# How to Check a Car's Tax and MOT Status Online in Minutes

## Why You Should Check Before You Drive

Every vehicle on UK roads must have valid road tax and an up-to-date MOT certificate if it is over three years old. Driving without either can lead to fines, penalty points, or even having the car clamped or impounded. The good news is that checking both is straightforward and free. Whether you are buying a used car, renewing your own vehicle's tax, or just want to confirm a friend's car is legal, the online system gives you an instant answer.

The official government service handles most checks, but third-party tools can add useful context. For example, a service like **IsItAGoodCar** pulls together MOT history, tax status, and other DVLA data in one place, saving you from jumping between multiple websites. This article walks you through the exact steps to check a car's tax and MOT status, what each piece of information means, and what to watch out for along the way.

## What You Need to Get Started

To check any vehicle's tax or MOT online, you only need the registration plate (number plate). The system does not ask for your name, address, or any personal details. You can run a check on any car, whether you own it or not. The results are pulled from the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency (DVLA) and the MOT database, so they are official and up to date.

Make sure you have the full registration, including the letters and numbers in the correct order. A common mistake is mixing up similar characters like O and 0, or I and 1. If the plate is dirty or damaged, clean it gently or check the V5C logbook for the exact format.

## How to Check Car Tax Status

The quickest way is through the government's online vehicle enquiry service. Go to the official DVLA page and enter the registration plate. The system will display the vehicle's make and model, the date it was first registered, the engine size, fuel type, and CO2 emissions. It also shows the current tax status: either "Taxed" with an expiry date, or "Untaxed".

If the tax has expired, you cannot drive the vehicle on public roads unless you have a valid Statutory Off Road Notification (SORN). Driving an untaxed car is an offence, and the DVLA can issue a penalty of up to £1,000. The system also tells you whether the vehicle has a current MOT, but only as a simple yes or no. For the full MOT history, you need a separate check.

### What to Watch for on Tax Checks

The tax status is a snapshot taken at the moment you search. A car that appears taxed today could become untaxed tomorrow if the owner does not renew. If you are buying a car, ask the seller to show the tax renewal reminder or check again on the day of purchase. Also, note that tax does not transfer with the vehicle when you buy it. You must tax it in your own name before you drive away.

Some sellers display a screenshot of the tax status from weeks ago. Always run a fresh check yourself. The official site does not charge for this, so there is no reason to trust a third-hand image.

## How to Check MOT History

MOT checks go beyond a simple pass or fail. The government's MOT history service lets you see every test result for a vehicle since 2005. Enter the registration plate and the make of the car, and you get a full list of test dates, odometer readings, and any advisory or failure notes.

This is where you find out if the car has a pattern of minor issues or a history of serious failures. For example, if the same advisory about corroded brake pipes appears year after year, it might indicate the owner never addressed it. A sudden jump in mileage between tests could mean the odometer was tampered with. The MOT history also tells you when the next test is due, which is useful for planning.

### What to Watch for on MOT Checks

Look at the advisory notes carefully. Some advisories are minor, like "tyre worn close to legal limit", but others point to neglect, such as "excessive corrosion in sill" or "brake disc worn". A car that passes every year but has a long list of advisories may still be safe, but it could need attention soon.

Also check the mileage consistency. If the odometer reading at the last MOT is lower than the one before, that is a red flag. It could be a clerical error, but it might also mean the mileage has been rolled back. A service like IsItAGoodCar can cross-reference MOT mileage with other data sources to spot discrepancies, which is especially useful when you are buying a car and cannot verify the history yourself.

## Using a Combined Check Service

Jumping between the tax checker and the MOT history site is not difficult, but it takes time. A combined service pulls both sets of data into one report, along with other details like the date first registered, engine size, fuel type, and CO2 emissions. This gives you a fuller picture of the vehicle in a single search.

For example, you might find a car that is taxed and has a valid MOT, but its CO2 emissions are higher than you expected, affecting your annual road tax cost. Or you might see that the car was first registered 12 years ago but only has 40,000 miles on the clock. That low mileage could be genuine, or it could be the result of a clocked odometer. The more data you have, the better your judgment.

Some services also include a basic valuation or a check against the DVLA's stolen vehicle database. These extras are not always free, but they can save you from buying a car that has hidden problems. Always use a reputable provider. The official government sites are free and reliable, but they do not offer the cross-referencing that a dedicated vehicle checking service can.

## What to Do If the Check Shows a Problem

If the car's tax is expired, do not drive it. Ask the seller to tax it before you buy, or factor the cost of taxing it yourself into your offer. If the MOT has expired, the car cannot be driven legally to a test centre unless you have booked an MOT appointment and are driving directly there. Even then, you risk a fine if you are stopped.

If the MOT history shows repeated failures for the same issue, such as emissions or corrosion, that car may need expensive repairs. Walk away unless the price is low enough to cover the work and you are prepared to do it. A single failure followed by a pass is normal; a pattern of failures for the same defect is not.

For mileage discrepancies, ask the seller for an explanation. They might have a service book that supports the lower reading. If they cannot provide evidence, consider paying for a full history check from the DVLA or a third-party provider. It is cheaper than buying a car with a clocked odometer.

## Staying Up to Date After You Buy

Once you own the car, you are responsible for keeping the tax and MOT current. The DVLA sends a reminder when tax is due, but it is easy to miss if you have moved or changed email addresses. Set a calendar reminder for yourself. For the MOT, you can check the expiry date online at any time. Some services offer email or text alerts for upcoming MOT and tax renewals.

Regular checks also help you spot if something changes unexpectedly. If your car suddenly shows as untaxed when you have paid, contact the DVLA immediately. It could be a system error or a sign that your identity has been used fraudulently. Similarly, if you sell a car, check that the new owner has taxed it in their name. If they do not, the DVLA may still hold you liable for any fines.

## Final Practical Tips

Keep your V5C logbook in a safe place. You will need the reference number from it if you need to update the vehicle's details or challenge a mistake. When checking a car online, always use a secure connection and avoid entering your personal information on sites that ask for more than the registration plate. The official checks are free and require no payment details.

If you are buying from a private seller, run the check in front of them or ask them to send you a photo of the V5C so you can verify the details. A seller who is reluctant to let you check the tax and MOT history online may be hiding something. Trust your instincts, and if something feels off, walk away.

Checking a car's tax and MOT status online takes less than two minutes for each vehicle. It is a simple habit that can save you money, time, and legal trouble. Whether you are buying, selling, or just staying on top of your own car's paperwork, the information is always at your fingertips.