VEHICLE HISTORY REPORT

What's on a **vehicle history report**, where the records come from and how to read one: title brands, odometer readings, owners, liens and auctions, the red flags that should stop a sale, **Carfax vs AutoCheck vs NMVTIS** reports, free vs paid, and where to buy the best report for less.

$14.99	Free	51
full vehicle history report at carcheckervin.com	history preview for any VIN, no credit card	U.S. jurisdictions feeding the federal NMVTIS title system

CarCheckerVIN

www.carcheckervin.com/vehicle-history-report

Vehicle history reports · Free VIN lookup · VIN decoder

START HERE

ABOUT THIS VEHICLE HISTORY REPORT GUIDE

A **vehicle history report** is the paper trail of a used vehicle: the titles, brands, odometer readings, insurance total losses, liens, auction sales and service visits that someone reported against its VIN. This guide explains what's on one, where each record comes from, how to read it without missing the warning signs, and which report is worth your money.

It is published by **CarCheckerVIN (carcheckervin.com)**, which runs a free VIN lookup and sells a $14.99 vehicle history report. The facts come from public sources we opened ourselves: the U.S. Department of Justice's National Motor Vehicle Title Information System (NMVTIS), the Federal Trade Commission, NHTSA, the National Insurance Crime Bureau, state motor vehicle agencies and federal law. The sample report in Chapter 4 is an illustrative layout, not a real vehicle.

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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/vehicle-history-report** for decoded specs and a free preview of the history records on file. No card, no sign-up. The full vehicle history report is $14.99, with no subscription.

How to use this guide

Buying this week

Read Chapters 3, 4 and 5 to learn how to read a report and spot red flags, then Chapter 11 for the buying sequence.

Choosing a provider

Chapters 6 to 10 compare the Carfax report, the AutoCheck report, NMVTIS providers, CarCheckerVIN and the free checks.

Dealer or flipper

Chapter 12 covers VIN lists, license-plate searches, wholesale pricing, bulk API access and white-label reports.

BUYER'S SHORTCUT

WHERE TO BUY A VEHICLE HISTORY REPORT

About to buy a used vehicle? Here is where to get a vehicle history report, what each option costs, and what to check before you pay for one.

OUR PICK

CarCheckerVIN · www.carcheckervin.com

- **Free VIN lookup and history preview**, no credit card
- **Full vehicle history report: $14.99**, 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 records and state title brands, plus **NMVTIS title records**
- Odometer readings, owner count and insurance total-loss records
- Lien history, impound information and **auction sales with photos**
- Service records, open recalls, factory specs and a market value estimate

Run a free preview at carcheckervin.com/vehicle-history-report →

Vehicle history report options compared

Where	Price	Strongest at	Keep in mind
CarCheckerVIN	Free preview; full report $14.99; from $9 in packs	Title brands, NMVTIS title records, odometer, liens, impounds, auction photos at a low price	No accident or theft records: add NICB's free VINCheck and an inspection
Carfax report	Widely quoted at $44.99; free on many dealer listings	Service and maintenance records; Buyback Guarantee on missed title brands	Highest single price; no NMVTIS reports for consumers (DOJ)
AutoCheck report (Experian)	Varies; check the current price	Auction data and the AutoCheck Score	No NMVTIS reports for consumers (DOJ)
Other NMVTIS providers	Varies by provider	Federal title, brand, odometer, total-loss and salvage records	Depth varies; read plan terms for renewals
Free checks (NICB, NHTSA)	Free	Theft and total-loss records; open recalls	Screening tools, not a full history

How to choose a vehicle history report

- ☐ **NMVTIS title records** included
- ☐ **Every odometer reading**, with dates
- ☐ **Total-loss and salvage** records
- ☐ **Auction sales**, ideally with photos
- ☐ **Liens and impounds**, so the title can transfer
- ☐ **One price**, no renewing subscription
- ☐ **Packs** for comparing several cars
- ☐ **A site you chose**, not one a seller sent

CHAPTER 1

WHAT IS A VEHICLE HISTORY REPORT?

A **vehicle history report**, also called a **car history report** or **VIN history report**, is a dated list of the events recorded against one vehicle identification number. It answers a single question: *what has happened to this vehicle since it left the factory?*

Every road vehicle built for the 1981 model year onward carries a 17-character VIN under federal rules (49 CFR Part 565). Because that number never changes, state title offices, insurers, salvage yards, auctions, lenders and repair shops all file their records under it. A history report puts those records in date order and flags the ones that matter.

VIN decoder, VIN check, history report: the difference

Tool	What it answers	Typical result
VIN decoder	What is this vehicle, as built?	Year, make, model, engine, plant
VIN check	Is there a problem on record?	Salvage brand found; open recall
Vehicle history check	A quick screen of the history	Counts of records on file, before you buy the full report
Vehicle history report	Everything on record, in order	Titles, brands, mileage, owners, liens, auctions, service
NMVTIS report	The federal title and brand record	Current title, brand history, odometer, total loss, salvage
Pre-purchase inspection	What condition is it in today?	A mechanic's findings on the car itself

The FTC tells used-car buyers to get one

Dealers must display the Federal Trade Commission's Buyers Guide on the used vehicles they offer for sale. Since the FTC approved changes to its Used Car Rule in November 2016, that window form directs shoppers to obtain a vehicle history report and to check for open safety recalls, pointing them to ftc.gov/usedcars and safercar.gov. (Dealers in Maine and Wisconsin display their own state version of the guide.)

The FTC's consumer advice is just as clear about the limits: a history report may list accidents and flood damage, but it typically won't list mechanical problems, and it is not a substitute for an independent inspection.

What a report is good at

Facts that someone wrote down: a salvage brand, a mileage reading at a title transfer, an insurer's total-loss decision, an auction sale, a lien and its release.

What it can't judge

Worn brakes, a slipping transmission, a quiet repair paid in cash. For those you need a test drive and a mechanic's inspection.

Who buys vehicle history reports

Private buyers run one before meeting a seller. **Dealers** run them on trade-ins and auction buys. **Sellers** attach one to a listing. Start with a free check at **carcheckervin.com/vin-lookup**.

CHAPTER 2

WHERE VEHICLE HISTORY DATA COMES FROM

No single database holds a vehicle's whole life. A vehicle history report is assembled from many reporters, each of which sees only part of the story. Knowing who reports what explains both what a report shows and what it can miss.



Source	What it adds to the report	Typical gap
State titling agencies	Title issue dates and states, title brands, odometer at transfer, recorded liens	Only sees events that pass through a title office; brand rules differ by state
NMVTIS	Combines state title data with insurer and junk/salvage reports nationwide	Five key indicators only; no repair history
Insurance carriers	Total-loss and salvage determinations	Damage repaired without a total loss may never appear
Junk & salvage yards	Vehicles obtained, crushed, sold or exported	Only vehicles that reach a yard
Auto auctions	Sale date, mileage, damage description, photos	Only vehicles sold through reporting auctions
Service shops	Maintenance and repair visits	Owner and many independent repairs are missing
NHTSA & makers	Safety recalls by VIN and whether they're open	Very new recalls may not be loaded yet

The reporting rules behind it

Federal regulation 28 CFR Part 25 makes much of this reporting mandatory. Insurance carriers (§ 25.55) and junk yards, salvage yards and auto recyclers (§ 25.56) have reported to NMVTIS on a monthly basis since March 31, 2009. Insurers report the vehicles they decide are junk or salvage, including total losses; yards report each vehicle's VIN, the date they got it, who it came from, and whether it was crushed, sold or meant for export.

Why two reports on the same VIN can differ

Each provider buys a different mix of these sources: one holds more service visits, another more auction photos. The title and odometer sections should rest on state and NMVTIS data.

NMVTIS: THE FEDERAL TITLE BACKBONE

The National Motor Vehicle Title Information System is run by the U.S. Department of Justice's Bureau of Justice Assistance. It exists under 49 U.S.C. 30502 to keep stolen vehicles out of interstate commerce, protect states and consumers from fraud, and protect buyers from unsafe vehicles.

680M	1B+	16.9M	51
current title records in the system (FY2024)	title history records (FY2024)	junk, salvage & insurance records reported in FY2024	states and jurisdictions (incl. DC) participating

Sources: NMVTIS FY2024 Annual Report (published August 2025); DOJ state participation map, read November 2026, which also says 100% of U.S. DMV data is now represented in the system.

The five things NMVTIS reports

1. **Current title** state and the last title date
2. **Brand history:** every brand any state has applied, such as junk, salvage or flood
3. **Odometer reading** recorded at titling
4. **Total-loss history** reported by insurers
5. **Salvage history**, including transfers to junk yards, salvage yards and recyclers

The DOJ calls the report "intentionally concise"; repair, recall and maintenance data come from private providers.

What NMVTIS doesn't hold

The DOJ's Consumer Access Product Disclaimer spells out the limits:

- It is not a repair or service record.
- Serious damage may be missing if no insurer declared a total loss and no state branded the title.
- Commercial vehicles may be missing if a state keeps them outside its main title database.
- A vehicle history report is not a substitute for an independent inspection.

Who can sell you an NMVTIS report

Only DOJ-approved data providers (Chapter 8). The DOJ states that consumers cannot receive NMVTIS reports from Carfax, DMVDesk or Experian, which serve dealerships only.

A state example: California dealers must check NMVTIS

The California DMV requires licensed dealers to obtain an NMVTIS report before a used vehicle is offered or displayed for sale, and to post a disclosure on the vehicle if the report or title shows a junk or salvage history or a brand. Other states set their own rules.

INCLUDED

Every CarCheckerVIN vehicle history report includes NMVTIS title records alongside state title brands, odometer readings, liens, auctions with photos and service records, for $14.99. See **carcheckervin.com/nmvtis-vin-check**.

CHAPTER 3

WHAT'S ON A VEHICLE HISTORY REPORT

Layouts differ between providers, but nearly every full report is built from the same nine sections. Here is **what's on a vehicle history report** and what each part tells you.



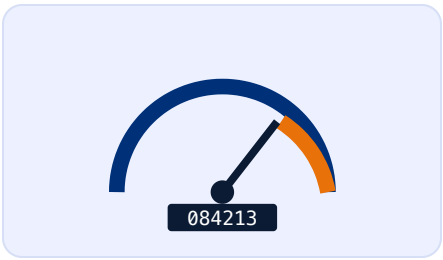
Vehicle & specs

The decoded VIN: year, make, model, engine, plant. Check it against the car and the ad.



Title & brands

Every title issued, the state, and any brand: salvage, rebuilt, junk, flood, lemon buyback.



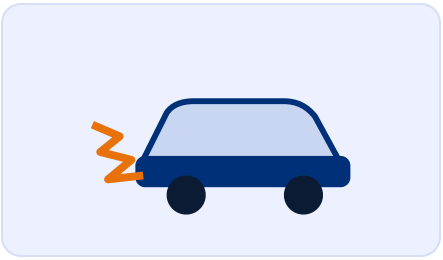
Odometer readings

Mileage at each title transfer, inspection, sale or service, with dates.



Owners

How many owners, when ownership changed and in which states. Never names.



Total loss & salvage

Insurer total-loss decisions and records from junk and salvage yards.



Auction sales & photos

Sale dates, mileage, damage notes and the photos taken when it sold.



Liens & impounds

Loans recorded against the title, their releases, and impound events.



Service records

Maintenance and repairs reported by shops that share their data.



Recalls & value

Open safety recalls by VIN and an estimate of what the vehicle is worth.

Read the sections in this order

Start with the **title**, because a brand changes everything else on the page. Then read the **odometer**, the **total-loss and auction** records, and the **liens**. Owners, service and recalls come last: they shape your questions and your offer, but rarely end a deal on their own. The next four pages take each section in turn.

THE TITLE SECTION & TITLE BRANDS

The title section lists every title issued for the VIN: when, in which state, and with which brand, the permanent note a state adds after a serious event. It is the most important line on any vehicle history report.

Common title brands and what they mean

Brand (names vary)	What it generally means	What to do
Salvage	Declared a total loss or badly damaged; usually can't be driven until repaired and inspected	Don't pay clean-title money; see the damage photos
Rebuilt / reconstructed	A salvage vehicle repaired and passed a state inspection	Ask for repair records and get a frame and safety check
Junk / nonrepairable	Meant for parts or scrap only; often can never be titled for the road again	Walk away unless you're buying parts
Flood / water damage	Water reached the vehicle; electrics and corrosion are the long-term risk	Walk away or get a specialist inspection
Lemon / manufacturer buyback	The maker bought it back over repeated defects under a state lemon law or warranty	Find out what the defect was and whether it was fixed
Prior taxi / police	Former commercial or government use, in states that brand it	Expect high wear; price accordingly
Odometer brands	Not Actual Mileage, Exceeds Mechanical Limits and similar	Treat the mileage as unknown (see page 9)

State example: California

The California DMV's brands include Salvaged, Original (or Prior) Taxi, Original (or Prior) Police, Non-USA (grey market), Warranty Return (or Lemon Law Buyback), Remanufactured and Park Trailer, shown in a red **VEHICLE HISTORY** box near the title's upper right corner.

State example: Texas

The Texas DMV's salvage manual says a vehicle rebuilt from a Texas salvage title gets the brand **REBUILT SALVAGE – DAMAGED**; one rebuilt from an out-of-state salvage document gets **REBUILT SALVAGE – ISSUED BY (STATE)**. Read the exact brand text.

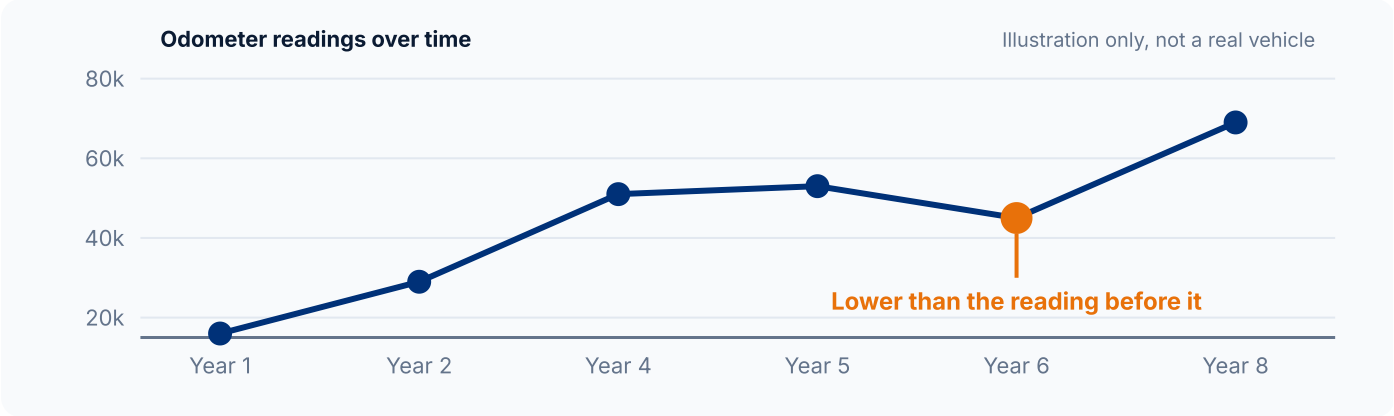
Title washing: why the history matters more than today's title

Title washing exploits differences between states: a branded vehicle is retitled elsewhere in the hope that the brand doesn't carry over. A paper title only shows the current status. A history report shows the full sequence, and NMVTIS tracks brands that *any* state has applied. Read the title section as a timeline. Three patterns need an answer: a brand that vanishes on a later title in another state; several titles in different states within a year or two; and a total-loss or salvage-yard record with no brand on any title.

Run a dedicated **title check** at **carcheckervin.com/car-title-check**, read how washing works at **carcheckervin.com/title-washing**, or check for a salvage brand at **carcheckervin.com/salvage-title-check**.

THE ODOMETER SECTION

Mileage is the second thing to read. A vehicle history report lists each odometer reading someone recorded, with a date and a source. Read them as a line on a chart: it should only ever go up.



Where readings come from

- **Title transfers:** the seller states the mileage on the odometer disclosure, and the state records it
- **Inspections and emissions tests** in states that require them
- **Service visits** at shops that report to history providers
- **Auction sales**, which record mileage at the time of sale

What a drop can mean

A reading lower than an earlier one is the classic sign of an **odometer rollback**. It can also be a typing error by a clerk or a shop, or a replaced instrument cluster. Never assume which: ask for the documents that explain it, and if nobody can, treat the true mileage as unknown.

Odometer labels decoded

Label	Meaning
Actual	The reading is believed accurate
Not Actual Mileage	Known not to reflect the true miles
True Mileage Unknown	Accuracy can’t be confirmed
Exceeds Mechanical Limits	The odometer has rolled past its maximum
Exempt	No federal disclosure was required (age rule below)

The law on odometers

NHTSA estimates that more than **450,000** vehicles are sold each year with false odometer readings. Federal odometer law (49 U.S.C. Chapter 327) makes tampering illegal, and a buyer who proves intent to defraud can recover three times actual damages or $10,000, whichever is greater, plus attorney’s fees. Disclosure isn’t required on vehicles 20 years old or older, or on model year 2010 and older vehicles, which is why older cars often show “exempt”.

Check a mileage history on its own at **carcheckervin.com/odometer-check**, and learn the warning signs at **carcheckervin.com/odometer-fraud**.

CHAPTER 3 CONT.

OWNERS, LIENS, IMPOUNDS, TOTAL LOSSES & AUCTIONS

After title and mileage, these four sections fill in the story: who had the vehicle, who lent money against it, whether an insurer wrote it off, and whether it passed through an auction on the way to the seller.

Owners

The owner section counts ownership changes and shows when and where each began. It never names owners: the Driver's Privacy Protection Act of 1994 (18 U.S.C. § 2721 et seq.) limits personal information from state motor vehicle records to permitted uses, so no public VIN or plate search reveals who owned a car.

Read it for patterns. One owner for eight years tells a different story from four owners in three years. Short ownerships aren't proof of trouble, but they're a fair question: "Why did the last two owners sell so quickly?"

Liens

A lien shows a lender had a security interest in the vehicle, normally a car loan. What matters is whether each lien was **released**. A lien still open when you buy can stop the title from transferring into your name. If the report shows an open lien, the seller should pay it off in front of you, at the lender, or through an escrow arrangement, and you should see the release before you pay.

Impounds

Impound records show the vehicle was towed and held, for unpaid parking, an abandoned car, an arrest or a crash. An impound alone isn't a deal-breaker. Ask why, and check that any lien sale or abandoned-vehicle title was handled properly.

Insurance total loss

A total-loss record means an insurer decided repairs cost too much relative to the vehicle's value and paid the claim. Insurers report these to NMVTIS. Look at what happened next: a salvage brand should usually follow. A total loss with no brand afterwards is a red flag worth an explanation.

Auction sales

Auction records show the sale date, the mileage and often a damage description (primary and secondary damage) and photos. Dealer auctions are routine for trade-ins and lease returns. A sale at a salvage auction means the vehicle was sold as damaged.

Auction photos: the closest thing to a time machine

A repaired car can look perfect today. Photos taken at a salvage auction show it before the repair: the crushed front end, the deployed airbags, the waterline on the seats. If the report has auction photos, look at every one, then compare panel gaps, paint and glass on the car in front of you.

WITH PHOTOS

CarCheckerVIN reports include auction sales with photos, insurance total-loss records, lien history and impound information. Look up an auction record at **carcheckervin.com/auction-history** or check for a total loss at **carcheckervin.com/total-loss-check**.

CHAPTER 3 CONT.

SERVICE, RECALLS, SPECS & VALUE, AND WHAT'S MISSING

The last sections of a vehicle history report rarely end a deal, but they sharpen your questions and your offer. Then there's the part no report contains, which matters just as much.

Service records

Service entries come from shops that share data with history providers: oil changes, tire work, inspections and repairs. Gaps are normal, because owners who do their own maintenance or use shops that don't report leave no trace. Use the entries you do see to spot patterns: the same repair three times, or a major repair just before the sale.

Open recalls

Many reports list open safety recalls by VIN. Cross-check them free at NHTSA's lookup (nhtsa.gov/recalls), which searches by VIN or plate. NHTSA's tool doesn't show recalls more than 15 years old (unless the maker offers more), some small or ultra-luxury makers, or very new recalls not yet loaded. Recall repairs are free at franchised dealers. Try **carcheckervin.com/recall-check**.

Factory specs

The decoded VIN shows what the vehicle was when it was built: year, model, engine, drive and plant. If the car in front of you has a different engine or trim, or the ad describes something else, find out why before you go any further. Decode free at **carcheckervin.com/vin-decoder**.

Market value

A value estimate gives you an anchor for negotiation. Adjust it with what the report found: a brand, a mileage question or a recent total loss should all pull the price down, and you now have documents to point to.

What no vehicle history report contains

Not on the report	Why, and where to find it instead
Mechanical condition	Reports record events, not wear. Get a pre-purchase inspection and a test drive.
Damage nobody reported	A crash fixed privately without an insurance claim may leave no record. Look for paint and panel mismatches.
Owner names and addresses	Protected by the Driver's Privacy Protection Act.
Very recent events	It takes time for a new title, claim or sale to reach the databases. Ask the seller directly.
Aftermarket changes	Lift kits, tunes and engine swaps rarely show. Compare the car with its decoded specs.

A clean report is not a clean car

The FTC and the DOJ say the same thing in their own documents: a vehicle history report is not a substitute for an independent inspection. A clean report tells you nothing *bad* was recorded. It doesn't tell you nothing bad happened. Budget for both the report and an inspection.

CHAPTER 4

HOW TO READ A VEHICLE HISTORY REPORT

Most people skim the summary box and miss the detail underneath. This is **how to read a vehicle history report** properly: ten checks, in order, that take about ten minutes.

1. **Match the VIN.** The VIN on the report must be identical to the one on the dashboard, the driver's door-jamb label and the title. One different character means you're reading another car's history.
2. **Match the description.** Year, make, model, engine and drive should match the car and the ad. A mismatch is either a listing mistake or a much bigger problem.
3. **Read the title timeline first.** List every title: date, state, brand. Any brand, in any state, at any time, changes the value of the car and the questions you ask.
4. **Plot the odometer.** Every reading should be higher than the one before. Note any drop, any mileage label, and any long gap without a reading.
5. **Look for losses even when the title is clean.** Insurance total-loss, junk and salvage-yard records can exist without a brand on the current title.
6. **Open every auction record.** Read the damage description and look at each photo. Compare what you see with the car today.
7. **Check liens and impounds.** Every lien should show a release. The name on the title should be the person selling you the car.
8. **Count owners and states.** Compare them with what the seller told you. "One owner, always garaged here" should match the record.
9. **Check open recalls.** Ask the seller to have them fixed, or plan a free dealer visit yourself.
10. **Read the service entries last.** Look for repeated repairs, a big repair just before the sale, and long gaps.

Write your questions down

Every odd entry becomes a question for the seller: "What happened in 2019?" "Why is there a reading lower than the one before?" An honest seller has answers and paperwork. Vague answers are an answer too.

Print it and bring it

Take the report to the viewing and to the mechanic. A mechanic who knows a car had front-end auction damage will look harder at the radiator support, the frame rails and the airbag system.

PRINT-READY

CarCheckerVIN reports are ready in under a minute and print-ready, with title, NMVTIS, odometer, lien and auction sections you can work through with these ten checks. Start at **carcheckervin.com/vehicle-history-report**.

A SAMPLE VEHICLE HISTORY REPORT, ANNOTATED

Here is the reading method applied to an example layout. The vehicle, dates, states and entries are invented for teaching; the numbered notes below explain what each entry would mean on a real report.

Example vehicle history report · 2016 midsize sedan

ILLUSTRATIVE EXAMPLE · NOT A REAL VEHICLE

Title brands: 2 | Owners: 3 | Odometer readings: 6 | Total-loss records: 1 | Auction sales: 1 | Liens: 1, released | Open recalls: 1

#	Date	Section	Entry
1	Mar, year 1	Title	Title issued, State A, no brand; odometer 12 mi; lien recorded
2	Jun, year 4	Insurance	Total loss reported by insurer
3	Jul, year 4	Auction	Salvage auction sale; primary damage: front end; 41,880 mi; 12 photos
4	Aug, year 4	Title	Title issued, State A, brand: SALVAGE
5	Feb, year 5	Title	Title issued, State B, brand: REBUILT; odometer 42,050 mi
6	May, year 6	Title	Title issued, State C, no brand; odometer 38,900 mi
7	Year 1–3	Lien	Lien released in year 3
8	Current	Recalls	1 open safety recall, remedy available

What each entry tells you

1 · A normal start. New-car mileage and a loan: nothing unusual. Check that the decoded specs match the car.

2–4 · A real write-off. The insurer's total loss, the salvage auction and the salvage brand agree with each other. Open all twelve photos: they show the front-end damage before any repair.

5 · Rebuilt in another state. A rebuilt brand means the car passed a state inspection after repair. Legitimate, but it should be priced as a rebuilt vehicle, and you want the repair invoices.

6 · Two red flags at once. The brand disappears on a third state's title, the pattern behind *title washing*, and the odometer reads lower than the year before. Either alone needs an explanation; together they're a reason to walk away.

7 · Lien released. Fine, but confirm the seller's name is on the current title.

8 · Open recall. Free to fix at a franchised dealer; not a reason to reject the car on its own.

The verdict on this example

Pass, unless the seller can document the repair, explain the mileage drop with paperwork and price the car as a rebuilt vehicle, and an independent inspection confirms the structure. The summary box showed only seven numbers; the timeline told the real story.

CHAPTER 5

VEHICLE HISTORY REPORT RED FLAGS: STOP OR ASK

Not every odd entry is bad news. Some should end the deal on the spot; others only need a good answer. Sorting them correctly saves you from both buying a problem and walking away from a good car.

Stop: deal-breakers

- **A title brand** you didn't knowingly shop for: salvage, rebuilt, junk, flood, lemon buyback
- **Mileage that goes backwards**, with no paperwork to explain it
- **A mileage brand:** Not Actual Mileage, True Mileage Unknown, Exceeds Mechanical Limits
- **A junk, nonrepairable or destroyed record** on a car being sold for the road
- **A total loss with no brand afterwards**, especially after a move to another state
- **A VIN that doesn't match** the dashboard, door label or title
- **An open lien** the seller can't or won't clear before you pay
- **A report that contradicts the story:** "never damaged" against salvage auction photos

Ask: entries that need an answer

- **Many owners in a short time:** why did each one sell?
- **Long gaps** with no readings or service: stored, or off the record?
- **Titles in several states** in a short period: moves, or shopping for a clean title?
- **A dealer auction sale:** usually a trade-in or lease return, but check the condition notes
- **An impound:** what happened, and was the title handled properly?
- **Prior commercial, fleet or rental use**, where a report lists it: expect more wear
- **Repeated repairs** to the same system
- **Open recalls:** ask the seller to get them fixed free

Questions to ask the seller, with the report in hand

If the report shows…	Ask…
A total loss or salvage auction	"Who repaired it, and can I see the invoices and parts receipts?"
A reading lower than the one before	"Was the instrument cluster replaced? Is there paperwork?"
Titles in several states	"Where has the car been registered, and why did it move?"
An open lien	"How will the loan be paid off, and when do I get the release?"
A short last ownership	"When did you buy it, and why are you selling now?"

Price it right if you go ahead

A branded or unexplained history doesn't always mean "never", but it always means "less". Some lenders and insurers treat branded vehicles differently, so call yours before you commit, and expect the same discount when you sell. More on reading flags at **carcheckervin.com/carfax-red-flags**.

CHAPTER 5 CONT.

FRAUD & SCAMS A HISTORY CHECK EXPOSES

Most used-car fraud depends on the buyer not looking at the record. A vehicle history check, read properly, catches the common schemes, as long as the report itself is genuine.

HIDDEN DAMAGE

Title washing

A salvage or flood vehicle is retitled through a state where the brand doesn't carry over, so the new paper title looks clean. The history report shows the sequence: a brand in one state, then a clean title in another. NMVTIS records the brands that any participating state has applied. Read more at **carcheckervin.com/title-washing**.

MILEAGE

Odometer rollback

NHTSA estimates more than 450,000 vehicles a year are sold with false readings. The defense is a timeline of dated readings: a lower reading after a higher one is the tell.

IDENTITY

VIN cloning

Thieves copy the VIN of a legitimately registered car of the same model onto a stolen one. The VIN decodes perfectly because it's real. Clues: registrations or service in a state the car has supposedly never been. Check the VIN in several places on the vehicle and run NICB's free VINCheck for theft records.

AFTER STORMS

Flood vehicles

Water-damaged vehicles can be moved far from where the flooding happened. Look for flood brands, insurance total losses and auction damage notes; NICB's free VINCheck also shows flood total-loss records from participating insurers.

FAKE REPORTS

Report scams: choose the site yourself

In an October 2018 alert, the FTC described scammers posing as buyers who ask car sellers to buy a history report from one specific website, which may simply collect card details and personal information for resale. Buyers face the mirror image: a seller's link to a "report" on an unknown site, or a printout that can't be verified. The FTC says to question any request to use a particular site and points to the approved provider list at vehiclehistory.gov. Run your own report. See **carcheckervin.com/fake-carfax-report**.

Suspect fraud? Stop before you pay, keep the ad and messages, and report it to local police and your state motor vehicle agency (insurance fraud also to the NICB). Already bought? Contact your state attorney general.

CHAPTER 6

THE CARFAX REPORT & CARFAX PRICE

Carfax, Inc., founded in 1984 in Virginia and now part of S&P Global Mobility, is the best-known name in vehicle history. Many shoppers say "Carfax" for any **vehicle history report**, so know what a **Carfax report** offers.

What's in a Carfax vehicle history report

Carfax's own guide to reading its report walks through these parts:

- Value estimate, vehicle basics and highlights: owners, personal or commercial use, miles, damage reported
- Ownership history with dates, where registered, estimated miles a year
- Title problems, including fire and flood, and whether the odometer reading is accurate
- Accidents and damage, from airbag deployment to structural damage to total loss, with a damage severity scale
- Open recalls, and a detailed history timeline including loans, emissions and safety inspections

Its strength is **service records** from its large network of shops. Carfax itself notes that it does not have the complete history of every vehicle.

Carfax price and free Carfax options

A single Carfax report is widely quoted at **$44.99**. Ways to pay less:

- **Dealer listings:** many dealers include a free Carfax, paid for by the dealer. Ask for the link.
- **AAA:** Premier members get one free Carfax a year by phone; Classic and Plus members get a discount, which varies by club.
- **License plate:** Carfax also offers a plate search if you don't have the VIN.

The Carfax Buyback Guarantee

Carfax pays out if its report missed a DMV-issued title brand, such as salvage or flood. It doesn't cover accidents, has deadlines, and the payout is capped.

NMVTIS and Carfax

The DOJ says consumers cannot receive NMVTIS reports from Carfax; it serves dealerships only.

Carfax report vs CarCheckerVIN report

	Carfax report	CarCheckerVIN report
Single report	Widely quoted at $44.99	$14.99, no subscription
Five cars	5 × $44.99 = $224.95	5-pack $54.99 ($11 each)
Title brands & odometer	Yes	Yes, plus NMVTIS title records
Service records	Its main strength	Yes, where reported
Accident records	Yes, where reported	No; insurance total-loss records instead
Auction photos; liens & impounds	Loans shown in the timeline	Auction sales with photos; lien history and impounds

CARFAX ALTERNATIVE

Screen cars with $14.99 reports; add a Carfax on the final car if service history matters. More: **carfax-vehicle-history-report**, **how-much-is-a-carfax-report**, **how-to-get-a-free-carfax-report**, **carfax-buyback-guarantee** and **alternatives-to-carfax**.

CHAPTER 7

THE AUTOCHECK REPORT, AND CARFAX VS AUTOCHECK

The **AutoCheck report** comes from Experian, the credit bureau. It is best known for two things: its auction data and the AutoCheck Score, and it is a common alternative to the Carfax report.

The AutoCheck Score

The score is a single number that rates the vehicle against similar vehicles. It gives a quick read on whether a car's recorded history is typical for its kind. It is a summary, not an explanation: always read the records underneath before you rely on the number.

How AutoCheck labels history

AutoCheck's public glossary defines terms you'll meet on most reports:

- **Fleet / lease:** a vehicle provided by a company, for example to an executive
- **Commercial, government, police, taxi, livery** and **driver education** use
- **Odometer rollback:** a DMV reading lower than one previously reported
- **Not Actual Miles, True Mileage Unknown, Exceeds Mechanical Limits**
- **Manufacturer buyback** and **grey market**

Price and NMVTIS

AutoCheck prices change and vary by package, so check the current price on its site rather than relying on a figure from a review or an old forum post.

As with Carfax, the DOJ lists Experian among companies from which consumers cannot receive NMVTIS reports; Experian supplies that data to dealerships only.

Which is "better"?

Neither has every record. Carfax is usually stronger on service history; AutoCheck on auction history. Buyers who want maximum coverage sometimes run both on the final car. A cheaper report with NMVTIS title data and auction photos is a sensible first screen for the rest.

Carfax vs AutoCheck vs CarCheckerVIN

	Carfax	AutoCheck	CarCheckerVIN
Company	Carfax, Inc. (S&P Global Mobility)	Experian	CarCheckerVIN, independent
Best known for	Service records	Auction data, AutoCheck Score	Low price, NMVTIS title records, auction photos
Single report	Widely quoted at $44.99	Varies; check current price	$14.99
Multi-car buying	Per-report pricing	Varies by package	Packs from $9 a report
Free route	Dealer listings; AAA Premier	Ask the seller or dealer	Free preview for any VIN
NMVTIS report to consumers	No (dealers only, per DOJ)	No (dealers only, per DOJ)	Includes NMVTIS title records

Compare in more depth at **carcheckervin.com/autocheck-vehicle-history-report** and **carcheckervin.com/autocheck-vs-carfax**.

CHAPTER 8

NMVTIS REPORTS & APPROVED PROVIDERS

An **NMVTIS report** is the federal core of vehicle history: title, brand, odometer, total-loss and salvage data from the national system. You can't buy one from the government directly; you buy it from an approved data provider.

What an NMVTIS report shows

The DOJ says consumers can search NMVTIS before buying to see:

- Current title information and brand history
- The latest reported odometer reading
- Any insurance "salvage" determination
- Any report of transfer to an auto recycler, junk yard or salvage yard

If a vehicle has a brand, total-loss or salvage history, the report warns that the vehicle may be unsafe. The DOJ strongly encourages an independent inspection as well.

NMVTIS report vs full history report

	NMVTIS only	Full report
Title & brands	✓	✓
Odometer	latest	timeline
Total loss, salvage	✓	✓
Auctions, photos	–	often
Liens, impounds	–	often
Service, recalls	–	often

Approved providers selling to the public

The DOJ's list of approved NMVTIS data providers whose links serve both commercial and public customers, as read in November 2026:

- Bumper.com
- Carsforsale.com
- Carvertical.com
- Checkthatvin.com
- Clearvin.com
- EpicVin.com
- GoodCar.com
- Titlecheck.us
- Vinaudit.com
- Vindata.com
- VinReport
- Vinsmart.com

Some providers also own other report sites the DOJ lists under them, for example BeenVerified.com (Bumper) and VehicleHistoryReport.com (Carsforsale). The list changes; check vehiclehistory.bja.ojp.gov before you buy.

Dealers only

The DOJ states that consumers cannot receive NMVTIS reports from Carfax, DMVDesk or Experian; those companies provide NMVTIS information to car dealerships only.

How to check a provider

Look it up on the DOJ list yourself. The FTC also points consumers to the approved list and suggests searching a company's name with words like "complaint", "review" or "scam" before buying.

NMVTIS + MORE

A CarCheckerVIN report includes NMVTIS title records and adds what a bare NMVTIS report leaves out: a dated odometer history, owner count, lien history and impounds, auction sales with photos, service records, open recalls and a market value estimate. $14.99 at **carcheckervin.com/nmvtis-vin-check**.

A clean NMVTIS result is good news, with limits

The DOJ says plainly that a "clean" NMVTIS report is a good thing: no state brand, no insurer total loss, no junk or salvage-yard record. It still won't show a repaired fender-bender or worn suspension, so pair it with an inspection.

CHAPTER 9

THE BEST VEHICLE HISTORY REPORT: HOW THE OPTIONS COMPARE

There is no single **best vehicle history report** for everyone. The right choice depends on how many cars you're checking, where you're buying, and which records matter most to you.

Feature	CarCheckerVIN	Carfax	AutoCheck	NMVTIS-only	NICB (free)
Price	$14.99; from $9	~$44.99 quoted	varies	varies	free
Title brands	✓	✓	✓	✓	–
NMVTIS title records	✓	dealers only	dealers only	✓	–
Odometer history	✓	✓	✓	latest	–
Insurance total loss	✓	✓	check sample	✓	salvage & flood losses
Auction sales & photos	✓	check sample	auction data	–	–
Liens & impounds	✓	loans	check sample	–	–
Service records	where reported	strongest	check sample	–	–
Accident records	–	✓	check sample	–	–
Theft records	–	check sample	check sample	–	stolen, not recovered
Open recalls	✓	✓	check sample	–	–

"Check sample" means we couldn't confirm the item from the provider's public pages; look at a sample report before you buy. NICB VINCheck covers stolen-not-recovered and salvage or flood total-loss records from participating insurers.

The best report for your situation

Comparing several cars

Use low-cost reports with NMVTIS title records and auction photos on every car on your list. CarCheckerVIN packs bring it to $9–$12 a report.

Service history matters most

For a late-model car where maintenance records drive the value, add a Carfax on the final car, or ask the dealer for theirs free.

Buying from an auction or wholesaler

Auction records and photos are the priority; read every condition note. Dealers can get wholesale report pricing at **carcheckervin.com/dealers**.

Just screening a listing

Start free: CarCheckerVIN's preview, NICB VINCheck and NHTSA's recall lookup. Buy a full report once the car makes your shortlist.

See CarCheckerVIN's full ranking at **carcheckervin.com/best-vehicle-history-report** and its VIN history tool at **carcheckervin.com/vin-history**.

CHAPTER 10

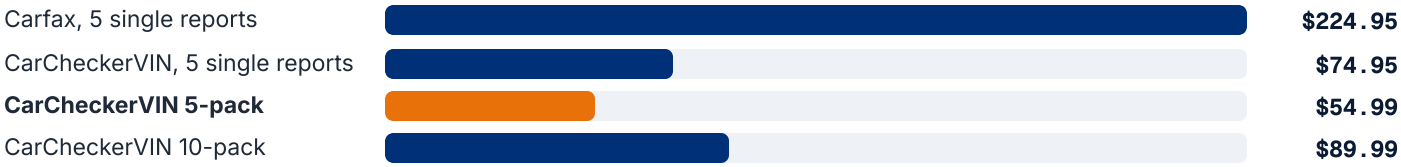
FREE VS CHEAP VS FULL VEHICLE HISTORY REPORTS

Searching for a **free vehicle history report** is sensible: several genuinely free tools exist. None of them is a full history, though, and the cheapest paid reports can cost more than they look if they come with a subscription.

Free vehicle history checks worth running

Tool	What it shows	Limits
NICB VINCheck	Stolen-not-recovered and salvage or flood total-loss records from participating insurers (92.49% of earned U.S. premium); some motorcycles and watercraft	5 searches per 24 hours per IP; NICB says it is not a full history report
NHTSA recall lookup	Open safety recalls by VIN or plate	Recalls over 15 years old, some makers and very new recalls may be missing
Dealer-provided Carfax	The full Carfax report, paid for by the dealer	Only for that dealer's cars
AAA Premier	One free Carfax a year, by phone	Membership required; other tiers get a discount
CarCheckerVIN preview	Decoded specs and a free preview of the records on file, for any VIN	The detail is in the $14.99 full report

What checking five cars costs



Carfax at its widely quoted $44.99 single-report price; CarCheckerVIN prices from carcheckervin.com/pricing, November 2026. The 10-pack covers ten cars.

A cheap vehicle history report done right

A **cheap vehicle history report** is worth it when it still covers the sections that matter: title brands with NMVTIS data, a dated odometer history, total-loss and salvage records, liens and auctions. Low price is only a saving if those sections are there.

Watch for these traps

- A low first charge that starts a renewing subscription or a timed pass
- "Free report" sites that ask for a card before showing anything
- Report sites a seller insists you use (Chapter 5)

Compare prices at **carcheckervin.com/how-much-should-a-vehicle-history-report-cost**, run a **free VIN check**, or read about **cheaper Carfax options**.

CHAPTER 11

WHEN A VEHICLE HISTORY REPORT IS WORTH IT

For almost any used-car purchase, a vehicle history report is the cheapest insurance you can buy. Here's when it matters most, when a dealer's free report is enough, and when even a full report isn't.

Situation	Report?	Why
Private seller	Always	No Buyers Guide, no dealer standing behind the sale; the report is your main check on the title and mileage
Buying online or remotely	Always	You can't inspect it yourself before paying; read the auction photos closely
Out-of-state vehicle	Always	Brand rules differ by state; read the title timeline for washing
Price well below market	Always	A hidden brand, total loss or mileage problem is the usual reason
After major storms	Always	Look for flood brands, insurance total losses and auction water-damage notes
Buying from a dealer	Ask for theirs	Many include a free Carfax; a second report adds NMVTIS title records and auction photos
Selling your car	Often	A report in the listing answers buyers' questions and shows you what they'll see
Pre-1981 classic	Limited	Pre-17-digit VINs have few electronic records; rely on documents and an expert

A buyer's sequence that saves money

1. **Screen free.** Decode the VIN and run the CarCheckerVIN preview, NICB VINCheck and NHTSA recalls. Drop any car whose VIN doesn't match the ad.
2. **Buy reports for the shortlist.** A 3-pack ($35.99) or 5-pack ($54.99) covers the two to five cars worth a viewing.
3. **See the car with the report in hand.** Check the VIN in three places and ask your questions from Chapter 5.
4. **Inspect the winner.** Pay an independent mechanic for a pre-purchase inspection, and add a Carfax if service history matters to you.
5. **Close cleanly.** Confirm the seller's name is on the title, any lien is released and the odometer disclosure is filled in.

When the report isn't enough

Some sellers will tell you a car is "clean" because the report is. That only means nothing bad was reported. Read **buying a car without a vehicle history report** for the risks of skipping one, and **check a VIN before buying a car** for the full pre-purchase routine.

CHAPTER 12

HOW TO GET A VEHICLE HISTORY REPORT AT CARCHECKERVIN.COM

Getting a vehicle history report takes about two minutes: find the VIN or plate, preview the records free, then unlock the full report if the car is worth pursuing.

1. **Find the VIN.** Read it through the windshield at the lower driver's-side corner of the dashboard, or from the door-jamb label. It's also on the title, registration and insurance card. Every location is listed at **carcheckervin.com/where-is-the-vin-number-on-a-car**.
2. **Search by VIN or plate.** Enter the 17 characters at **carcheckervin.com/vehicle-history-report**, or a U.S. license plate and state at **carcheckervin.com/license-plate-lookup**. A good VIN tool rejects the letters I, O and Q and checks the 9th-character check digit, so typos are caught before you pay.
3. **Review the free preview.** You'll see the decoded specs and a preview of the records on file, with no credit card.
4. **Unlock the full report.** $14.99 for one, or a pack for several cars: 3 for $35.99, 5 for $54.99 or 10 for $89.99. No subscription. See **carcheckervin.com/pricing**.
5. **Read and print.** The report is ready in under a minute and print-ready. Use the Chapter 4 method, then take it to the viewing.

IN THE REPORT

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

Not in the report

CarCheckerVIN reports don't include accident or theft records. For theft, run NICB's free VINCheck; for damage that never reached an insurer or auction, rely on an independent inspection. No vehicle history report shows owner names.

Many cars? Paste a list

Paste or drop a list of VINs on the **carcheckervin.com** homepage to preview several vehicles at once, then buy a pack for the ones you want in full.

For dealers

Wholesale report pricing, bulk API access and white-label reports with your branding: **carcheckervin.com/dealers**.

Refer a friend

Share your link and get a free report when a friend buys: **carcheckervin.com/refer**.

REFERENCE

VEHICLE HISTORY REPORT GLOSSARY

Auction record
A sale at a dealer or salvage auction, with date, mileage, damage notes and often photos.

Brand (title brand)
A permanent note a state adds to a title after a serious event, such as salvage, flood or lemon buyback.

Buyers Guide
The FTC window form on dealers' used cars; since 2016 it tells buyers to get a history report and check recalls.

Clean title
A title with no brand. It describes the current title only, not the full history.

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

Exceeds Mechanical Limits
The odometer has passed its maximum and rolled over.

Exempt (odometer)
No federal mileage disclosure required: vehicles 20 years or older, or model year 2010 and older.

Grey market
A vehicle not originally built for the U.S. market (California brands it "Non-USA").

Impound
A record that the vehicle was towed and held by police or a towing operator.

Insurance total loss
An insurer decided repairs weren't worth it and paid out the claim; reported to NMVTIS.

Junk / nonrepairable
A vehicle meant for parts or scrap; often can't be retitled for the road.

Lemon buyback
A vehicle the manufacturer bought back over repeated defects; California calls it Warranty Return.

Lien
A lender's claim on the vehicle until a loan is repaid; look for its release.

NMVTIS
National Motor Vehicle Title Information System, run by the U.S. Department of Justice.

NMVTIS approved provider
A company the DOJ has approved to sell NMVTIS data in vehicle history reports.

Not Actual Mileage
The odometer reading is known not to reflect the true miles.

Odometer disclosure
The seller's written mileage statement at a title transfer.

Odometer rollback
A reading lower than one previously recorded; a sign of tampering or an error.

Rebuilt / reconstructed
A former salvage vehicle repaired and passed by a state inspection.

Recall
A safety defect campaign; the repair is free at franchised dealers.

Salvage title
A brand for a vehicle declared a total loss or severely damaged.

Title washing
Retitling a branded vehicle in another state to obtain a title without the brand.

True Mileage Unknown
The odometer reading can't be confirmed as accurate.

VIN
Vehicle Identification Number: 17 characters since model year 1981; no I, O or Q.

VIN cloning
Putting a real vehicle's VIN on a stolen vehicle of the same model.

Vehicle history report
A dated record of the title, mileage, loss, lien, auction and service events tied to a VIN.

PUT IT TO WORK

Now read a real one: preview any VIN free at **carcheckervin.com/vehicle-history-report**, decode it at **carcheckervin.com/vin-decoder**, and unlock the full report for $14.99.

ANSWERS

VEHICLE HISTORY REPORT FAQ

What is a vehicle history report?

A dated record of the titles, brands, odometer readings, total losses, liens, auction sales and service visits reported against a VIN.

What's on a vehicle history report?

Typically vehicle specs, title and brand history, odometer readings, owners, total-loss and salvage records, auctions, liens and impounds, service records, recalls and a value estimate.

How do I get a vehicle history report by VIN?

Enter the 17-character VIN at carcheckervin.com/vehicle-history-report for a free preview, then unlock the full report for $14.99.

Can I get a free vehicle history report?

Partly. NICB VINCheck, NHTSA recalls and CarCheckerVIN's preview are free, and dealers often include a free Carfax. A full independent report costs money.

What is the best vehicle history report?

It depends on your needs: Carfax for service history, AutoCheck for auction data, a low-cost report with NMVTIS records and auction photos for screening several cars.

Is Carfax better than AutoCheck?

Each has records the other lacks. Carfax is known for service records, AutoCheck for auction data and its score.

What is an NMVTIS report?

The federal title record: current title, brand history, odometer, total-loss and salvage records, sold by DOJ-approved providers.

Can I get a vehicle history report by license plate?

Yes. A plate search finds the VIN first; try carcheckervin.com/license-plate-lookup.

How much does a vehicle history report cost?

$14.99 at CarCheckerVIN (from $9 in packs); a single Carfax report is widely quoted at $44.99.

Does a vehicle history report show accidents?

Carfax lists accidents and damage where reported. CarCheckerVIN shows insurance total losses, salvage records and auction damage with photos, not accident records.

Does it show the owner's name?

No. Federal privacy law (the DPPA) keeps owner details out of public reports.

How accurate are vehicle history reports?

As accurate as what was reported. Unreported damage and private repairs can be missing.

How do I read a vehicle history report?

Match the VIN, then read title, odometer, losses and auctions, liens, owners, recalls and service, in that order (page 12).

What are the red flags on a car history report?

Title brands, mileage that drops, mileage brands, a total loss without a brand, open liens and a VIN mismatch.

Is a clean report enough?

No. The FTC and the DOJ both say a report doesn't replace an independent inspection.

Should I trust a report the seller sends?

Run your own from a site you chose. The FTC has warned about scams built around report links.

How long does a report take?

At CarCheckerVIN, under a minute, and it's print-ready.

Does a vehicle history check show recalls?

Many reports do; you can also check open recalls free at NHTSA or carcheckervin.com/recall-check.

VEHICLE HISTORY REPORT

Know its past before you pay.

Title brands, NMVTIS title records, odometer readings, liens, impounds and auction photos. Free preview for any VIN; full report $14.99.

carcheckervin.com/vehicle-history-report →

Scan to check a VIN free

Sources

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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
VIN decoder
Free VIN check
License plate lookup
Recall check
NMVTIS VIN check
Carfax VIN check
Best vehicle history report
Report pricing

General information, not legal advice. Record coverage varies by vehicle and provider; state rules vary. The sample report in Chapter 4 is illustrative. Carfax is a trademark of Carfax, Inc.; other names are trademarks of their owners. CarCheckerVIN is independent and not affiliated with them. © 2026 CarCheckerVIN

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