

# Ford Scorpio 95 Onward Buyers Guide



*Eric R.*

**The Scorpio was introduced by Ford on 1st October 1994 and it's perhaps an understatement that it didn't go down too well. The Press had a field day with it's unusual front end styling and in the Saloon version at least it's bustle rear end. However Ford had always been leading the way in styling back to the launch of the Ford Sierra that came in for similar criticism but went on to become a classic design and accepted by almost everyone. Things actually came full circle as Quentin Willson from the BBC's Top Gear suggested that the Scorpio was his most recommended second hand Executive car purchase - and who are we to argue?**

**Today the Scorpio makes an ideal choice as a secondhand vehicle - fully loaded and engineered to last they are available at half the cost of a comparable BMW or Mercedes - and a lot more exciting. Eric R, one of the highly knowledgeable site founders of [www.fordscorpio.co.uk](http://www.fordscorpio.co.uk) has written this guide to help prospective buyers get ahead of the game, when purchasing one of these fine cars.**



**Steve C, Pete C, and Eric R, the Founders of [WWW.FORDSCORPIO.CO.UK](http://WWW.FORDSCORPIO.CO.UK), welcome you to the finest, largest, most detailed and comprehensive single-marque car site on the Web, dedicated to the best large European saloon ever made by Ford.**

**Copyright © 2001, 2004 [www.fordscorpio.co.uk](http://www.fordscorpio.co.uk)**

A couple of recent new owners have offered a tale of woe after buying a Scorpio and then been presented with huge bills at their first Service, because work which should have been completed by previous owners had been left undone, causing bigger bills. Examples of this have been brake disks which should have been changed but just had new pads slapped on them, which was simply a waste of money because the rear disks never worked properly; failed front radius arms which were clearly ignored on the last service, and pumps and pulleys that needed obvious attention. We have also seen failing gearboxes and electrical gremlins.

## FSH?

So, some general advice on purchasing the Scorpio. First: the so-called Full Service History. You'll see them on adverts - FSH or FMDSH - these are used as selling points by sellers and dealers in order to increase the value of the vehicle.

In fact, they are meaningless for the simple reason that they relate to the *servicing schedule* of the vehicle - not its mechanical repairs. The Main Dealer will carry out a service and check everything that shows on the service schedule - but the service ends at *checking* them. Any *repairs* required must be agreed with the owner separately - and the owner can decline to get the item repaired - but the service stamp still goes in the book. The seller wants the purchaser to believe that any repairs found during the service have been carried out, but there is *absolutely no guarantee* of this. Quite the reverse, because if a private owner is told that the car is showing signs of an expensive failure during a service: what will he do? Simple, he will take it straight to a dealer and trade it in before the fault becomes too apparent, or he'll sell it himself. Then you buy it!

A fleet or company car user, on the other hand, will very probably simply have the repair authorised - vehicle repairs are tax-deductable in any case and cost the company nothing. For this reason medium and high mileage ex-fleet cars are probably the best buy of all - it is very likely that even the most expensive repairs have been carried out when required.

## BILLS & RECEIPTS

Rather than the 'FSH' - especially from the private owner, what one should be looking for are the *bills* - a service stamp means nothing, but if this is accompanied by worksheets showing a new battery, front radius arms, new clutch, new rear shock absorbers etc receipted as **PAID**, you can see that the work has actually been carried out and indicates that the previous owner has been a responsible one.

Of all the cars that I might choose, the 'low mileage, FSH, one lady owner' car is the last. If it is true, the little car would have been pottering two miles to the shops and back three times a week - so the oil will never have got hot and the exhaust system will be rotten through. A single driving fault, like 'riding' the clutch will have been inflicted on the car *all the time*, whereas a fleet car will have been driven by several people each with different driving habits so that the wear and tear is evened out.

So as an owner you should always retain receipts for the car regardless of whether it was for a large item or just a few pence for a gasket - it all adds up to support your story to a potential purchaser of a well looked-after car.

## COMPANY CARS

High mileage ex-company cars are good value and it's only really possible to cover high mileages quickly by Motorway driving: so only the brakes should be subject to significant wear – however be careful of 'ex-rental' cars as these may have been thrashed to valve-bounce and prematurely worn. However the Scorpio is a Boardroom Executive class of vehicle as opposed to the run of the mill Mondeo reps' car and thus will generally have been driven more carefully as a 'badge of office' rather than a 'mobile office'.

## EX-POLICE & GOVERNMENT

Some Scorpio will have been used by Police forces and Government agencies. They will not necessarily be white, or have a hole in the roof where the aerial was fitted although some will. Sold mainly through auctions, these will be good value. They will probably be high milers, but they will have been maintained properly and items replaced when necessary, although the interior trim may be shabby.

## INSPECTION

The Scorpio of course is a cruiser – not a racer and therefore should not have been abused by bad driving – the main faults seem to be design weaknesses (front suspension) and the things expected of high mileage motorway cars (brakes, tyres) and after 150,000 miles you would expect other items to start wearing out (gearboxes, suspension, pumps, exhausts etc).

With a car as complex as the Scorpio a prospective purchaser without the knowledge to carry out their own exhaustive inspection, may consider using an AA or RAC inspection, because any single fault is going to cost you a fair amount to fix – for example typical main dealer costs would be:

- Repair front suspension – £200
- Exhaust – £500
- Front brakes – £150
- Rear brakes – £150
- Alternator – £180
- A/C pump – £200
- Power Steering Pump – £300
- Gearbox – £750 rebuild
- Catalysts – £300 each
- 24V Engine rebuild - £3500

Generally the earlier cars are better rustproofed than the later and facelift vehicles. Watch out for rust in the rear wheelarches, around the fuel tank, at either end of the sills, at the rear of the floor section just forward of the back axle and around the front crossmember in front of the radiators. A couple of hours with tins of cavity wax, especially in those inner wheelarches could save you hundreds of pounds later!

When inspecting a car, looking round it and test-driving it, don't let the seller distract you. He may only be pointing out a good part of the vehicle, but he may also be timing it so as to distract you from something he doesn't want you to notice. Be aware of this, particularly with professional car salesmen - concentrate on what you are looking at and allow his voice to drift into the background while you engage brain.

I suggest you should already have studied the Form - that is, the [engines](#), the levels of [trim](#), etc. It is not unknown for the less reputable dealer to stick Ultima [badges](#) on a 'Comfort-Packed' Ghia and add £500 to the price so be quite certain what you're looking at.

You will have had a good look through the site and you should know what faults to look for - the [EGR](#) on the 24V or the [fuel cutoff loom](#) on the DOHC, for example - so make a list by working through the [FAQ](#) page here. Read and learn the Owners' [Handbook](#) so you cannot be bamboozled by science when something doesn't work as it should.

DO NOT get into the car first. The interior with the leather and all the goodies may seduce you before you have a chance to check out the coachwork. Again, don't go at the seller's pace - you're the buyer and you should be in charge. I suggest a proper buyer's inspection should go like this:

## Buyer's Checklist

1. Approach the car and at a distance of six feet (ok then, 2 metres) walk carefully a complete circle round the car. Look for light dings, dents, badly-gapped doors or panels, sagging suspension, chips in glassware, scratches/cracks in windscreens. Be sure to point anything out to the seller so he knows you've noticed. If you cannot see all round the car properly because it is parked too close to others then have the car moved out so that you can see it properly, but hang around it so you can hear the engine start.
2. On each corner press down on the body and watch the rebound. This is a rule-of-thumb test for the shock absorbers, and be aware that the Estate rear shockers are expensive.
3. Look at the exhaust pipe. Is it very black? If so, the [MAF](#) probably needs cleaning - but you don't have to tell the seller that.
4. Check each tyre - make sure they are at least Z rated for the 24V, (yes, they should be, they are the Manufacturer's original fitment required for Insurance) and that the tread is good. On other Scorpions V-rated are sufficient.
5. Grip each roadwheel and pull and push at 3 and 9 o'clock together and separately at 12 o'clock to check for bearing wear. In the case of the front wheels, the [suspension](#) is *not* the same as the Granada - the front wheels should *not* be able to move in track and they 'don't all do that' !
6. Now check the bonnet. Is it warm? Has the engine been started before you get there? If so, why? Does the seller not want you to hear the engine start from cold?
7. Lift the bonnet and check the [VIN](#) plate - and follow the advice shown on that page. You need to ensure that the VIN plate is original and matches the secondary chassis numbers.
8. Especially if the car is at a dealer, does the engine bay look suspiciously shiny? Has the dealer [Karchered](#) the engine? Used silicon shine? - A Ford Bulletin in the USA warns against using silicon products in the engine bay - it can creep into electrical signal connectors. You may have trouble ahead...
9. Is there a [Battery](#) cover? If not this is a top priority - but are there any electric gremlins? Is the auxillary fuse box wet? Are the [drainholes](#) clear or is the main fuse box sitting in a puddle?
10. Check the engine for oil or coolant leaks and the radiator for ballooning or leaks. Check the [EGR](#) pipe for tightness.
11. You should have been given a key to start the car. Is there at least one [Remote](#) with it? Ask if you have a red Master key as well as the black key, or on 1997+ cars 2 black keys? If not then this must be sorted.



12. Look at the instruments and turn on the Ignition but do not start the engine yet. Did the instrument needles flick round? This is a symptom that the battery or alternator may be failing.
13. Look at the warning lights - you should be aware of what the panel lights are for because you have studied the handbook. Make sure you can see the [ABS](#) light and TCS light (if fitted) and the Airbag light, and that when the engine runs they go out after a few seconds. It has been known for a warning bulb to be removed or blown so that there is no warning of an ABS or Airbag failure. Can people really be that devious? Oh yes.
14. Now start the engine and listen as it starts. Dry tappets? [Timing Chains](#) rattle? A half-second 'brrrrp' from the 24V Cosworth may be acceptable, but a prolonged rattle would be very [bad news](#). Watch the [PATS](#) light on the dash for any codes.
15. Get out of the car and stand so that you can see the front wheels. Move the steering wheel gently and check that the same movement is reflected on the road wheels. Less movement could mean the [Steering Rack](#) bushes or the steering rack itself need attention.
16. Now move the steering further in each direction. Listen for any groaning noises from the PS pump, or a scream from a [drive belts](#).
17. Check the handbrake is fully on in four clicks. Leave it on and on [Autos](#), engage D and time the transmission to get into D, there should be no more than a slight delay. Then select R and time it again for the drive to take up. No more than 3 seconds for reverse - more than that and the autobox may be on the way out.
18. In P draw out the autobox dipstick and dry it on a white lint-free cloth. The fluid on the cloth must be a proper red colour and have a mineral smell. If the fluid is brown and dirty and has a burnt, rancid smell walk away - the autobox is about to fail and this will be very expensive - it's probably why the owner is selling!
19. On manual cars, keep the handbrake on, check the clutch for smoothness, then check the gear selection. Make sure that the gearlever moves freely into each gear from neutral. If it balks from 2nd to first there may have been an amateur repair to the clutch at some stage and they may not have aligned the gearbox properly.
20. Lift the clutch to the biting point and check for smooth engagement.
21. Now leave the engine running, work through the entire cabin and check every button and switch for correct operation - every powered window, sunroof (this can be jammed and is expensive to repair), door mirrors; the [air conditioning](#) or climate control (good supply of cold air, noise from compressor? (expensive), the blower motor. Check the windscreen washers and wipers - (linkages can fail) and check that the quickclear windscreens are not damaged. Don't forget the [radio](#), and use fade and balance to test each speaker for good sound. If there is a CD player fitted go to the boot and check inside the player to make sure the CD caddy is there - usually it's missing.
22. Buy or borrow an [OBD](#) lead and insist on [checking](#) for any DTCs - the Scorpio does not have a MIL light and there is no warning if there is a fault. Are all of the [Monitors](#) complete? If not then the DTCs have been cleared recently, probably by a battery disconnection. Check for [DTCs](#) again after the test drive and make sure the Monitors are complete. For 12V and 2.5 TDis look [here](#) for diagnostics.
23. Point out anything that does not work and, as in the case of any fault, arrange a repair or re-negotiate the price.
24. Now the engine is warm how is the idle? Smooth and steady? A slightly raised idle (1000 rpm instead of 750-850 rpm) might simply be caused by a nearly empty petrol tank or a loose petrol cap. A surging idle or hunting may mean an air inlet leak - [idle faults](#) can be tricky to diagnose. It almost certainly *isn't* the IACV valve.
25. Only when the entire vehicle has been checked internally and externally should you take it for a drive. Try to find at least a stretch of derestricted road where the car can be driven through the entire speed range - some faults are only apparent above 50 mph. Don't let the seller turn on the radio while the car is being driven - you want to hear the car talking to you.

26. If the private seller won't let you drive for 'insurance reasons' be realistic about this - do you really want to buy a car you haven't driven? You should be able to arrange temporary insurance with your broker in order to be covered for a test drive. The seller may not want you to hear the gearbox in neutral with the foot *off* the clutch - keeping his foot down will hide the whirring noise from a badly worn layshaft.
27. You know how a car should drive - is it like that? Manual gears are smooth? Baulky gears can be caused by a dragging, contaminated or worn clutch driven plate.
28. Autobox is smooth through the gear? No thumps, and Torque Converter Clutch operates? Accelerate hard from stationary and suddenly ease off. Does the autobox slur the change into second - if so it has the later [programming](#). If the gearbox thumps into 2nd gear the autobox programming is unchanged from 1995.
29. All vehicles - is there a running vibration? A heavy low-speed rumble from beneath the car is most likely to be the [centre bearing](#), while a heavy vibration easing off above 45 mph is normally the UJs on the propshaft. A heavy cyclic drone from the rear is probably worn rear [bearings](#), while a clonk from the rear on taking up the drive may well be the rear CV joints. A loud ticking noise on driving round a corner is definitely a CV joint on the side of the turn.
30. Steering - speed sensitive [steering](#) operates on 24V models- you should feel lighter steering at manoeuvring speeds? Steering straight and true? Wandering can be caused by worn [radius arm](#) bushes/ball joints or by worn [Steering Rack](#) bushes.
31. No noises from the front suspension? [Clunking](#) can be caused by the radius arm bushes, a lighter rattle by the front [link rods](#).
32. Brakes - smooth and progressive? If they 'snatch' so that it is difficult to 'feather' the brakes to a stop they probably just need new brake pads - but bear in mind they will often need new disks, too. A steering 'shimmy' on light braking normally means a slightly warped disk at the [front](#). A heavier vibration while braking could mean a greater warp on either the [front or rear disks](#).
33. General performance? Is there a hesitation - missing at light throttle? Could be an [EGR](#) problem. Not a misfire but a [hesitation](#) at speed cleared by pressing on the accelerator - could be a faulty [HO2S](#) sensor.
34. When the engine is nice and hot, pull over and switch off. Talk to the seller for a little while and then start the engine. Does it start instantly, as it should, or is there a struggle to start? Could be an air inlet leak or faulty [HO2S](#) sensors or a fuel [rail pressure](#) problem.
35. Handbrake operates? Handbrake lever too high? If the handbrake does not self-adjust this may indicate that the brake fluid has not been changed and the self adjusters inside the rear [calipers](#) have corroded. It does **not** mean that the handbrake cable should be adjusted - the brake calipers have to be investigated first.

By now the oldest of the Scorpios will be ten years old and most cars will have one or more of the faults shown above. It will then be for you to make an informed decision about making an offer for the car or walking away. Using this buyer's guide will help you drive the price down before you buy, and may prevent you from finding a fault *after* you bought a car!