



A fresh approach to auto repair

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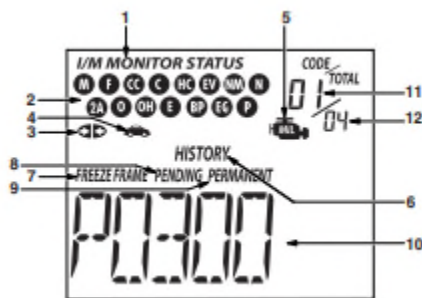
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Using a scan tool when buying a car

If you are looking to buy a car, everyone has the same concern. I hope the “check engine” light doesn’t come on. Well, an automotive scan tool can help you to alleviate some of those concerns.

You can get a basic scan tool for \$20 on Amazon or slightly more at your local auto parts store. Or, plan your test drive to head to a local Advance Auto or Autozone where they will read the codes for free.

Why are they important? Well, every car made after 1996 runs internal checks on the vehicle’s emissions system. These are called “Emissions Monitors” or “Smog Checks” depending on what company you are speaking about. The check engine light will come on if one of these monitors fails it’s self check. The scan tool can show you what condition all the monitors are in for the car you are looking at.



The picture to the left shows a typical scan tool screen. The black circles at the top of the screen (arrow 2) show the monitors. If the circle is green, then the monitor has run and passed it’s test. If the circle is blinking, the monitor hasn’t run yet. If it is solid red, then the monitor has run and the self check failed. This will result in a code (arrow 10) identifying what system the issue may be having a problem.

Scan tools are easy to you. There is universal connector that will be in the drivers footwell under the dashboard (DLC port). Simply turn the key on, but don’t start the car, and connect the scan tool to the DLC port. The scan tool does the rest. It will power on, talk to your vehicle, and show you the results.

Things to check:

1. Look at the emissions monitors. Are they all green. If not, check the battery. If it’s new, the monitors will have reset when the battery was changed out. If not, then ask if they had it disconnected. You should ask a lot of questions if all the monitors are not green. You may end up with a check engine light on your way home.
2. Some more expensive scan tools will show you how many miles it was driven since the codes were cleared. If this is a low number, ask questions. Codes and emission monitors are not cleared on a regular basis. They have to be manually cleared. Ask why.
3. Look for “history” or “permanent” codes in the scan tool. These are issues that haven’t thrown a code yet. Often this will happen after a repair is made and the driving conditions haven’t been met to clear that code. Again, ask about that.