

Buyers quick essential check guide /common faults and costings.....Toyota Estima

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As so many people over the years have asked for advice and what to check when buying these cars I have finally found the time to write this guide to save me the time of telling so many people over and over again!

This is an essential quick check guide for anyone thinking of buying a Toyota Estima.

The information within is meant only as a guide and not a complete or definitive buyers guide!

However that said if you follow the information given it will save you a lot of grief and expense! It is based on buying a turbo diesel model as I have no experience whatsoever of petrol models, or manuals!

Parts both secondhand and new are readily available and inexpensive to buy
www.bbcspares.com are an Estima specialist and offer a massive next day mail order service for all /any parts you could ever need!

Every vehicle has their own problems, which sadly you only get to hear about after buying one, having something go wrong and talking to people about it, then finding out what a common problem it is.

This guide is to make you aware of the possible common problems before you buy and therefore save yourself time/ grief and a lot of moneyit does not mean estimas have any more, or less problems compared to any other vehicle, just what I have found to be **not uncommon** with them .

All the prices quoted are a realistic approximate prices. You will get cheaper, and you will get far more expensive so I have been realistic and tried to go somewhere in between.

Basically the biggest problems to avoid, as with any vehicle, are engine problems because they are the most expensive to fix!

There are various rumours about these cars overheating and "blowing headgaskets", yes they can have headgasket problems (as any vehicle can do) but due to engine location/access to it is more labour intensive to fix and therefore more expensive than a "normal" carcheck also below under "common faults" for blocked radiator these can bring on head gasket failure!

Anyhow to avoid expensive engine problems these are the crucial quick tests to do..... which should take less than 3/5 minutes!

1) Start the engine and let tickover.

Open the bonnet and remove the cap on the plastic radiator top up water bottle.

There should be water in the bottle, and ideally it should have a light red colour (the colour of Toyota anti-freeze is red). **IT SHOULD NOT BE BROWN OR HAVE CRUSTY BITS IN IT!** (this is a sign the water has boiled due to overheating) .It also should not make a big "whooshing noise" (like air escaping from a balloon/ coke bottle opening) as this is a sign of the coolant system pressurising and possible head gasket problems !

Then walk to the back of the car and watch the exhaust.....it should not blow blue or white smoke. Blue or white smoke is a sign of engine problems.

(Some condensation after start-up from exhaust if cold/damp outside is ok though and quite normal, but should clear within a couple of minutes and just look like a bit of kettle steaming when boiling)

Then open the engine panel under the passengers seat and remove the engine oil filler cap,

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again you should not get big clouds of blue or white smoke puffing out, *but be aware oil droplets will be flung out when you do this so do not peer in unless you want an oil stained face and shirt!*

Pull out the engine oil dipstick near the oil filler cap and watch.....oil should not be pushed up the dipstick with engine running.....this again is a bad sign.

Refit the cover panel and walk to back of car again.

Watch the exhaust for a 30 secs or so, just to make sure the exhaust does not "puff" a bit of blue smoke just every now or then, and not just all the time! This again is a bad sign.

Next walk back to bonnet and remove rad bottle cap once again.....it should not give a big "whoosh" or push coolant out! A really big sign of probable head gasket problems.....

2) The engine should not make any unduly loud knocking noises listen to the engine and if possible let run till warmish for 10mins or so, I have bought cars that had no noises when cold but when get warm start to knock badly!

3) If possible trying starting the engine when its cold and not been recently run.....they should start easily and smoothly even when stone colda rough/bad starting when cold is not a good sign ...but does not necessarily mean has problems, just not as sweet/smooth as most.

Congratulations if it passes these simple quick tests it should not have (expensive to fix) engine problems.

If it fails any of the quick check above it definitely needs more investigation, or just walk away and find a better car there are always plenty more fish in the sea.

OK the next checks are for common (or quite common) faults that are far less expensive to fix!

Common faults - in order of cost to fix

1) **Blocked radiator** (aka rad) ... 1 in 20 have this problem but is quite hard to tell until gets so blocked the car wills overheat/get hot if run hard on motorway or up steep hills. (luckily I have both a motorway with hill and very steep hill right on my doorstep !).What happens is over time the radiator slowly blocks and so restricts the water flow around/through it.... this does not show up until the engine works hard.... so a road test is needed. Turn the internal heater off and get engine up to normal temperature on the temp gauge then take for a run on the motorway or up a steep hill(if motorway get up to 70mph plus) and watch the temp gauge if starts to get hot then slow right down and put internal heater and fan on max straight away (this acts as extra cooling for engine). If engine temp starts to rise noticeably then chances are the rad is blocked to some degree.....also afterwards try putting your hand on different places on rad (be careful it may be bloody hot!).If rad hot in one place and cold in others it will be blocked to some degree as should be pretty much the same temp all over.

This is caused by not changing the coolant/anti-freeze often enough (should be done at least once every 2 years) which causes sediment (bits) to form and can block rad....this restriction not only makes engine get hotter but also puts more pressure on water system.... these two combined can very easily cause head gasket to fail ...which is very expensive.

Around town and gentle driving will not even show any problems only on long runs, hills motorwaysI therefore recommended changing the rad on any Estima to be safe and as a preventative measure. Even flushing the rad does not mean you can be sure fully unrestricted.

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I stock "double core" rads which allow more cooling than standard rads anyhow (price £99inc vat and will do deals for people buying Estimias from me!)

Also the temp gauge is supposed to be quiet insensitive so by the time its starts to show hot engine is actually much warmer than thought, and who sits there watching the temp needle to see if moving when should be driving anyhow? So if you are doing a lot of motorway driving/touring then a masons alarm (costs about £30 to buy) can be fitted. Basically a little box that wires into back of speedo pod and can sit in the small cubby hole next to ignition key and has an adjustable sensitivity for temperature that gives an audible alarm so when temp gets hot you notice!!!!

Cost to replace - £194

Parts rad ... £99 1.75 hrs labour £95

OH and do not forget new anti-freeze!

2) Auxiliary drive shaft couplings (aka "couplings" "doughnuts") 4 out of ten need these. Will pass mot and not dangerous just bloody noisy and irritating if not fixed!

The engine for an Estima is actually under the front seats and the ancillaries (i.e. air-con pump , alternator , and PAS pump) are under the bonnet and are driven via a shaft (called an auxiliary drive shaft) from the engine that is connected at each end via couplings with 6 rubber cushioned bolts. Over time these rubber inserts break up and allow the bolts movement. Accordingly when the engine is tickover this causes a loud tapping or knocking noise..... the longer its left the worse it sounds! . The way to check it is the couplings and not more serious problems is to just press the accelerator to pick up the tickover a few hundred RPM.....if the noise disappears it is just the couplings that are worn.

Also to make the noise more obvious to hear - turn on the heater fan to max, turn the headlights on the main beam and turn the steering wheel from side to side whilst the engine is ticking over. (MAKE SURE THE AIR-CON IS OFF WHIST DOING THIS otherwise the tickover is increased and the noise reduced!) . This puts more loads on the auxiliary shaft and will make any knocking noise more pronounced and louder, therefore easier to hear!

Cost to replace - £185

Parts pair of new couplings £75, 2hrs labour £110

NB be aware some car stealers, opps dealers have been known to turn up the tickover speed to stop this noise, and save themselves moneythe engine should tickover at 900rpm when warm, and 1100 rpm when cold (both without air-con on)it takes about 5mins for a cold engine to drop down to lower engine revs when warm enough. It would take around about 5/10 mins to turn up the tickover to try and hide the noise!

3) Front brake flexible hoses (aka "flexi hoses" or "front flexis").....3 out of every 10 Estimias I buy need these. Should be picked up on an MOT test but worth checking yourself as can be missed. These are the hoses that join the brake pipes to the front brake callipers.....they are made of rubber and as such deteriorate over time.....turn the front wheels to full lock so the side you want to look at has the wheels turned outwards.....looking from the front of the car look in at the hoses and pull/push and turn the rubber hoses to examine them for any signs of cracks or cracking. Any signs of cracking means the hoses should be replaced .If the hoses are in poor condition they may swell when you press the brakes and therefore not push the front brakes as hard as would do if hoses were replaced this could mean increased distance. Obviously a few inches could be the difference between stopping, or hitting the car in front.....

Cost to replace £85

Hoses cost (per pair £30). Labour to fit allow one hour (fair price for garage labour these days would be £55 per hour) £55. Total parts labour £85

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4) **Anti-Roll bar bushes** (aka "bushes") 2 out of 10 need these. Will pass an MOT unless very worn and degrading badly. Not a major safety issue but like "auxiliary couplings" bloody annoying. Simply put these are two rubber mounts used to stop a bar on the suspension from banging about if bolted straight onto chassis. The rubber only needs to harden, or wear slightly and instead of absorbing the bumps it passes the shock from the bar when the car travels over bumps to the chassis! Easy to detect just drive down the road and try driving over bumps at low speed, i.e. potholes or drainholes. If it sounds like someone is hitting the underside of car at front with a hammer when you go over bumps then the anti-roll bar bushes will need replacing! If not just "donks" a lot as you drive along over bumps in road. There are two bushes, one on each side and best to replace both!

Cost to replace £ 80

Bushes £25 pair, labour less than an hour but say one hour £55

5) **Tyres** ...3 out of 10 need new tyres. In Japan they have extreme hot summers and cold winters with plenty of snow, however unlike the UK they do not use salt on their roads.....(which is great for preventing corrosion) the Japanese drivers have to either fit snow chains, or more commonly fit a second/spare set of wheels with mud and snow tyres. Accordingly as each set of tyres is used for only 6mths a year then the tyres are replaced less often than here in UK. However any tyres that has less than 1.6mm of tread over 75% of the tyre width is illegal here and needs replacing, also tyres should be replaced after 6years as they deteriorate with age as well as use!

Therefore check the tyres carefully **mud and snow tyres will pass an MOT here but are dangerous** because they are designed to grip mud and snow and therefore do not squeeze water out, resulting in aquaplaning (when the water under the tyre pushes the tyre up and it loses contact with the road below and skims along) which is obviously very dangerous! The tread patterns on mud and snow tyres are more chunky and will have lots of jagged lines in the treads, they may look good and in the dry they are fine but once on wet roads they are very very scary and dangerous, on a wet motorway they would be lethal and should be replaced as soon as possible!

Also even if they are normal road tyres they may have cracks in the sidewalls and treads **which again may pass an MOT but should be replaced. Look** carefully at the sidewalls, and tread to see if you can see any faint cracks starting to appear. If you see any cracking at all I would strongly recommend replacing the tyre as soon as possible.

Tyres are the one thing that connects a car to the road and therefore has a massive difference to the braking, steering and handling. Do not fit second hand or partworn tyres as they could be damaged or again many years old its your life and a new set of tyres is a small price to pay for it!

Tyre sizes are 185 SR14, 205/70 HR14 or 215/65 HR15

If you have 14inch wheels the 205/70 HR14 tyres are slightly more expensive than the smaller 185 SR14 but give a much better ride and drive so I would always say fit 205/70 HR14 as you will notice a big difference for little extra cost!

Cost to replace, say £50 per tyre.

For twin headlight later shape August 1996 / P reg onwards

A couple of extra things have noticed on the later shape models -

1) **Radiator expansion tank (aka water tank, top up tank)** - On the later cars this changes from a box like shape to a more rounded shape. The later rounded shape seems to consist of two parts that are joined together.....the join in the middle can start to deteriorate with age/use and can start to leak/weep water from join, so have a good look for dripping water

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when engine running and up to normal temperature. I have had one literally blow apart into two piecesThis is around £170 from Toyota (part number T16480-64153) Anyhow the earlier ones don't seem to suffer at all and fit the later ones so get a second hand one just in case I say!

Cost £170 for a new one plus 20 mins to fit

Cost £45/55 for an older second-hand one, plus 20 mins to fit

2) **Drivers front shock** seems to suffer on a few of the newer shapes I have had and would say 3 out of 10 need a new front shock. The shocker itself is not "wet" (as in leaking fluid but is stiff or knocking, but because the shocker is not "wet" will pass and MOT but certainly would need replacing even so. Best to replace both front shocks as a pair but for a single side would

Cost to replace £157.50

£75 for a single shocker, Labour 1.5hrs (at £55 per hour) £82.50

Ok thats the most common faults you should find that will need attending to, but there are some other less common things that are worth checking for also

Air-conditioning (aka "air-con" or a/c)

Less than 1 out of 50 cars. The air-con uses a gas that runs at 300psi (10 times the pressure in the average car tyre) and lack of use and leaks mean as the gas gets less pressurised the cooling effect is lessened also. As air-con has become more common its has also become cheaper and easier to get the gas topped up (known as re-gassing) these days and even smallish workshops /garages have the machinery to do so.

Run the engine and turn the air-con to cold with the air set on re-circulate, the air should be nice and cold after a few minutes max.

If it isn't it is worth just checking the air-con is actually trying to work and just needs a re-gas! Running the engine press the air-con button and you should hear a click or clunk from the under the bonnet, also check that the engine speed picks up by about 200 rpm. The light on the air-con button should also light up when switched on.

If this is the case it **should** just need a re-gas. However if when you press the air-con button it blows a fuse immediately, or after a minute or so the fuse blows then this is a sign of a wornout clutch on the air-con pump, which is far more expensive! (1 out of 100 plus need this)

The pump can be removed and reconditioned but its far easier, less expensive and quicker to get a second hand pump, also this should work straight away rather than having to visit a garage twice. Once to de-gas/remove the pump, and once to refit it/re-gas, also it can take several weeks to get reconditioned!

A second hand pump is £195 plus vat from BBC spares available off the shelf for next day delivery.

It would take around an hour to remove the old pump and fit another as is fairly straightforward to do. **BUT YOU NEED TO HAVE THE AIR-CON DE-GASSED BEFORE DOING SO as releasing the gas to the atmosphere is illegal and can make you go blind if gets in your eyes!**

Cost of re-gas £75inc labour (takes around an hour or so to re-gas a system) A lot of

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people offer a mobile service for air-con re-gassing!

To recondition an air-con pump costs around £350 upwards plus VAT!

Exhaust

1 out of 50 cars need a new rear exhaust section. Will fail an MOT if holed or blowing. It tends to corroded and hole just in front and behind the rear most box (which is just in front of rear wheel).....the exhausts on diesel cars last far longer than petrol's and 10 years is not uncommon for a diesel exhaust to last. Very expensive if you go to your local kwik-fit but source on-line or from BBC spares and save yourself a fair few pounds. Takes around half an hour to fit and the car does not have to go on a ramp so a good mechanic will be able to do for you. Sold a complete rear section from the cat back.

Cost £150 fitted

Exhaust £100 or so plus £40 fitting

Overdrive switch

The overdrive drive switch for the automatic gearbox is on the end of the gearlever and is connected to the electronic ECU (brain) via a twin core cable that runs down the inside of the gear lever. Over time the wire breaks down internally due to the movement of the gearlever. This means the switch will work intermittently, or not at all.

With the ignition on press in the overdrive switch and the orange " O/D off " light on dash should light up, putting front on brake move the gearlever through the gears, if the light flickers on and off the wire needs replacing Its not an MOT fail or really bad just that if you were to drive with the overdrive off the car could be switching on and off the overdrive and thus changing gear when not wanted! I don't know how much anyone else charges to sort out, a garage would probably want to replace the whole gearlever but I have found a way to replace just the faulty wire, which takes around 30 mins or so.

Cost (for me to repair) £37

labour £35, wire £2

Sticky Starter motor

The starter motors can get worn internal contacts etc. that cause the starter motor to just make a "click" rather than turn over engine...this happens intermittently at random and will get slower more commonuntil you have to repeatably turn the ignition key loads of times before engine will turn over once. You can buy second-hand overhauled starters for about £95 (I usually have 1 in stock) or have your own overhauled by a specialist. Fitting would take about 20/30 mins but allow an hour for garage labour rates

NB please note if car only "clicks" when cold or first thing in mornings carry out engine checks as listed above as may headgasket problems allowing water to seep into engine bores overnight/time which will not allow engine to turn over due to increased engine pressure!

Cost £150 fitted

Overhauled starter £95, labour £55

Power side loading door

All X-luxury spec models and above have a power side loading rear door (i.e. if you close the side door to just first latched position it will close itself completely electrically). The motor is inside the side door and over time the contacts that supply the electrical power to it stop working

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all the time, or just completely. To check this just pull the side loading door gently closed until stops on the first catch, and you should hear a whirr/clunk as pulls itself completely shut. Also if you drive the car and hear the same whirr/clunk whilst braking then the contacts are worn and are closing when braking thus causing the motor in the door to work! (which gets very annoying on a long journey!) .

The contacts in the side loading door will need replacing and the door stripped down to do so. I however have managed to find a way to overhaul the contacts without the need to strip down the door and so can repair this fault in around 30/50 mins.....a great saving on time and parts!

Cost (for me to repair) £45

Labour £40, 2 springs £5

Jack and tools

A lot of cars arrive with no jack, or no tools! They are kept in a little cubbyhole under a plastic lift off cover in floor at the end of middle row of rear seats opposite the side loading door. IE sit in middle row rear seats furthest from side loading door and look down between end of seat and side of car to see cover. Pull up and there should be a tool wrap with wheel brace and 3 other handle type bits and the jack underneath. Make sure tool wrap has 3 tools plus wheel brace, as one is handle, one is connector to jack and other is connector to lower spare wheel. Without just one you will have a long wait at side of road for an AA man to help you.....

From bbcspares.com

£25 (plus vat and delivery I believe though)

So that's my quick check guide for common problems for you. Good luck and happy shopping.

Neil Bowerman

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www.mvi-services.co.uk

PS

Or if you cannot be bothered to do all the above come and buy one of mine thats had all the above and more checked out for you!