THE CODE MECHANIC

The Mechanic's Eye

See the car the way I see it: before you buy, and before you pay the garage.



By
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Were the codes wiped on this car?



The problem

The engine lamp is off and the seller says "no faults at all." But any scan tool can switch that lamp off with one button, and the fault stays right where it was.

What most people do

They plug in the reader, see "no codes", and relax. That is exactly the screen the seller wants you to see.

The smart move

1. Plug in the reader, ignition ON. In the app, open "Distance since codes cleared".
2. Read "Warm-ups since codes cleared" next to it.
3. Open the "Readiness" screen and count the tests that say "Not ready".

4 Does your app have "Permanent DTC"? Read it. It is a separate list from the normal "Read codes".

5 Compare with the table, and ask the seller one question: "When were the codes last cleared or the battery disconnected, and why?"

What you read	What it means
Small distance, small warm-up count	The codes or the battery were wiped a few days ago. Ask for a convincing answer and an invoice.
Thousands of kilometres	Nobody has wiped anything for a long time.
Several tests "Not ready" and an empty code list	The car hasn't finished testing itself since the wipe. Ask for a second test drive in a few days.
Permanent code present and the lamp is off	The fault was wiped, not repaired. Either walk away, or negotiate the cost of the repair.

No reading came back	The car or the app doesn't support it. It proves nothing.

Why it works

The car's computer keeps counters that go back to zero with every wipe, plus internal tests that need days of driving to finish. The dashboard doesn't show them, and nobody can fake them with one button. The permanent code can't be cleared with a reader or by disconnecting the battery: it only goes when the computer confirms the fault is gone.

What you need

An OBD reader and a scan app — **10 min**

Limits of the move

A small number is a question, not a verdict: a proper repair or a new battery also reset the counters. And not every car supports every reading, especially older ones.

Try it now

- [ ] Today, read "Distance since codes cleared" on your own car and write it down: _____ km. That way you know what a normal number looks like before you check someone else's car.



A word from the mechanic

This is the first move I make on any used car, before I even open the bonnet.

Easy

How old are the tyres, really?



The problem

The tyres look fine, the tread is deep, and the seller says "new." But a tyre ages with heat and time, even if it hasn't done many kilometres.

What most people do

They only look at the tread depth. And nobody reads the date printed on the side of the tyre.

The smart move

1. **The code.** Find the letters DOT on the sidewall. The last 4 digits are the week and the year, so 2323 = week 23 of 2023.
2. **Every tyre.** Read all four and the spare. Sometimes the full code is only on the inner sidewall, so look there too.
3. **The gap.** Four tyres from different years, or old tyres on a "low-kilometre" car? That's a question about the date, and a bargaining chip.

4 **The cracks.** With the torch, look for cracks between the tread blocks and on the sidewall. A cracked tyre needs changing whatever its age.

What you saw	What it means
Only 3 digits in the code	The tyre was made before the year 2000.
4 tyres from 4 different years	Ask the seller when they were changed.
Cracks between the blocks or on the sidewall	Change it, even if the date is fine.
The spare is older than the rest	Normal, but read its date too.

Why it works

The code is stamped at manufacture, and rubber ages with heat and sun even if the tyre never moves. Age counts from the day it was made, not the day it was fitted.

What you need

A torch and a phone — **3 min**

Limits of the move

Manufacturers advise inspecting the tyre, not one fixed number of years for everyone. In Dubai only, the roads authority says a tyre more than 5 years old from manufacture fails the technical inspection. Elsewhere the rule differs, so ask your own testing centre.

Try it now

- [ ] Read the DOT code on your car's four tyres and the spare, and write down the year: _____.



A word from the mechanic

The tread shows how much tyre is left. The date shows how much safety is left.

Easy

Dead key fob: how to start the car



The problem

You pressed the fob and nothing happened, and the car is locked or won't start with the button.

What most people do

They think the car is dead, and they call recovery.

The smart move

1. **The mechanical key.** There's a metal key hidden in the fob. Open the door with it.
2. **Bring the fob close.** To the start button, or put it in the dedicated slot in the dashboard, the console or beside the steering column, as the manual says. Press the brake and press start.
3. **Change the fob battery** soon. It's a small battery and its number is printed on it.

Why it works

The car's reader powers the fob's chip from close range when it's very near, even if the battery is flat.

What you need

The fob, two minutes — 2 min

Limits of the move

Where you hold it differs by maker, so read the manual. And if the spare fob doesn't work either, the problem is in the car, not the fob.

Try it now

- [ ] Find the "dead fob" page in your manual and photograph it. And open the fob and check the battery number: _____.



A word from the mechanic

Before you call recovery, try holding the fob close.

That was the free sample

The rest

is in the full book

24	more moves: before you buy, at the garage, with the reader, in an emergency
107	fault codes in the Codes Book
40	dashboard lamps in the Lamps Book

Three books for one price

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