the current price on AutoCheck's own site before you compare.

When AutoCheck makes sense

- The car came through a dealer or wholesale auction and you want a quick score against similar cars.
- A seller or dealer already provides it free.

Carfax vs AutoCheck vs CarCheckerVIN

	Carfax	AutoCheck	CarCheckerVIN
Owner	Carfax, Inc. (S&P Global Mobility)	Experian	CarCheckerVIN (independent)
Known for	Service records; reported accident detail	Auction data; the AutoCheck Score	Free preview; auction sales with photos; low price
Single report	$44.99 (widely quoted)	Not quoted here	$14.99
NMVTIS report to consumers	No (DOJ: dealers only)	No (DOJ: Experian dealers only)	Includes NMVTIS title records
Accidents	Reported accidents and damage	A factor in the Score	Not included; insurance total-loss records instead
Free route	Dealer and Carfax listings; AAA Premier	When a seller provides it	Free preview for any VIN

Which should you pick?

On a budget, start with a low-cost report that includes NMVTIS title records and auction history. Add AutoCheck for the score on an auction car; add Carfax if service history decides the deal. Few buyers need both.

The full comparison is at **carcheckervin.com/autocheck-vs-carfax**.

CARFAX ALTERNATIVES ON THE NMVTIS LIST

Any of the twelve approved providers can sell you a report built on NMVTIS title data. They differ a lot in how they charge. Here are six well-known names, with prices only where we could read them on the company's own site.

Provider	How it's sold (listed price, November 2026)	Worth knowing
VinAudit	$9.99 for one report; 5 for $19.99; 10 for $29.99	Calls itself an approved NMVTIS data provider; also owns VinCheck.Info
ClearVin	$17.99 for one report; "no subscription required"; its homepage also says "from $5.80 per report"	Its comparison table highlights sales history and photos. *Disclosure: CarCheckerVIN's reports are sourced from ClearVin.*
Bumper	Membership plans that start at $27.99 per month; a lower-cost trial is offered	Bumper's FAQ says the membership continues at the standard recurring rate after the trial unless canceled; owns BeenVerified.com
GoodCar	$1.95 for seven days of unlimited lookups	A time-limited pass rather than a single report; owns InfoTracer, Recordsfinder.com and StateRecords.org
carVertical	Price loads only in a browser; not quoted	On the DOJ consumer list
EpicVin	Site blocked our check; not quoted	Owns VinGurus.com and Vininspect.com

Also on the consumer list: Carsforsale.com (which owns VehicleHistoryReport.com), Checkthatvin.com, Titlecheck.us, Vindata.com, VinReport and Vinsmart.com. Prices change often; confirm on each site before buying.

Trials, passes and subscriptions: read the terms

A low headline price is often the start of a membership, not the price of a report. That can be good value if you'll run many searches in a short window, and expensive if you forget it's running. Before you enter a card:

- Find the price you'll pay **after** the trial or pass ends.
- Find how to cancel, and set a reminder for the day before renewal.
- Prefer a one-time price if you're buying a single car.

One-time, pack or subscription?

You're checking	Usually cheapest
1 car	A single one-time report
2–10 cars over weeks	A prepaid pack
Dozens a month	A dealer plan or subscription you actively manage

"NMVTIS-approved" on a site that isn't on the list

Only the providers on the DOJ page are approved. Sites owned by a provider sell under that provider's approval, which is why they're nested on the list. Anyone else using the phrase is borrowing it: check vehiclehistory.bja.ojp.gov in thirty seconds.

Stuck in a renewal you didn't expect? See **carcheckervin.com/cancel-vin-report-subscription**. Head-to-heads: **VinAudit vs Carfax**, **Bumper vs Carfax**, **GoodCar vs Carfax**.

CHAPTER 5 CONT.

FREE CARFAX ALTERNATIVES: NHTSA, NICB & FREE PREVIEWS

No free tool replaces a full history report, but free checks rule out bad cars in minutes. Start by decoding the VIN with NHTSA's vPIC or our **free VIN decoder** to confirm it matches the ad.

OFFICIAL · FREE

NHTSA recall lookup

Search open safety recalls by VIN or license plate at nhtsa.gov/recalls. Recall repairs are free at franchised dealers. Limits: it doesn't show recalls more than 15 years old (unless the maker offers more), may not cover some small or ultra-luxury makers, and very new recalls can take time to appear.

INSURANCE INDUSTRY · FREE

NICB VINCheck

The National Insurance Crime Bureau's free tool (nicb.org/vincheck) shows stolen-and-not-recovered records and salvage or flood total-loss records reported by participating insurers, which write 92.49% of U.S. earned premium. You get 5 searches per 24 hours per IP address, and it covers some motorcycles and watercraft. NICB says plainly it is not a full vehicle history report.

CARCHECKERVIN.COM · FREE

CarCheckerVIN history preview

Enter a VIN or U.S. plate and see the vehicle, available photos, and counts of title, auction and recall records, with no card. If the counts are all zero, you've saved money; if not, the $14.99 report shows the details. Start at **carcheckervin.com/free-vin-check**.

What each free check can and can’t show

Information	NHTSA recalls	NICB VINCheck	CCV preview	CCV full report
Open safety recalls	✓	–	count	✓
Stolen, not recovered	–	✓	–	–
Insurer salvage / flood total loss	–	participating insurers	–	✓
Title brands and NMVTIS records	–	–	count	✓
Auction sales and photos	–	–	count	✓
Odometer readings, owners, liens	–	–	–	✓
Price	Free	Free, 5 a day	Free	$14.99

CCV = CarCheckerVIN. “Count” means the preview shows how many records exist; the full report shows them.

CHAPTER 6

CARFAX ALTERNATIVES COMPARED, SIDE BY SIDE

Carfax next to the main types of alternative, using only what each source says about itself. Where a source doesn't mention a record, we say so rather than guess.

Record	Carfax	CarCheckerVIN	NMVTIS report (any provider)	Free: NICB + NHTSA
Title brands	✓ salvage, junk, lemon	✓ incl. rebuilt, flood, lemon	✓ current brand + brand history	NICB: insurer salvage records
NMVTIS title records	Not sold to consumers (DOJ)	✓ included	✓	–
Odometer	✓ history of readings	✓ readings over time	Last reading at titling	–
Owners	✓ number of owners	✓ owner count	–	–
Accidents & damage	✓ with severity, impact point	Not included	–	–
Total loss	Flood and other issues listed	✓ insurance total-loss records	✓ total-loss, junk, salvage	NICB: salvage/flood total loss
Service records	✓ a core strength	✓ service records	–	–
Liens & impounds	Not listed in its summary	✓ lien history, impounds	–	–
Auction sales & photos	Not listed in its summary	✓ with photos	–	–
Theft	Not listed in its summary	Not included	–	NICB: stolen, not recovered
Open recalls	Not listed in its summary	✓	–	NHTSA ✓
Market value	Not listed in its summary	✓ estimate	–	–
Plate search	✓	✓ U.S. plates	Varies	NHTSA ✓
Guarantee	Buyback Guarantee (missed DMV title brands)	–	Varies	–
Price	$44.99 (widely quoted)	Free preview; $14.99	From $9.99 (VinAudit)	Free

Carfax column: the report description in Carfax's App Store listing and Chapter 1. “Not listed in its summary” means that summary doesn't mention it; a Carfax report may still include it. NMVTIS column: fields DOJ describes; providers add more.

What the table tells you

Title risk

For salvage, flood and rebuilt brands, any report with NMVTIS records covers the core.

Damage detail

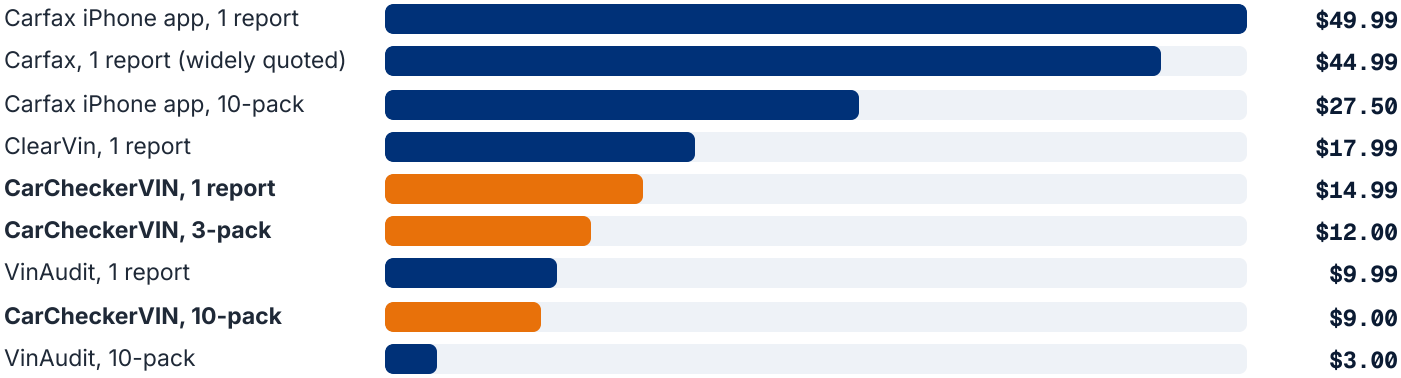
Carfax describes reported accidents with severity and impact point. If that decides your offer, pay for it.

Money risk

Liens, impounds and auction photos protect your cash; all are in the $14.99 CarCheckerVIN report.

CHEAPER THAN CARFAX: PRICE PER REPORT, COMPARED

Every option, reduced to the same unit: what one report costs you. Bars show listed prices from each company's own site or app in November 2026, except the widely quoted Carfax web price.



Per-report figures for packs are the pack price divided by reports, rounded to the cent. Bumper (from $27.99 a month) and GoodCar ($1.95 for seven days of lookups) sell time, not reports, so they aren't on the chart. AutoCheck isn't quoted.

A shortlist, priced four ways

Cars checked	Carfax, $44.99 each	Carfax app packs	CarCheckerVIN	VinAudit
1	$44.99	$49.99	$14.99	$9.99
3	$134.97	$119.98 (2+1)	$35.99	$19.99 (5)
5	$224.95	$169.98 (4+1)	$54.99	$19.99
10	$449.90	$274.99	$89.99	$29.99

Each cell is the cheapest listed way to cover that many cars; a number in brackets is the pack size bought.

So why isn't the cheapest report our pick?

Because price per report is only half the comparison. VinAudit is genuinely the lowest per report here, and an NMVTIS title check at that price is good value. Before you choose on price, compare sample reports: what you want is the cheapest report that answers *your* questions. CarCheckerVIN's adds odometer readings over time, liens and impounds, auction sales with photos, service records and market value, and you can preview any VIN free before paying.

The cost that matters most

The most expensive report is the one you skipped on the car that turned out to have a washed title or a lien. The second most expensive is five full-price reports on cars you'd have ruled out with free checks. The sequence in Chapter 11 avoids both.

CHEAP CARFAX ALTERNATIVE

All our prices: **carcheckervin.com/pricing**. Refer a friend and get a free report: **carcheckervin.com/refer**.

CHAPTER 7

HOW TO GET A FREE CARFAX REPORT, LEGITIMATELY

"Can I get a **free Carfax report**?" Often, yes, if someone else has already paid for it. These are the routes that actually work, followed by the ones that don't.

Five legitimate routes

1. **Dealer listings.** Many dealers pay for Carfax and put a free report link on their listings. If a dealer's ad doesn't show one, ask the salesperson; it costs them little to send.
2. **Carfax's own used-car listings.** Carfax's app description says all used-car listings there include a free Carfax Vehicle History Report. If the car you want is listed there, the report comes with it.
3. **Ask a private seller.** Some sellers buy a report before listing. Ask for the live report link rather than a screenshot or PDF, and check that the VIN on it matches the car.
4. **AAA membership.** AAA Premier members get one free Carfax report a year by phone; Classic and Plus members get a discount that varies by club. AAA's discount page also lists a free Carfax Flood Check for members.
5. **For a car you already own.** Carfax's Car Care app is built to track maintenance and repairs on your own vehicle. It's handy when you sell, but it isn't a report on a car you're buying.

What doesn't work

- "Free Carfax generator" or "unlimited Carfax" sites
- Forum offers to "run a Carfax for you" in exchange for personal details
- A "$1 report" that quietly starts a monthly membership
- A report a seller emails you for a different VIN, or one you can't open as a live link

Spotting a fake or edited report

- The VIN on the report doesn't match the dashboard and door-jamb VIN
- It's a PDF or image only, with no link back to the provider
- Fonts, spacing or dates look inconsistent
- The seller won't let you run your own check

No free Carfax on offer? Free alternatives

When nobody has paid for a Carfax, use the free checks in Chapter 5d: CarCheckerVIN's history preview, NICB VINCheck and NHTSA's recall lookup. They won't show service history, but they'll tell you whether a car is worth a paid report at all. If it is, a $14.99 CarCheckerVIN report costs about a third of a widely quoted Carfax price.

FREE CARFAX REPORT

Step-by-step routes, updated: **carcheckervin.com/how-to-get-a-free-carfax-report**. AAA details: **carcheckervin.com/aaa-carfax-discount**. Fake-report warning signs: **carcheckervin.com/fake-carfax-report**.

CHAPTER 8

IS CARFAX WORTH IT? WHEN IT IS, AND WHEN IT ISN'T

This is a guide to Carfax alternatives, but the honest answer to "**is Carfax worth it**?" is sometimes yes. It depends on what you need to know about the specific car in front of you.

Carfax is worth it when…

- **Service history decides the deal**, such as proof a known issue was fixed.
- **You want accident detail**: reported accidents with severity and point of impact.
- **It's free** because the dealer or Carfax's listings include it.
- **You're paying a lot** and want the Buybback Guarantee.
- **You're selling** and want a report buyers recognize.

An alternative is enough when…

- **You're screening** several cars and most will be ruled out.
- **The big risks are title and money**: brands, rollbacks, liens and impounds.
- **It went through an auction**, where sale photos say more.
- **It's an older car** whose value is mostly its condition.
- **Budget matters** and the free preview shows nothing alarming.

A quick decision table

Your situation	Start with	Add Carfax?
Dealer car with a free Carfax link	The free Carfax	You have it; add a low-cost report if anything looks off
Private sale, late-model car	Free preview, then a $14.99 report	Yes, if service records will decide your offer
Private sale, older car	Free checks, then a $14.99 report	Rarely; spend it on an inspection
Comparing 5+ cars	Free checks, then a pack	Only on the finalist

The Buyback Guarantee in plain terms

It can pay when a Carfax report missed a DMV-issued title brand, such as salvage. It doesn't cover accidents, has claim deadlines and a capped payout: a backstop on title brands, not insurance against every problem. Read Carfax's current terms; more at **carcheckervin.com/carfax-buyback-guarantee**.

Two reports can disagree, and both can be right

Each provider sees a different mix of sources. A Carfax may show a service visit a title database never saw; a low-cost report may show an auction sale with photos that a summary leaves out. When they disagree, believe the more specific record, then let an independent inspection settle it. Our full take: **carcheckervin.com/is-carfax-worth-it**.

FIVE BUYERS, FIVE ANSWERS

The right **Carfax alternative** depends on the car and the seller. These five illustrative buyers show how the choice plays out, using the listed prices in this guide.

EXAMPLE 1 · PRIVATE SELLER

An older commuter car from an online marketplace

No dealer, no free Carfax, and the car's value rests mostly on its condition. **Plan:** decode the VIN and run the free checks; if they're clean, buy one CarCheckerVIN report for title brands, NMVTIS records, odometer readings and liens; then spend the rest of the budget on an inspection. Carfax only if the seller already has one to share. **Report spend: $14.99.**

EXAMPLE 2 · FRANCHISE DEALER

A late-model SUV with a free Carfax link on the listing

The dealer has already paid for the Carfax, so read it closely, especially service history and any reported damage. **Plan:** run CarCheckerVIN's free preview on the same VIN as a cross-check for auction and lien records; buy the full report only if the preview shows records the Carfax doesn't mention. **Report spend: $0 to $14.99.**

EXAMPLE 3 · REBUILT TITLE

A rebuilt-title pickup from a small used-car lot

Here the auction record matters more than anything else: you want to see how badly it was damaged before it was repaired. **Plan:** buy a report with auction sales and photos plus NMVTIS brand history, compare the photos with the truck in front of you, and have a body shop or frame specialist inspect the repaired areas. **Report spend: $14.99.**

EXAMPLE 4 · WEEKEND OF SHOPPING

Six cars across three sellers in two days

Paying $44.99 a car would mean $269.94 in reports. **Plan:** free checks on all six, then a 5-pack ($54.99) for the survivors, or reports one at a time if only two or three survive. A time-limited pass, such as GoodCar's seven days of unlimited lookups for $1.95, can suit this too, if you read what happens after the seven days. Add one Carfax on the finalist if its service history matters. **Report spend: $35.99 to $99.98 on the pack routes.**

EXAMPLE 5 · SELLING

Selling your own car privately

Buyers trust what they can verify. **Plan:** share the VIN in your ad so buyers can run their own checks, fix any open recall for free at a franchised dealer before listing, and consider attaching a report. A $14.99 CarCheckerVIN report covers title, mileage and liens; a Carfax adds the name many shoppers recognize. **Report spend: $0 to $44.99.**

CHAPTER 9

CHEAP CARFAX: RESELLERS, COUPONS AND FAKE REPORTS

Search for a **cheap Carfax** and you'll find offers promising the Carfax name for a few dollars. Some deliver something, some don't, and none of them is Carfax. Here's how to tell what you're looking at.

OFFER TYPE 1

"Carfax reports" for a few dollars from third-party sites

These sites aren't Carfax and aren't affiliated with it. If the report doesn't arrive or covers the wrong VIN, your dispute is with the middleman, not Carfax. Before paying, find out who runs the site and how to contact it. If you can't, don't pay.

OFFER TYPE 2

Carfax coupon codes

A code is only worth what Carfax honors at checkout. The discount we could verify is AAA's member pricing. Treat any code that needs a download, survey or outside account as a red flag. See carcheckervin.com/carfax-coupon-code.

OFFER TYPE 3

"Free Carfax generators"

No tool produces genuine Carfax reports for free. Real free Carfax reports are the ones a dealer, Carfax's listings or AAA already paid for (Chapter 7). And if a seller sends a report PDF but discourages your own check, match the VIN and ask for a live link.

Cheaper than Carfax, legitimately

Route	Cost	What you give up
Free Carfax from a dealer or Carfax's listings	$0	Nothing, if it's for the right VIN
AAA Premier free report	$0 (one a year)	Requires membership; by phone
Carfax app 10-pack	$27.50 a report	Upfront cost of $274.99
CarCheckerVIN report	$14.99; $9 in a 10-pack	Accident and theft records (use NICB for theft)
NMVTIS-only check (e.g. VinAudit)	From $9.99	Compare its sample to see what's included

CHEAP CARFAX

The legitimate low-cost route, explained: carcheckervin.com/cheap-carfax. Preview your VIN free first, then pay $14.99 only if the records are worth reading.

CHAPTER 10

CARFAX REPORT BY VIN OR LICENSE PLATE

Every history report, Carfax or otherwise, starts from the VIN. Get the VIN right and you can run a **Carfax report by VIN**, or the same VIN through any alternative, and compare like with like.

Know the VIN you're searching



A modern VIN has 17 characters (required since model year 1981 under 49 CFR Part 565) and never uses I, O or Q. In North America, position 9 is a check digit that catches typos, position 10 is the model year and position 11 the plant. The example above is a 2003 Honda Accord EX-V6 decoded with NHTSA data; its serial is illustrative.

Where to find it

- Lower driver's-side corner of the dashboard, through the windshield
- The certification label on the driver's door jamb
- The title, registration and insurance card

Read it from the car, not from the ad: listings are where typos happen. All locations: **carcheckervin.com/where-is-the-vin-number-on-a-car**.

Running the report

1. Copy all 17 characters from the car; check them twice.
2. Look for a free route first (Chapter 7), then enter the VIN on Carfax, or the plate if you don't have the VIN; Carfax offers plate search too.
3. Confirm the year, make and model on the report match the car before you read anything else.

Run the same VIN through an alternative first

Before paying for any Carfax, enter the same VIN or plate at CarCheckerVIN for a free preview, and run NICB VINCheck and NHTSA's recall lookup. If they turn up a salvage brand or a lien, you may not need the Carfax at all. Compare approaches at **carcheckervin.com/carfax-vin-check**, or start from a plate at **carcheckervin.com/license-plate-lookup**.

Plate searches and privacy

A plate or VIN search identifies the vehicle, not the person. Under the Driver's Privacy Protection Act of 1994 (18 U.S.C. § 2721 et seq.), owner personal information from DMV records may only be released for permitted uses, so no consumer history report, Carfax or alternative, shows an owner's name or address.

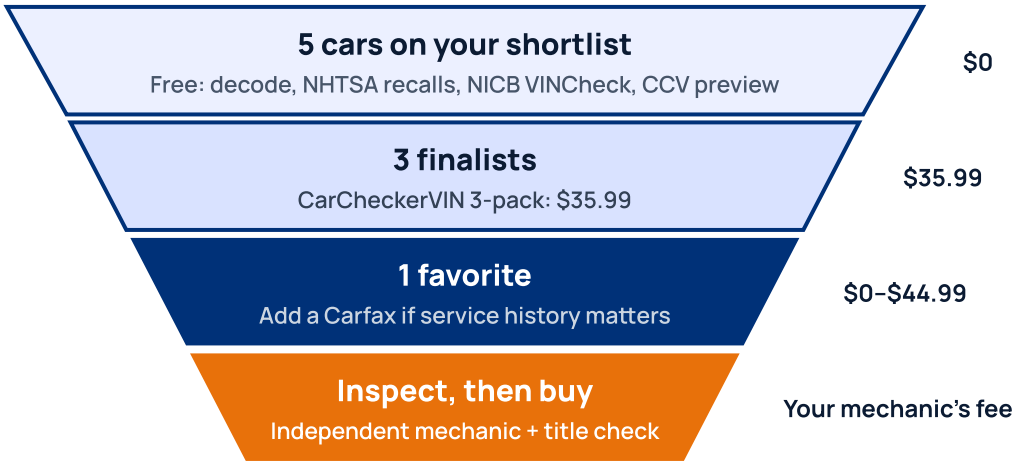
The three-place VIN match

Before trusting any report, Carfax or alternative, confirm the VIN on the dashboard, the VIN on the door-jamb label and the VIN on the title are identical, and that the report's year, make and model match the car. A report on the wrong VIN, or on a VIN copied from another car, is worse than no report at all.

CHAPTER 11

THE MONEY-SAVING BUYING SEQUENCE

You don't have to choose between Carfax and its alternatives. The cheapest safe approach uses free checks to narrow the field, low-cost reports on finalists, and a Carfax only where it adds something.



Reports bought only where the free checks say they're worth it

Step by step

1. **Free checks on every car.** Decode the VIN to confirm the year, trim and engine match the ad. Run NHTSA's recall lookup, NICB VINCheck and CarCheckerVIN's free preview. Drop anything with a surprise brand, a theft record or details that don't match.
2. **Reports on the finalists.** Buy a 3-pack ($35.99) and read title brands, NMVTIS records, odometer readings, liens and auction photos for each finalist.
3. **Carfax on the favorite, if it adds something.** Ask the dealer for the free Carfax. If none is offered and service history or accident detail matters, buy one.
4. **Inspect before paying.** No report replaces an independent pre-purchase inspection. Bring the report and ask the mechanic to check anything it flags.

Approach for 5 cars	Reports bought	Report cost
Carfax on every car	5 single Carfax reports	$224.95
Sequence, dealer provides the Carfax	3-pack only	$35.99
Sequence, you buy the Carfax	3-pack + 1 Carfax	$80.98

Timing tip: records keep arriving, so run the final report close to the day you pay, not weeks before. Comparing many cars? The 10-pack brings each report to $9, at **carcheckervin.com/pricing**.

READING ANY REPORT: RED FLAGS AND WHAT TO DO

Whichever report you buy, the value is in acting on what it shows.

What you see	What it may mean	What to do
Salvage, rebuilt, flood or junk brand	An insurer or state judged the car badly damaged or unroadworthy at some point	Walk away unless the price reflects it and an inspection confirms the repair
Brand in one state, clean title now	Possible title washing through a re-title elsewhere	Trust the NMVTIS brand history over the paper title; ask the seller to explain
Odometer reading lower than an earlier one	Possible rollback, a replaced cluster, or a typo in a record	Ask for documents; compare wear with the mileage; walk away if unexplained
Insurance total-loss record	The car was written off after damage or theft	Check for a matching brand, then inspect the repair closely
Open lien	Money is still owed; the lender may have a claim	Pay only once the lien is released or paid off through a bank or dealer
Impound record	Towed or held, sometimes for unpaid fees	Ask why; confirm there are no outstanding charges
Auction sale with damage photos	The car was sold damaged, then repaired	Compare the photos with the car today; inspect those areas
Open recall	A safety fix hasn't been done	Not a deal-breaker: recall repairs are free at franchised dealers
Fleet or rental use	Carfax lists use; many drivers, high miles	Price accordingly; check maintenance records
Long gaps in records	Often nothing, sometimes storage or unreported damage	Ask the seller; let the inspection decide

Odometer fraud is not rare

NHTSA estimates that more than 450,000 vehicles are sold each year with false odometer readings. Federal odometer law is 49 U.S.C. Chapter 327. Vehicles 20 or more years old, or model year 2010 or older, are exempt from written mileage disclosure.

If you were sold a rolled-back car

Under federal law, a buyer who proves intent to defraud can recover three times actual damages or $10,000, whichever is greater, plus attorney's fees. Keep the ad, title, odometer statement and reports. Check mileage at **carcheckervin.com/odometer-check**.

When the report and the seller disagree

Ask for documents, not explanations: repair invoices, the lien release, the previous title. If the story keeps changing, walk away. Salvage checks: **carcheckervin.com/salvage-title-check**.

CHAPTER 12

CARFAX ALTERNATIVES FOR DEALERS, FLIPPERS & AUCTION BUYERS

If you buy cars often, reports stop being a one-off expense and become a cost per unit. The right Carfax alternative depends on how many VINs you run and where the cars come from.

Buyer	Typical volume	What matters most
Auction buyer	A few to dozens per sale	Auction sale records and photos, title brands, the AutoCheck Score if you like a single number
Flipper / hobby dealer	A few a month	Low per-report price with no contract: packs, and pasting a list of VINs to preview them together
Independent dealer	Dozens a month	Wholesale pricing, reports to hand customers, a report link for listings
Fleet, lender or marketplace	Hundreds+	An API, predictable unit cost, white-label output

Auction buyers

For cars that went through salvage or insurance auctions, the most useful record is the sale itself: photos from the lot show the damage you're being asked to trust has been repaired. CarCheckerVIN reports include auction sales with photos; AutoCheck is known for auction data; ClearVin's own comparison highlights sales history and photos. Before bidding, preview every lot's VIN for free and buy reports only on the cars you'd actually bid on.

Flippers and frequent buyers

A 10-pack brings CarCheckerVIN's report to $9, and credits are spent per VIN as you shortlist, so you're not paying a monthly fee in slow weeks. Paste a list of VINs to preview a whole batch at once.

Dealers

Carfax doesn't publish a dealer rate card; dealerships are quoted individually. If you're weighing an alternative for your lot, ask any provider for a written per-report price at your volume. CarCheckerVIN offers dealers:

- **Wholesale pricing** on reports
- **Bulk API access** for inventory tools
- **White-label reports** to give customers under your own brand

FOR DEALERS

Details at **carcheckervin.com/dealers**.

Questions to ask any provider before you commit

- [ ] Does every report include NMVTIS title records?
- [ ] Can I see a full sample report, not a screenshot?
- [ ] What is the per-report price at my monthly volume?
- [ ] Is there a contract, minimum or auto-renewal?
- [ ] Can reports carry my dealership's branding?
- [ ] Is there API documentation, and what are the rate limits?

REFERENCE

CARFAX ALTERNATIVE GLOSSARY

Approved NMVTIS data provider
A company the U.S. Department of Justice lists as allowed to sell NMVTIS vehicle history reports.

AutoCheck Score
Experian's 1–100 score comparing a vehicle's history with vehicles of similar class and age.

Auction record
A record of the car being sold at auction, often with lot photos and condition notes.

Brand history
Every title brand a vehicle has carried, in every state, as recorded in NMVTIS.

Buyback Guarantee
Carfax's program that can pay if its report missed a DMV-issued title brand; excludes accidents, has deadlines and a cap.

Check digit
VIN position 9 in North America; a calculated character that catches typos.

Commercial-only provider
A company DOJ lists as supplying NMVTIS data to businesses, not to consumers.

DPPA
Driver's Privacy Protection Act of 1994; limits release of owner personal information from DMV records.

Flood brand
A title brand showing the vehicle was damaged by water.

Impound record
A record that the vehicle was towed and held, by police or a private lot.

Insurance total loss
An insurer's decision that repairing the car would cost more than it was worth.

Junk title
A brand for a vehicle fit only for parts or scrap in that state.

Lemon buyback
A vehicle repurchased by its maker under a state lemon law; many states brand the title.

Lien
A lender's legal claim on a vehicle until the loan is paid.

NHTSA
National Highway Traffic Safety Administration: runs the free recall lookup and the VIN decoder data.

NICB VINCheck
The National Insurance Crime Bureau's free theft and insurer total-loss lookup.

NMVTIS
National Motor Vehicle Title Information System, run by DOJ's Bureau of Justice Assistance.

Odometer rollback
Illegally reducing the mileage shown, to raise the price.

Pre-purchase inspection
An independent mechanic's check of a car before you buy it.

Rebuilt title
A brand some states use for a salvage vehicle repaired and passed for road use.

Salvage title
A brand for a vehicle declared a total loss or severely damaged; rules differ by state.

Service records
Maintenance and repair visits reported by shops and dealers.

Title washing
Re-titling a branded vehicle in another state to obtain a clean-looking title.

Trial membership
A low first payment that becomes a recurring charge unless canceled.

Vehicle history report
A dated record of a vehicle's titles, brands, mileage, sales and other events, looked up by VIN.

PUT IT TO WORK

Preview any VIN free and see which title, auction and recall records exist before you buy a report: **carcheckervin.com/vin-lookup**.

ANSWERS

CARFAX ALTERNATIVE FAQ

What is the best Carfax alternative?

For most private buyers, a low-cost report with NMVTIS title records and a free preview. Our pick is CarCheckerVIN: free preview, $14.99 report. AutoCheck suits auction-sourced cars.

Is there a free Carfax alternative?

For screening, yes: NHTSA's recall lookup, NICB VINCheck and CarCheckerVIN's free preview. A full history report is paid everywhere.

How much is a Carfax report?

A single report is widely quoted at $44.99. Carfax's iPhone app lists one report at $49.99 and 10 for $274.99 (November 2026).

Can I get a free Carfax report by VIN?

When someone else paid: dealer listings, Carfax's own listings, a seller who shares the link, or AAA Premier's one free report a year.

Is Carfax worth it?

When service history or accident detail will decide your offer, or when it's free. For screening several cars, a cheaper report is usually enough.

Carfax vs AutoCheck: which is better?

Carfax is strongest on service records; AutoCheck on auction data and its 1–100 score. Pick by what you need to know about that car.

Is anything cheaper than Carfax?

Yes. CarCheckerVIN is $14.99 ($9 in a 10-pack), ClearVin lists $17.99 and VinAudit $9.99.

What's the cheapest way to check several cars?

Free checks on all of them, then a pack for the finalists: 3 for $35.99 or 10 for $89.99 at CarCheckerVIN.

Is a Carfax alternative as accurate as Carfax?

On title brands, a report with NMVTIS title records draws on the federal system states report to daily. Carfax is deeper on service history. No report sees events nobody reported.

Do Carfax alternatives show accidents?

It varies. CarCheckerVIN shows insurance total-loss records, not accident records; Carfax lists reported accidents; NICB shows insurer total losses free.

Are cheap Carfax sites legit?

Sites selling "Carfax reports" for a few dollars aren't Carfax. If something goes wrong, your recourse is the middleman.

Is CarCheckerVIN an NMVTIS-approved provider?

No. Its reports include NMVTIS title records sourced from ClearVin, which is on the DOJ list.

Can I get an NMVTIS report from Carfax?

No. The DOJ says consumers cannot receive NMVTIS reports from Carfax, DMVDesk or Experian; they supply dealers only.

Can I run a Carfax report by license plate?

Yes, Carfax offers plate search; so does CarCheckerVIN for U.S. plates, with a free preview.

Will any report show the owner's name?

No. The DPPA limits release of owner personal information, so consumer reports identify the car, not the person.

Do I still need an inspection?

Yes. A report shows the record; a mechanic shows the car. Do both before paying.

How do I avoid a subscription trap?

Prefer one-time prices; on any trial, find the renewal price and cancel steps before you enter a card.

Where do I find the VIN for a Carfax report by VIN?

On the dashboard through the windshield, the driver's door-jamb label, the title, the registration and the insurance card. Copy it from the car, not the ad.

CARFAX ALTERNATIVE

Check the car before you pay.

Free history preview for any VIN or U.S. plate. Title brands, NMVTIS title records, odometer readings, liens and auction photos in a $14.99 report.

carcheckervin.com/alternatives-to-carfax →

Scan to preview a VIN free

Sources

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- NHTSA, recall lookup (nhtsa.gov/recalls) and odometer fraud guidance (nhtsa.gov)
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How we made this guide: written by CarCheckerVIN with AI assistance, from the public sources listed above; figures, prices and links checked November 2026.

More free tools at carcheckervin.com

VIN lookup
Free VIN check
License plate lookup
Cheap Carfax
Free Carfax report
NMVTIS VIN check
AutoCheck vs Carfax
Carfax VIN check
Vehicle history report

General information, not legal advice. Competitor prices are listed prices read from each company's site or app in November 2026 and may change. Record coverage varies by vehicle and data source. Carfax is a trademark of Carfax, Inc.; AutoCheck is a trademark of Experian; other names are trademarks of their owners. CarCheckerVIN is independent and not affiliated with them. © 2026 CarCheckerVIN

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