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AUSTRALIAN

NEW CAR & SUV

BUYER'S GUIDE



MG ZS
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- AUDI A4
- BMW X1
- FORD ESCAPE
- HYUNDAI PALISADE
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PLUS

- ALL THE TOP SELLING CARS & SUVs
- ALL INDEPENDENTLY TESTED & STAR RATED

It's 25 years since Porsche launched the Boxster, one of the great roadsters. The original 986 model is shown here in Speed Yellow, alongside the 2021 718 25th Anniversary special edition. The 718 Boxster is tested on page 103.





AUSTRALIAN **NEW CAR & SUV**
BUYER'S GUIDE



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Australian New Car & SUV Buyer's Guide.

After lurking on the fringes for a couple of decades now, electric vehicles will, without doubt, become affordable, mainstream transport over the next few years.

In this issue, we test several EVs, including the new MG ZS, which at \$43,990 drive away is the cheapest EV model on the market.

That will soon change, however, and within a few years you'll be able to buy an EV for less than \$30,000.

One reason why EV sales have been slow in Australia is the absence of government financial incentives for buyers. In the UK, the government gives you a rebate of around \$6000, and in Europe and the US EV buyers also get generous incentives.

The ALP recently announced a rebate scheme for EVs if it wins the next federal election. However at state level, EV owners will soon be hit with some sort of road user charge to compensate for the fact that they pay no fuel excise.

The government giveth, and the government taketh away...

Your comments or questions are always welcome. Just email us at bill.mck10@gmail.com.

Bill McKinnon
Editor



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CONTRIBUTORS



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Joshua Dowling is the National Motoring Editor at *drive.com.au* and a World Car of the Year judge.

Joshua is renowned for his consumer-first approach and you can also read his regular rants on Twitter: @JoshuaDowling. In this issue, he tests the MG ZS EV and Toyota Yaris Cross.



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BYRON MATHIOUDAKIS

Byron is a car tragic. He claims that a dream as a toddler of driving an Austin A35 sealed his fate. Byron writes for *goauto.com.au* and *Wheels*, where he is a judge on Car of the Year. He particularly likes French cars, but is an otherwise sensible, objective roadtester.


SYMBOLS




In our tests on the following pages and in the Showroom, we have used symbols to give you a quick indication of the strengths of each car, and star ratings to indicate in more detail how each car stacks up in its class. Here's what the symbols and stars mean:


 Our piggybank indicates a car that we think represents good value for money against the others in its class. It may not necessarily be the cheapest, but taking into account factors like standard equipment, safety, the way it drives, resale values and quality, it shapes up as a good deal.

S A capital S indicates a car that scores five stars out of five for occupant protection in ANCAP crash tests and has stability control plus six airbags as standard or as reasonably priced options. You can get full details for individual cars, including recently introduced child-protection ratings for most models, at *ancap.com.au*

 If you're after a safe, practical car in which to carry the kids, look for this symbol. We've taken into account things like its ANCAP score, safety features such as a rear camera, the placement of child restraint anchor points, a versatile, spacious load area and other parent-friendly features.

 This is an internationally-recognised symbol for environmentally-friendly products and we've used it to indicate cars that score at least four stars out of

five in the Federal government's *Green Vehicle Guide*. Unfortunately, from late 2015, all the star ratings were removed from the site, which is ridiculous, so we have kept the star ratings for models given prior to their removal.

 A trophy indicates a car that, all things considered, is at or near the top of its class. It's important to note that we don't test cars against some perfect theoretical model. We test them against their competitors so it's an apples with apples comparison. Features that are important in sports cars, for example, such as performance and handling, are less important in, say, the mid-size hatchback class, where buyers are looking for fuel economy and space efficiency.

STARS ★★★★★

★ The star rating for safety is from ANCAP crash tests and the *Green Vehicle Guide* stars are as per the car's rating in the *Green Vehicle Guide* itself.

★ Other star ratings, including the overall star rating, reflect how the car rates against others in its class.

Redbook REDBOOK VALUATIONS

In Australian New Car Buyer, we include trade-in values for every model in our Showroom section. These are provided to us by Redbook, Australia's leading authority on used car values.

Each model we test includes three- and five-year retained values, expressed as a percentage. These are based on what the wholesale price — ie, the price that a dealer would pay for the car — would be for a car in average condition with average kilometres for its age. You'll find Redbook's three- and five-year retained values in the Spex box.

Typically, cars with the best retained values show 55%-60% after three years, and 40-something percent after five years. The cars nobody wants are worth that after three years, and 20-something percent after five.

When you're selling your car privately, trading it in or buying a car, a Redbook Valuation is money well spent.

When selling your car privately, a Redbook personalised valuation will help you get a clearer

understanding of what your car is worth in today's market. It can also be particularly handy during negotiations with potential buyers, with your list price backed up by an independent vehicle pricing authority and tailored to your vehicle's kilometres and condition.

When trading in your car, a Redbook personalised valuation can help make the choice between selling privately and trading in simpler, with up-to-date market values for each sale price option displayed on your certificate.

Whether you're buying used or new, a Redbook valuation can put you in a stronger negotiating position through understanding the market value of the car you're after at the time and even in the future. Not only will you have peace of mind when it comes to paying the right price for your new car, you'll also get an idea of the potential future resale price.

A Redbook Valuation certificate costs \$29.00 for one car.

Go to redbook.com.au for more information.

PRICES

● Prices are manufacturers' list prices and do not include options, on-road charges or insurance. These vary from state to state. Dealers are now required, when they advertise a price, to make it the drive-away price, including on-road charges.

● Note that manufacturers can and do change prices regularly and in some cases this will have occurred after our publication deadline. Go to *carsales.com.au* where you'll find drive away prices from dealers, or direct to the relevant car company website to see their current offers.

NEW CAR & SUV BUYER'S GUIDE

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THE SHOWROOM

In THE SHOWROOM this issue, new models include Ford Escape, Hyundai Kona, Hyundai Palisade, Kia Stonic, MG ZS EV, Mercedes-Benz GLA, Skoda Kamiq, Skoda Scala, Subaru Outback, Toyota Yaris Cross and Volkswagen Tiguan. Aston Martin Vantage pictured.

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ALFA ROMEO GIULIA FROM \$63,950



Alfa Romeo's Giulia is aggressively priced and generously equipped. It deserves more attention against its German rivals.

Start money is \$63,950 for the 2.0-litre four-cylinder turbopetrol Giulia Sport, with 147kW of power and an eight-speed automatic, in a rear-wheel drive layout.

Giulia Veloce, at \$71,450, looks like the value/performance/equipment sweet spot in the Giulia line-up. It gets a 206kW version of the 2.0-litre turbopetrol engine, plus premium performance hardware including adjustable suspension, a limited slip rear differential and exquisite traditional Alfa five-hole 19-inch alloy wheels.

Alfa also needs to make a heroic, forceful statement of intent with the Giulia, and that it certainly does with the Quadrifoglio, priced at \$138,950.

Up against Audi's RS5, BMW's M3 and the Mercedes AMG C 63 S, the Quadrifoglio (or four-leaf clover, Alfa's historic racing symbol) boasts suitably ballistic numbers from a "Ferrari-inspired" 375kW, 2.9-litre twin turbo V6, which flings it from

0-100km/h in just 3.9 seconds — supercar territory — en route to 309 km/h.

Perhaps Giulia's greatest attraction, though, is the fact that it's so, so gorgeous.

Even if you think Alfas are and always will be rubbish, I defy you to look at the Giulia and not want it. Badly.

Alfa has sometimes left all the beauty on the outside, though, and compromised its cars with a cheap, industrial-grade cabin.

Not here. Giulia's interior is beautifully styled and finished, with deep, luxurious leather/Alcantara front seats, aluminium and carbon-fibre trim in Quadrifoglio and a driving position that's entirely conventional, unlike Alfas of yore, which had the ergonomics of an alien spacecraft.

The dash and control layout owes much to BMW, particularly the iDrive-type infotainment system.

Understated opulence in a Gran Turismo package, in the manner of Maserati, is the overall

impression when you walk around and climb into Giulia.

The Maserati connection is also clearly evident in the way Giulia drives.

Although its numbers suggest otherwise, Quadrifoglio's 2.9-litre V6 isn't a primal screamer, although it will make the appropriate racket if you select Race mode, brutalise the accelerator and don't mind frying \$1000 worth of Pirelli P Zero tyres.

At speed, it's surprisingly sotto voce, with a seductive, mellifluous thrum, even as it approaches the 6500rpm redline. I anticipated a nuclear-grade top-end kick, as you tend to do when 375kW is involved, but it didn't really happen. The engine has so much grunt that its power arrives almost as an afterthought.

The eight-speed auto works seamlessly with your right foot, especially in Dynamic and Race modes, where paddles tempt you to compare your gear-shifting skills with the engineers' algorithms.

You can feel the drivetrain sending extra torque to the outside rear wheel as you power through corners, complementing Giulia's exceptionally fine balance and responsive turn-in. It's one of those rare cars that steers almost by intuition, though, like its German rivals, the driver-to-road connection is slightly anaesthetised by the array of electronic systems doing most of the work.

Alfa has, at long last, delivered a machine that really does deserve comparison with Germany's best.

The brand still carries heavy baggage as a maker of self-destructing cars. It claims those days are over, of course, but buyers' lingering suspicions are difficult to overcome, and the Giulia has been a slow seller.

THINGS WE LIKE

- ✓ At last, a viable alternative to Audi, BMW and Mercedes
- ✓ Looks like a million dollars, costs much less
- ✓ Comfortable, spacious, luxurious cabin
- ✓ Quadrifoglio performance
- ✓ Torque vectoring works
- ✓ Loaded with gear

THINGS YOU MIGHT NOT LIKE

- ✗ Will it throw tantrums?
- ✗ Short warranty
- ✗ Gearshift paddles are fixed and don't move with the steering wheel

SPEX (Quadrifoglio)

- Made in Italy
- 2.9-litre twin turbopetrol V6/eight-speed automatic/rear-wheel drive
- 375kW of power at 6500rpm/600Nm of torque from 2500-5000rpm
- 0-100km/h in 3.9 seconds (claimed)
- 5.7L/100km highway; 12.4L/100km city; 95 octane premium; CO₂ emissions are 189g/km
- Warranty: Three years/150,000 kilometres
- Standard: Eight airbags, stability control, automatic emergency braking, blind spot monitoring, radar cruise, rear cross traffic alert, camera, carbon fibre roof, 19-inch alloy wheels, sports seats with leather/Alcantara upholstery, Brembo performance brakes, carbon fibre interior trim, Harman Kardon audio, adaptive dampers, 8.8-inch infotainment screen, digital radio, navigation, keyless entry and starting
- Redbook future values: 3yr: 49%; 5yr: 36%

STARS ★★★★★

- Safety ★★★★★ Euro NCAP
- Performance ★★★★★
- Handling ★★★★★
- Quality and reliability ★★★★★
- Comfort and refinement ★★★★★
- Value for money ★★★★★
- Overall** ★★★★★



compare with ...

Audi RS5, BMW M3, AMG C63S



ALFA ROMEO STELVIO FROM \$65,900



Remember when there was no such thing as a beautiful SUV? SUVs were spacious, sure. And capable. Even occasionally sporty. But they were never, ever beautiful.

But clearly something has changed, because we defy anyone to gaze upon Alfa Romeo's new Stelvio and describe it as anything but stunning.

The Italian brand's first-ever SUV can be had with a choice of a turbocharged 2.0-litre petrol-producing 149kW and 330Nm, or a 2.2-litre turbodiesel that generates 154kW and 470Nm, both with an eight-speed auto and all-wheel drive.

The petrol model kicks off at \$65,900 and the turbodiesel at \$67,900.

Standard equipment includes leather, 19-inch alloys and a power tailgate.

A 2.0-litre petrol Ti model, with a 206kW/400Nm engine, is \$78,900.

The headline-stealing act here is the thumping 2.9-litre bi-turbo petrol V6 that lives exclusively

in the performance-focused Quadrifoglio (or Q for short) model. It's priced at \$149,900.

The same engine that powers the brand's fire-breathing Giulia QV, the V6 churns out 375kW and a whopping 600Nm — enough to see 100km/h whip by the windows in just 3.8 seconds.

Sure, the cabin materials aren't quite up to the soaring standards of its mostly German competition (including the BMW X3, Audi Q5 and Porsche Macan) and the on-board infotainment system can feel a generation behind its premium challengers at times, too.

But point the Stelvio Q's shapely nose at anything resembling a twisting road and these drawbacks suddenly feel like little more than tiny foibles.

That big bi-turbo engine is the star attraction, sending a constant flow of power to the rear wheels.

The Stelvio's all-wheel-drive

system only directs power to the front axle when maximum grip is required.

That power is channeled through an eight-speed ZF automatic gearbox, while active torque vectoring (using dual-clutch packs), adaptive dampers and the ability to customise the gearbox, acceleration and steering at the turn of a dial all add up to an engaging and smile-inducing drive.

Stelvio sits on the same all-new Giorgio platform as the Giulia sedan and benefits from extensive use of aluminium and lightweight materials.

And that means, no matter the engine, the Stelvio feels light and lithe when driven enthusiastically and offers what might be the sharpest and most direct steering ever seen in any SUV to date.

Stelvio is on the small side for a premium mid-size SUV, though, measuring shorter nose-to-tail than both the BMW X3 and Mercedes-Benz GLC. You're

unlikely to notice if you sit up front, but the back seat can feel a little tight, especially should you attempt to squeeze three adults into it. There's a maximum 1600 litres of storage space on offer with the rear seats folded flat, but there are better alternatives if moving people or cargo is your main priority.

Sporty SUV buyers are spoiled for choice by BMW, Audi and Mercedes, as well as the Jaguar F-Pace, Range Rover Velar and Porsche Macan.

While the Stelvio might not be quite so polished or complete in places as its more established competition, if you judge a car by the amount of fun you have behind the wheel, then the Alfa Romeo deserves a spot on your test-drive calendar.

By Andrew Chesterton

THINGS WE LIKE

- ✓ An undeniably sexy SUV
- ✓ A super-dynamic drive
- ✓ The best steering in any SUV
- ✓ Light, agile and well balanced
- ✓ That fantastic 2.9-litre V6 in the Stelvio Q
- ✓ The 2.0-litre turbopetrol is pretty good, too

THINGS YOU MIGHT NOT LIKE

- ✗ Interior quality not up to the best of the Germans
- ✗ Alfa's poor reliability record doesn't inspire confidence
- ✗ Multimedia technology a little off the pace
- ✗ Not as spacious or practical as bigger rivals

SPEX (Stelvio Q)

- Made in Italy
- 2.9-litre V6 turbopetrol/eight-speed automatic/all-wheel drive
- 375kW of power at 6500rpm/600Nm of torque from 2500-5500rpm
- 0-100km/h in 3.8 seconds (claimed)
- 7.5L/100km highway; 11.7L/100km city; 98 octane premium; CO2 emissions are 210g/km
- Warranty: Three years/150,000km
- Standard: Eight airbags, stability control, automatic emergency braking, blind spot monitoring, rear cross traffic alert, adaptive cruise control, leather upholstery, sports seats, 20-inch alloy wheels, 8.8-inch infotainment screen, navigation, Bluetooth, voice control, adaptive dampers, Brembo brakes.
- Redbook future values: 3yr: 51%; 5yr: 37%

STARS ★★★★★

- Safety ★★★★★ ANCAP
- Performance ★★★★★
- Handling ★★★★★
- Quality and reliability ★★★★★
- Comfort and refinement ★★★★★
- Value for money ★★★★★
- Overall** ★★★★★



compare with ...

Audi Q5, BMW X3, Jaguar F Pace, Mercedes GLC, Porsche Macan

ASTON MARTIN VANTAGE FROM \$278,900



Even Aston Martin admits that for most of its existence it has made Russian dolls – one car in several different sizes. But all that changed with the 2017 DB11 grand tourer, the first product of a range renewal plan, and is confirmed by the Vantage.

Vantage was launched with a price rise of around \$80,000, pitching against the Audi R8 RWS, Porsche 911 GTS and Mercedes-AMG GT S – the best sub-Ferrari performers money can buy.

Vantage can hold its head up in this crowd. It has nothing in common with its predecessor but shares a version of Aston's new generation underpinnings. Like DB11, it uses electronic architecture and a V8 engine sourced from Daimler, maker of Mercedes.

The eight-speed manual coupe is \$278,900; the eight-speed auto coupe is \$299,500. The auto roadster is \$315,000.

In design and driving character, Vantage breaks the mould. Its look is agile and athletic, with muscular flanks and a low nose housing fresh approaches to the brand's grille and headlights. To achieve

this, it loses Aston's signature uninterrupted bonnet "shut-lines".

You sit immersed in a snug leather cockpit, the steering wheel a flattened ovoid.

The centre console is tightly laid out with Aston's familiar transmission selector buttons, aircon and other controls topped by a screen with menus and functions courtesy of Mercedes. Vantage disguises these supplied ingredients better than DB11.

It can be a lavish interior, with myriad trim possibilities. Aston's inventive options include "brogue-style" stitched and punched leather. But the cabin is let down by unavoidably low-rent plastics for the instrument cowls and vents.

Daimler's 4.0-litre twin-turbo V8 can be found in various states of tune in most Mercedes-AMGs, including the GT, a direct rival.

It feels at home here. There's the hardcore power delivery you expect in an Aston along with exemplary response.

Vantage blitzes to 100km/h in 3.7 seconds accompanied by a visceral growl and, when you lift and brake for a corner, a spatter of exhaust grenades.

It accelerates quicker and has a higher top speed – 314km/h – than all but the most extreme AMG GT R.

Along with pace, Vantage has the crisp reflexes of a proper sports car.

Its 1.5-plus tonnes are balanced evenly between the axles, adaptive dampers keep the car pinned to the ground and an electronic rear differential helps power get to the road.

How it behaves depends on the smoothness and precision of driver inputs, and the controls are a nice match for the task. Vantage turns into a corner without hesitation and the steering is a highlight, pointing the car neatly and then unwinding evenly to let you feed in throttle. Sitting low and right in the middle of the car, you sense every

nuance of movement and grip.

The sweetest sports cars reward the driver regardless of speed.

Vantage is one of those. It has character and charm and, vitally for Aston, now looks and drives quite differently from its other cars.

By Philip King

THINGS WE LIKE

- ✓ Responsive, characterful V8
- ✓ Plenty of pace
- ✓ Crisp, agile handling
- ✓ Driver engagement
- ✓ Modern Mercedes electronics

THINGS YOU MIGHT NOT LIKE

- ✗ Fussy interior design
- ✗ Cheap plastic vents and instrument shroud
- ✗ First Aston with a "nose cone"
- ✗ Uneven hand-built quality

SPEX

- Made in England
- 4.0-litre twin-turbocharged V8 petrol/eight-speed automatic/rear-wheel drive
- 375kW of power at 6000rpm/685Nm of torque from 2000-5000rpm
- 0-100km/h in 3.7 seconds [claimed]
- 8.0L/100km highway; 14.2L/100km city; 98 octane; CO2 emissions are 236g/km
- Warranty: Three years/unlimited km
- Standard equipment: Four airbags, stability control, blind-spot sensor, keyless start, alarm, surround cameras, parking assistance, LED headlights, 20-inch alloys, sports seats, partial leather and suede-look trim, navigation, dual-zone air, Bluetooth
- Redbook future values: 3yr: 54%; 5yr: 42%

STARS ★★★★★

- Safety **Not yet tested**
- Performance ★★★★★
- Handling ★★★★★
- Quality and reliability ★★★★★
- Comfort and refinement ★★★★★
- Value for money ★★★★★
- Overall** ★★★★★



compare with ...

Audi R8, Mercedes AMG GT S, Porsche 911 Carrera S



The base model Audi A1 30 TFSi, priced at \$32,750, is a redecorated Volkswagen Polo. Audi is a subsidiary brand of VW.

Nearly all of the hardware, including the body, running gear and 85kW 1.0-litre three cylinder turbopetrol/seven speed dual clutch drivetrain, is the same; the sheetmetal and interior design are different.

Oh, and the price. The Polo 85TSi Comfortline costs \$23,390 – that's \$8960, or nearly 30 percent less, than the Audi.

We're testing the mid-spec 35 TFSi, with a 110kW 1.5-litre turbopetrol four/seven-speed dual clutch drivetrain, a combination not available in the Polo. It costs \$35,290.

The 40 TFSi, with a 147kW 2.0-litre turbopetrol four, is \$46,450.

Pennies have obviously been pinched in the A1, notably in the absence of Audi's signature quality materials and trim, replaced by hard, cheap plastics

on many surfaces, including the dash and controls.

This is a very expensive small hatchback, however much of what you should reasonably expect at the price isn't there. You have to cough up extra for navigation, voice control, LED lights, dual zone air, heated front seats and decent sound.

VW does five years warranty on a Polo. Audi gives you three. Sometimes, the more you pay, the less you get.

A firm, supportive driver's seat, with a long, angled cushion and lots of travel, complements a driving position that can be tailored to any physique.

The large infotainment touchscreen, angled towards the driver, is easy to move around and digital instruments are clear and informative; Type A and C USB sockets, Apple CarPlay/Android Auto, digital radio and wireless phone charging are also included.

Rear seat legroom is pretty tight – ditto for the class in

general – and no vents or device connectors are provided.

On optional 18-inch alloys (part of the \$2990 Style package) the ride is well controlled, firm and busy. You feel the road surface – and at highways speed you certainly hear it, with extremely loud tyre noise requiring raised voices for conversation.

When it comes to safety, you're also paying maximum money for minimum tech. There's no blind spot monitoring, adaptive cruise or rear cross traffic alert. That said, A1's standard autonomous emergency braking (AEB) "raises the benchmark for collision avoidance in the light car segment" according to ANCAP.

VW's 1.5-litre four gets off the line smartly then dies a little on a light throttle, because it's engineered for economy and the transmission spends as much time in the high gears as possible. So you push the pedal harder, responsiveness and performance improve, and everybody's happy.

A time of 7.7 seconds from 0-100km/h, assisted by the car's light weight (1165kg) is pretty respectable for a small hatch.

So is fuel economy. Automatic stop/start is standard, the engine runs on two cylinders under light loads, and, on a trailing throttle, the transmission has a freewheeling function. This yields highway economy of 4-5L/100km; around town, expect 6-8L/100km, on premium.

Using Polo's basic Macpherson strut front/torsion beam rear suspension layout, A1 is nippy, agile and relatively untroubled by rough surfaces. Steering is featherlight, sharp and – unusually for Audi – communicative at speed, while the brakes are fine.

If you want a proper sporty drive, though, VW will sell you a Polo GTi, with a 147kW 2.0-litre turbo and adaptive, fully independent suspension, for \$32,890 -- \$2800 less than the Audi. Bargain.

THINGS WE LIKE

- ✓ Nippy, frugal 1.5-litre drivetrain
- ✓ Agile, engaging dynamics
- ✓ Comfortable driving position and driver's seat
- ✓ Well organised dash layout
- ✓ Easy to use infotainment

THINGS YOU MIGHT NOT LIKE

- ✗ An overpriced VW Polo
- ✗ Short changed on convenience and safety features
- ✗ Excessive tyre noise
- ✗ Short warranty
- ✗ Cheap cabin plastics

SPEX (35 TFSi)

- Made in Spain
- 1.5-litre four cylinder turbopetrol/seven-speed dual clutch automatic/front-wheel drive
- 110kW of power from 5000-6000rpm/250Nm of torque from 1500-3500rpm
- 0-100km/h in 7.7 seconds (claimed)
- 5.0L/100km highway; 7.2L/100km city; 95 octane premium; CO2 emissions are 132gkm
- Warranty: Three years/unlimited km
- Standard: Six airbags, stability control, AEB with cyclist and pedestrian detection, speed limiter, lane keep assist, parking sensors, digital instruments, 8.8-inch touchscreen, Audi connect, Apple CarPlay, Android Auto, digital radio, wireless smartphone charging, 17-inch alloy wheels.
- Redbook future values: 3yr: 54%; 5yr: 38%

STARS ★★★★★

- Safety ★★★★★
- Performance ★★★★★
- Handling ★★★★★
- Quality and reliability ★★★★★
- Comfort and refinement ★★★★★
- Value for money ★★★★★
- Overall** ★★★★★



compare with ...

BMW 1 Series, Mazda2, Mercedes A Class, Renault Clio, VW Polo



Audi's A4 sedan range opens with two front-wheel-drive models. The 35TFSi (\$56,100) runs the same 110kW 2.0-litre turbopetrol/seven-speed dual-clutch S-Tronic drivetrain used in the VW Golf.S-Line is \$59,900.

Top of the range, and the variant that has usually been the pick of the A4s to drive, is the 183kW 2.0-litre turbopetrol 45TFSi quattro, at \$68,500 for the sedan and \$71,000 for the Avant wagon.

The 45TFSi quattro allroad, a faux SUV that's basically a jacked up Avant with more clearance, is \$72,600 and the 40TDi quattro allroad, with a 140kW/400Nm 2.0-litre turbodiesel, is \$70,600.

The S4 quattro sedan, with a 260kW 3.0-litre turbopetrol, is \$99,500; the Avant is \$102,000.

The RS4 Avant, with a 331kW/600Nm 2.9-litre twin turbo V6/eight speed auto and a claimed 0-100km/h time of just 4.1 seconds, is priced at \$147,900.

This A4 may look just like the previous model, but there's a lot of pointy end technology in this car, too.

When you begin to open the driver's door, you will be warned of a car, or a cyclist, approaching from the rear.

If you're in danger of being rear-ended by an errant texter, the pre-sense system will pick this up and the LED brake lights will strobe frantically in an effort to get their attention. Automatic emergency braking, blind spot warning and rear cross traffic alert are also standard.

A \$3770 Assistance Package includes Turn Assist, which will actually stop you executing a right turn if it detects an approaching vehicle from the other direction at close range.

If you're about to whack the car in front and you grab a big handful of steering lock to try to dodge it, the collision avoidance system will compute that you need all the help you can get to swerve and avoid, effectively taking over the steering.

The A4's showroom party trick, the Virtual Cockpit, replaces analogue instruments with a 12.3-inch, hi-res LCD monitor on which you can call up a huge variety of system functions, connectivity (via Apple Car Play or Android Auto) and other information, including navigation in map or Google Earth/Street View modes, plus speedo and tacho dials in different sizes.

The voice control system is so smart it's scary. "Take me to an Italian restaurant," I said. The nav came up with a list of those nearby, asked me to say the name or number of the one I wanted, then began guidance.

Updated for 2021, the interior features a new 10.1-inch infotainment touchscreen with higher resolution and a claimed 10 times greater processing power than previously.

A smartphone interface/app includes the ability to wirelessly charge two phones at once.



STARS ★★★★★

- Safety ★★★★★ ANCAP
- Performance ★★★★★
- Handling ★★★★★
- Quality and reliability ★★★★★
- Comfort and refinement ★★★★★
- Value for money ★★★★★
- Overall** ★★★★★

Petrol drive trains were updated with mild hybrid technology in mid 2020.

The 2.0 TFSi quattro, with 185kW on tap, hits 100km/h in a claimed 5.8 seconds, but the 2.0-litre's muscular midrange fades away to a pretty flat top end. BMW's 2.0-litre turbopetrol, also with 185kW in the 330i, is much more responsive and energetic as redline approaches and also makes nice noises for a turbo. The Audi engine sounds like a Dyson hand dryer.

Dynamics are competent but disappointing and well short of class benchmarks. You get tidy handling, predictable, secure roadholding and a comfortable, quiet ride. Nothing more.

The front wheel drive models in particular are pretty ordinary in light of the ambitious prices being asked. A Camry handles just as well, and a rear-wheel drive BMW 3 Series handles a whole lot better.

THINGS WE LIKE

- ✓ Quiet and comfortable
- ✓ Some great safety technology
- ✓ Interior space and quality
- ✓ Futuristic instrument panel
- ✓ Fuel-efficient engines

THINGS YOU MIGHT NOT LIKE

- ✗ Audi has run out of new design ideas. Can you pick it from the previous model?
- ✗ Mediocre dynamics
- ✗ Weak resale values

SPEX (45 TFSi quattro)

- Made in Germany
- 2.0-litre four cylinder turbopetrol/seven-speed automated manual/all-wheel drive
- 183kW of power at 5000-6000rpm/370Nm of torque from 1600-4500rpm
- 0-100km/h in 5.8 seconds (claimed)
- 6.0L/100km highway; 8.9L/100km city; 95 octane premium; CO₂ emissions are 162g/km
- Warranty: Three years/unlimited kilometres
- Standard: Eight airbags, stability control, navigation, wireless phone charging, voice control, adaptive suspension, leather, automatic parking, automatic emergency braking, blind spot warning, dual-zone air, 19-inch alloy wheels
- Redbook future values: 3yr: 51%; 5yr: 35%

compare with ...

Alfa Giulia, BMW 3 Series, Jaguar XE, Lexus IS, Mercedes C Class



AUDI A5/S5 FROM \$71,900



Since 2007, few cars have been as seductive standing still as the Audi A5 Coupe. Now, in (some say too timidly) a redesigned and re-engineered second-generation guise, can it captivate on the move, too?

Based on the medium-sized A4 range, the swoopy two-door (and four door Sportback) four-seater grand tourer grows ever so slightly, paying palpable cabin space dividends.

It's also lighter yet stronger, promising raised driving dynamics and refinement levels.

The least-expensive model is the 2.0 40TFSI S-Line, priced at \$71,900 for the coupe and Sportback. A5 Cabriolet is priced at \$85,800.

Far from being sparsely equipped, A5 includes autonomous emergency braking, blind-spot monitoring, parking sensors, a reverse camera, satellite navigation, adaptive matrix LED headlights, digital radio, electrically adjustable front seats, leather upholstery, three-zone climate control and 19-inch alloys.

Also standard is an electronic instrumentation system Audi

dubs "Virtual Cockpit", as well as a mechanical arm that extends the front seatbelts.

The real clincher though might just be the knockout interior, with its almost sensual tactility, exquisite attention to detail and rich ambience.

Cars costing twice as much as this aren't as beautiful from the driver's seat.

Both drivetrains were updated in 2020 with mild hybrid technology, which brings minor gains to fuel efficiency and performance.

The base 140kW/320Nm 2.0-litre four-cylinder turbopetrol engine drives the front wheels via a seven-speed dual-clutch transmission.

Fast off the mark and nimble through the gears, this powertrain combo is a sweet-revving gem.

Eager (if slightly anaesthetised) steering, balanced handling and surefooted control reflect the much-improved chassis featuring five-link suspension starring underneath.

Stronger still is the 183kW/370Nm 2.0 45 TFSi quattro from \$79,500, again for both coupe and Sportback. The 45 TFSi Cabriolet is \$93,000.

Ambient cabin lighting and extra tinsel might shine in the showroom, but it is the extra shove from the uprated four-pot turbo that shines brightest, turning what is already a willing performer into a cracking point-to-point hotshot, backed up by the added traction of all-wheel drive grip.

The real gun in the A5 artillery is the S5, lighting a fuse with a blazing 260kW/500Nm 3.0-litre V6 turbo that can hit 100km/h from standstill in just 4.7 seconds, a slick eight-speed torque-converter auto, rear-biased AWD for contained sideways fun and blindingly effective brakes to help harness all that oomph.

Talk about beauty and the beast! Better still, compared to the previous iteration, the price has plummeted \$17,000, putting this Porsche Cayman-shading

slingshot more within (relative) reach, from \$106,500 for the coupe and Sportback. The S5 Cabriolet is \$120,000.

That price includes adaptive dampers, which take the edge off the slightly harsh ride in cars wearing bigger wheels. They don't help tyre drone though.

Other range-wide bugbears include a fiddly transmission lever, occasional rattles, a stingy warranty and the invariable expensive desirable options.

Audi's A5 and S5 are underrated cars that deserve more attention than they get.

By Byron Mathioudakis

THINGS WE LIKE

- ✓ Exquisitely designed and crafted interior
- ✓ Strong, smooth engine performance
- ✓ Agile handling and assured roadholding
- ✓ Striking coupe styling
- ✓ Generous standard specification
- ✓ The 465-litre boot is the largest in its class

THINGS YOU MIGHT NOT LIKE

- ✗ Firm ride on 19-inch (and up) alloys with no adaptive dampers
- ✗ Some cabin squeaks
- ✗ Weak resale values
- ✗ Short warranty

SPEX (45 TFSI)

- Made in Germany
- 2.0-litre four-cylinder petrol turbo/seven-speed dual-clutch S-Tronic/all-wheel drive
- 185kW of power from 5000-6000rpm/370Nm of torque from 1600-4500rpm
- 0-100km in 5.8 seconds (claimed)
- 6.0L/100km highway, 8.9L/100km city; 95 octane; CO₂ emissions are 162g/km
- Warranty: Three years/unlimited kilometres
- Standard: Six airbags, stability control, autonomous emergency braking, blind-spot monitoring, parking sensors, navigation, reverse camera, matrix LED headlights, digital radio, electrically adjustable front seats, tri-zone air, Virtual Cockpit, multimedia touchscreen, Apple CarPlay/Android Auto, Bluetooth, wireless hotspot, music storage, ambient lighting, leather upholstery, front foglights, tyre-pressure monitoring, 19-inch alloy wheels, space-saver spare wheel
- Redbook future values: 3yr: 49%; 5yr: 33%

STARS ★★★★★

- Safety ★★★★★ ANCAP
- Performance ★★★★★
- Handling ★★★★★
- Quality and reliability ★★★★★
- Comfort and refinement ★★★★★
- Value for money ★★★★★
- Overall ★★★★★



compare with ...

BMW 4 Series, Lexus RC, Mercedes-Benz C-Class Coupe, Porsche Cayman

AUDI RS5 FROM \$150,900



The RS5 sits at the top of Audi's A5 coupe line-up. In typical Audi RS fashion, this car goes softly, but carries a very big stick.

It features the 2.9-litre, twin turbo V6, developed with Porsche (where it's also found in the Panamera and new Cayenne); VW's rigid, lightweight MLB platform architecture; five-link suspension with adaptive, adjustable dampers at both ends and an eight-speed automatic, mated to Audi's signature quattro all wheel drive system, with a mechanical centre differential, and active torque vectoring between the rear wheels.

RS5 is available as a two door coupe and a five door Sportback, both priced at \$150,900.

Sliding into the luxurious, supportive, Nappa leather sports driver's seat, you face Audi's virtual cockpit, with configurable digital instruments, including specific RS displays for engine power and torque, cornering g-forces

and a light that tells you it's time to change up, in manual mode, because you're about to bang the rev limiter.

You sit deep in the RS, with lots of seat and wheel adjustment. The wheel itself is a lovely lightweight, flat bottomed thing, with shift paddles and an array of controls; using these, and/or voice control, you rarely have to reach for the infotainment controller on the centre console.

A larger body yields more rear seat space, but with tall people up front you still sit legs splayed, on a comfortable, supportive bench shaped for two. Headroom is OK for those up to about 185cm. Boot space is generous.

Audi's engine may lack the theatrical shoutiness of its rivals, but it's a magnificent device, very Porsche like in its superb responsiveness at the pedal – with zero turbolag in Dynamic mode – and offering

unctuous, honeyed horsepower right across the rev range.

Sure, the old RS5's 4.2-litre, naturally-aspirated V8 was a glorious piece of nostalgia, but, in the bottom half of the rev range at least, it wouldn't see which way this one went.

Audi claims 0-100km/h in 3.9 seconds. Mercedes claims the same for its C63 AMG S coupe; BMW's M4 Competition is 0.1 second slower.

Beyond its performance, though, what really makes this RS5 special is it's superb agility, poise and driver engagement – three traits often lacking in performance Audis, which too often feel overweight, unbalanced and dead in your hands.

Light, communicative steering points with absolute precision and the car responds in a completely neutral manner.

Audi has deliberately engineered a strong rear drive bias into

quattro for the RS, and it shows in the absence of understeer, and a willingness to tighten its line, just bit, on the throttle. Yet you also retain the major advantage of quattro: you can apply the go pedal as hard as you like mid corner and the car will just rocket out, with no compromise between grip and slip, as happens with its rear wheel drive rivals.

Ride comfort, if not quite Gran Turismo in compliance, is pretty good considering the 275/30 tyres (at both ends) on 20 inch wheels. Comfort mode is fine in town; Dynamic mode is typically fidgety and firm, with some coarseness and tyre noise also evident on country roads.

Audi has transformed the RS5 from a likeable but fairly brutal, blunt instrument into a car of delicate, lithe, yet immensely powerful, authoritative character, that's a real pleasure to drive.

THINGS WE LIKE

- ✓ Grunt and power from the V6
- ✓ Superb interior design and quality
- ✓ Adaptive suspension offers great handling plus ride comfort
- ✓ Road grip of Quattro
- ✓ Classy exterior design

THINGS YOU MIGHT NOT LIKE

- ✗ Ride lacks compliance at speed, and tyre noise is excessive
- ✗ Automatic's shift calibration needs work
- ✗ Muted engine sound

SPEX

- Made in Germany
- 2.9L twin turbopetrol V6/eight-speed automatic/all-wheel drive
- 331kW of power from 5700-6700rpm/600Nm of torque from 1900-5000rpm
- 0-100km/h in 3.9 seconds (claimed)
- 7.2L/100km highway; 11.6L/100km city; 98 octane premium; CO2 emissions are 199g/km
- Warranty: Three years/unlimited kilometres
- Standard: Six airbags, stability control, adaptive dampers, 20-inch alloys, automatic emergency braking, lane keeping, blind spot monitoring, radar cruise, automatic parking, leather/Alcantara upholstery, sports front seats, Virtual Cockpit digital instruments, Bluetooth, navigation, digital radio, voice control, Apple CarPlay, Android Auto, sunroof, LED headlights
- Redbook future values: 3yr: 50%; 5yr: 32%

STARS ★★★★★

- Safety ★★★★★
- Performance ★★★★★
- Handling ★★★★★
- Quality and reliability ★★★★★
- Comfort and refinement ★★★★★
- Value for money ★★★★★
- Overall** ★★★★★



compare with ...

BMW M4, Lexus RC F, Mercedes-AMG C63 S



Audi's A6 40 TFSI starts from \$84,900, powered by a 140kW/320Nm 2.0-litre turbopetrol engine matched to a seven-speed twin clutch automatic gearbox and front-wheel-drive.

A6 45 TFSI quattro, priced from \$96,900, gets a 180kW/370Nm variant with the same transmission. S Line is \$106,000.

The A6 55 TFSI S Line, tested here and priced from \$116,000, is powered by a 250kW/500Nm turbopetrol V6.

The A6 Allroad quattro faux SUV, with a 183kW/600Nm 3.0-litre V6 turbodiesel, is \$109,200.

Top of the range RS6 Avant wagon, with a 441kW/800Nm twin turbo 4.0-litre V8, is \$216,000.

The dash is dominated by two large touchscreens (10.1- and 8.6-inch) that control infotainment and air-conditioning systems.

In front of the driver is Audi's 12.3-inch "virtual cockpit" display which can be viewed in several modes.

Thanks to a permanent phone connection via an embedded SIM card installed at the factory (separate from the optional onboard wifi hotspot) you can via the Audi Connect app on your phone pinpoint the car to within one metre of its actual location, lock and unlock the doors and automatically contact emergency services if necessary.

In case you let your kids drive it, you can set a perimeter that sounds an alert if the car is driven beyond a "geo-fenced" area – or exceeds a pre-determined speed limit.

We downloaded the app and had a thorough demonstration but never used it in a practical sense.

Audi Connect is free for three years. After that, the service is expected to cost about \$400 a year.

You can bundle the first three services for a lump sum of \$1700 at the time of purchase. The five-year service plan is \$2630.

At an average of more than \$500 a service, it's not exactly cheap but it is par for the course in the luxury class.

Optional 21-inch wheels on the test car dealt with some patchy road surfaces reasonably well. The suspension wasn't nauseatingly stiff and nor did it jar. It only really got upset on the occasional freeway expansion join.

That said, given the plushness of the interior and the car itself, there is scope for a more comfortable ride setting.

The A6 sits flat in corners and the steering is eerily precise, however it's worth noting the test car was equipped with optional all-wheel steering.

Most impressive is the 55 TFSi's acceleration. The turbo V6 responds instantly to light throttle inputs. We matched Audi's 5.1-seconds 0 to 100kmh claim.

Brakes are equally impressive, with a precise pedal feel.

A6 drivetrains have "mild hybrid" tech, with a 48-volt main electrical system for the 55 TFSI and a 12-volt system for the 40/45 TFSI.

In practice, though, it's more of an advanced idle stop-start

system than a true hybrid. It isn't able to drive the car on battery power alone.

I averaged between 8.9 and 9.9L/100km. This figure would increase if you plan to do mostly urban driving. A Lexus ES300h hybrid I tested at the same time got between 5.1 and 5.6 L/100km on a mix of city and highway driving.

Overall, the Audi A6 is impressive, but be sure to haggle. Luxury sedans are a hard sell these days, so treat the official prices as a guide only. Be aware of weak trade-in values, too.

By Joshua Dowling

THINGS WE LIKE

- ✓ Exquisitely designed and crafted interior
- ✓ Strong, smooth engine performance
- ✓ Agile handling and assured roadholding
- ✓ Striking coupe styling
- ✓ Generous standard specification
- ✓ The 465-litre boot is the largest in its class

THINGS YOU MIGHT NOT LIKE

- ✗ Firm ride on 19-inch (and up) alloys with no adaptive dampers
- ✗ Some cabin squeaks
- ✗ Weak resale values
- ✗ Some road/tyre noise intrusion

SPEX (45 TFSI)

- Made in Germany
- 2.0-litre four-cylinder petrol turbo/seven-speed dual-clutch S-Tronic/all-wheel drive
- 180kW of power from 5000–6500rpm/370Nm of torque from 1600–4300rpm
- 0–100km in 6 seconds (claimed)
- 6.3L/100km highway, 9.0L/100km city; 95 octane; CO₂ emissions are 166g/km
- Warranty: Three years/unlimited kilometres
- Standard: Six airbags, stability control, autonomous emergency braking, blind-spot monitoring, parking sensors, navigation, reverse camera, adaptive LED headlights, digital radio, electrically adjustable front seats, tri-zone air, Virtual Cockpit, multimedia touchscreen, Apple CarPlay/Android Auto, Bluetooth, wireless hotspot, music storage, ambient lighting, leather upholstery, front foglights, tyre-pressure monitoring, 20-inch alloy wheels, space-saver spare wheel
- Redbook future values: 3yr: 46%; 5yr: 30%

STARS ★★★★★

- Safety ★★★★★ Euro NCAP
- Performance ★★★★★
- Handling ★★★★★
- Quality and reliability ★★★★★
- Comfort and refinement ★★★★★
- Value for money ★★★★★
- Overall ★★★★★



compare with ...

BMW 5 Series, Jaguar XF, Mercedes-Benz E-Class

AUDI Q3 FROM \$46,950



The third generation Audi Q3 might be labelled an SUV but as with many of its peers it could easily be described as a high-riding hatchback.

It delivers the usual SUV attributes: taller driving position, better vision around the car, and a higher “hip point”, making it easier to get in and out.

All this in a package that fits in the same size parking space as a Toyota Corolla. Little wonder compact SUVs are so popular.

Prices start from \$46,950 plus on-road costs for the 35 TFSi, powered by a carryover 1.4-litre turbo four-cylinder petrol engine (110kW/250Nm) matched to a six-speed S-tronic twin clutch auto driving the front wheels.

The coupe-style S Line Sportback, with the same drivetrain, starts at \$50,450.

The 40TFSi, with a 132kW 2.0-litre turbopetrol/seven-speed S-tronic/quattro all-wheel drivetrain, is \$54,450, or \$59,950 in S Line specification. S Line Sportback is \$62,350.

The hotrod RS Q3 that tops the range runs a 2.5-litre five cylinder turbo, with a whopping 294kW of power and 480Nm of torque. RS Q3 hatch is \$89,900 and the Sportback is \$92,900.

While it may look familiar, this Q3 has grown in every dimension compared to its predecessor – it’s almost the next class size up – and every body panel is new, distinguished by sharp creases inside and out. It’s a fresh design and one that should age well.

The cabin has as standard Audi’s digital 10-inch widescreen dash display instead of analogue instruments.

The generously-sized 10-inch central infotainment touchscreen is also standard, and you can option the Virtual Cockpit configurable instrument display as well.

Apple CarPlay/Android Auto connectivity, navigation, voice control and digital radio are standard. Safety tech includes

autonomous emergency braking, blind spot monitoring and 360 degree cameras.

As with most Audis, the interior is extremely practical with large door pockets front and rear and a decent size glovebox, although the centre console is small.

Charging points in the front cabin include a standard USB and one USB-C port while back seat passengers have a choice of two USB-C ports and one 12V socket. Wireless phone charging is also standard.

The Q3 is one of the roomiest vehicles in its segment, both in terms of back seat space (where there is ample foot room under the front seats) and the cargo hold, which offers a class leading 530 litres of space.

On the road Q3 is relatively quiet and refined.

The steering can feel a bit too light at first but you soon get accustomed to it.

This also makes it easier to manoeuvre the Q3 at low speeds

and when parking.

The suspension feels taut over bumps – not too busy and not too floaty – and the steering is impressively responsive.

The 1.4-litre turbo engine feels surprisingly spritely, but it’s a bit thirsty by current standards and requires premium.

The six-speed twin-clutch auto is generally a smooth operator but does have the trademark delay on take-off typical of this type of transmission.

Overall, the Q3 is an impressive effort – if you’re prepared to pay close to, or in excess of, \$50,000 once a few option packs are ticked.

You should also have a look at the VW T-Roc and Tiguan.

The latter is priced from \$39,690. In many respects, including drivetrain, it’s basically the same car -- but don’t expect an Audi dealer to tell you that.

By Joshua Dowling

THINGS WE LIKE

- ✓ Roomy, practical cabin and cargo hold
- ✓ Sharp design inside and out.
- ✓ Optional widescreen displays
- ✓ Refined, flexible performance
- ✓ Agile, secure handling

THINGS YOU MIGHT NOT LIKE

- ✗ Pricy, and there are a lot of options that should be standard
- ✗ Base model costs about \$7000 more than the VW Tiguan, which is basically the same car
- ✗ The VW also has a five year warranty; Audi has only three years
- ✗ Carryover 1.4-litre engine is thirsty

SPEX

- Made in Hungary
- 1.4-litre turbopetrol/six-speed S Tronic/front wheel drive
- 110kW of power from 5000-6000rpm/250Nm of torque from 1500-3500rpm
- 0-100km/h in 9.3 seconds (claimed)
- 6.0L/100km highway; 9.4L/100km city; 95 octane premium; CO2 emissions are 164gkm
- Warranty: Three years/unlimited km
- Standard: Seven airbags, stability control, front and rear autonomous emergency braking, lane keeping assistance, blind zone warning, rear cross-traffic alert, speed sign recognition, 360-degree camera, tyre pressure monitoring, navigation, voice control, wireless phone charging, 17-inch alloy wheels
- Redbook future values: 3yr: 46%; 5yr: 35%

STARS ★★★★★

- Safety ★★★★★ Euro NCAP
- Performance ★★★★★
- Handling ★★★★★
- Quality and reliability ★★★★★
- Comfort and refinement ★★★★★
- Value for money ★★★★★
- Overall ★★★★★



compare with ...

BMW X1/X2, Mercedes GLA, Mini Countryman, Skoda Karoq, VW T-Roc and Tiguan, Volvo XC40



AUDI Q5 FROM \$68,900



Today's Audi Q5 might seem barely changed since the original in 2009, but there's exciting new stuff underneath its almost the same skin.

Kicking off from \$68,900 for the 150kW/400Nm 2.0-litre 40 TDI diesel quattro and \$69,900 for the 183kW/370Nm 2.0-litre 45 TFSI petrol quattro, the second generation Q5 features mild hybrid drivetrains, a significantly lighter yet stronger body than before, the adoption of sophisticated five-link independent suspension (with optional air springs for a smooth, supple ride — something the previous Q5 struggled with) and enough driver-assist safety to make a Volvo engineer blush.

Clean surfaces, obsessive quality, precision shutlines — all are expected Audi hallmarks, yet the Q5 ups the ante anyway with a spacious and airy cabin boasting designer textures, exquisite materials, cocooning silence and exceptional tactility.

Thankfully there is actual depth behind the dazzle, as revealed by supportive seating, thoughtful ergonomics (once the time is taken to learn the fiddly steering-wheel controls), superb

ventilation and properly family-friendly practicality.

Function is on equal footing with form in the back seat too, with ample room, shapely cushions and individual climate controls.

However, the absence of sliding/reclining rear backrests is an oversight, though that's part of an optional Comfort pack that also boosts the sumptuously finished cargo area's capacity by 60 litres to 610 litres.

The air suspension option features a 'kneel down' function that drops the body for easier loading. It also raises the body for extra ground clearance when the terrain requires it.

However, it is the Q5's car-like ability to traverse regular roads that is most remarkable, starting with the 2.0-litre four-cylinder turbo petrol 45 TFSi Sport, as tested, priced at \$76,600.

Eager off the mark and hungry for revs, this Teflon-smooth powertrain is a pure and punchy delight, defined by instant and broad throttle responses.

Paired to a quick-shifting seven-speed dual-clutch transmission, it's also frugal to boot, helped out by stop/start as well as Audi's

standard fuel-saving 'quattro ultra' all-wheel-drive system; it decouples whichever axle isn't required to maximise efficiency.

Even greater economy is possible by opting for the 2.0-litre four-pot turbo-diesel 40 TDI quattro, priced at \$74,900 in Sport trim, that's capable of 5.4L/100km.

A 210kW/620Nm 3.0-litre V6 turbodiesel 50 TDI quattro, that launches the Q5 to 100km/h in just 5.7 seconds, costs \$89,600.

The flagship SQ5, at \$101,136, runs a 260kW/500Nm 3.0-litre V6 turbopetrol drivetrain that launches it to 100km/h in 5.5 seconds.

Q5 is one of the best-handling SUVs on the road, delivering controlled, agile dynamics combined with rock-solid roadholding.

While more feel would be welcome, the steering remains beautifully alert. The driver can alter its weighting via the Drive Mode selector that also adjusts the suspension's dampers to comfort or sport.

If you select a Sport-grade Q5, with adaptive cruise, LED headlights, racier seats and Audi's

showy digital 'Virtual Cockpit' instrumentation among other goodies, it's also worth paying an extra \$4400 for air suspension, which allows you to dial up an exceptionally comfortable ride.

Gripes include the high cost of desirable options, no full-size spare and ... that's about it.

So this latest Q5 is a fiercely capable, car-like luxury medium SUV that — with the right extras — pushes class boundaries.

Don't buy a BMW X3, Jaguar F-Pace, Mercedes GLC or Volvo XC60 before driving this first.

If only Audi's designers were as bold as its visionary engineers.

By Byron Mathioudakis

THINGS WE LIKE

- ✓ Sporty, agile handling
- ✓ Muscular performance
- ✓ Exceptional interior design and presentation
- ✓ Luxury ride with air suspension option
- ✓ Practical cargo area

THINGS YOU MIGHT NOT LIKE

- ✗ Expensive options
- ✗ Previous model had reliability issues
- ✗ Firm ride without air suspension
- ✗ Short warranty
- ✗ No full-sized spare

SPEX (45 TFSi quattro)

- Made in Mexico
- 2.0-litre turbopetrol mild hybrid/ seven-speed auto/all-wheel drive
- 183kW of power from 5000-6500rpm/370Nm of torque from 1600-4300rpm
- 0-100km in 6.3 seconds (claimed)
- 7.0L/100km highway; 9.7L/100km city; 95 octane premium; CO₂ emissions are 182g/km; fuel tank is 70 litres
- Warranty: Three years/unlimited kilometres
- Max towing weight: 2000kg
- Standard: Eight airbags, stability control, AEB (Autonomous Emergency Braking), cross traffic assist, blind spot monitoring, rear camera, parking sensors, Virtual Cockpit, leather, navigation, three-zone air, Apple CarPlay/Android Auto, Bluetooth, voice control, WiFi hotspot, digital radio, tyre-pressure monitoring, adaptive dampers, power tailgate, 19-inch alloy wheels, collapsible space-saver spare
- Redbook future values: 3yr: 54%; 5yr: 37%

STARS ★★★★★

- Safety ★★★★★
- Performance ★★★★★
- Handling ★★★★★
- Quality and reliability ★★★★★
- Comfort and refinement ★★★★★
- Value for money ★★★★★
- Overall** ★★★★★



compare with ...

Alfa Stelvio, BMW X3, Jaguar F-Pace, Land Rover Discovery Sport, Mercedes-Benz GLC, Range Rover Velar, Volvo XC60



Audi's second-generation Q7 is a huge improvement over the first. That model's whale-like scale made it a daunting vehicle to drive in the city and its high weight meant it had the handling agility of a humpback.

Audi's engineers found ways to shed around 300kg without affecting strength or compromising occupant safety.

The Q7 is now among the more pleasant and capable large premium SUVs to drive.

There's little steering feel, a trait common to the breed, but the Audi copes gracefully with corners, ride comfort is very good (thanks to adjustable air suspension) and noise, vibration and harshness levels are very low.

The Q7 doesn't pretend to be a sportster and this is to its credit.

Audi's engineers offer the 3.0-litre V6 turbodiesel 45TDi with 170kW/500Nm, priced at \$103,300, or the 210kW/600Nm 50TDi, priced at \$114,300. These mild hybrid drivetrains comply with the Euro 6 emissions

standard. This means the Q7 has a 12L tank for AdBlue fluid, a urea solution.

The 50TDi S-Line is \$121,300.

At the top of the range, the 320kW/900Nm electric compressor-boosted twin-turbo 4.0-litre V8 turbodiesel SQ7 TDi is \$122,350.

It reaches 100km/h from rest in just 4.8 seconds. Astounding.

The 3.0-litre V6 turbodiesel is smooth, muscular and quiet, a perfect blend of everyday attributes for a big SUV.

Rapid acceleration and remarkably low consumption are similarly impressive and the entire mild hybrid drivetrain is classy, refined engineering.

The Q7 now faces competition from BMW's X7, the Mercedes GLE, which now offers a seven seat layout, Land Rover Discovery and Volvo XC90, so if you've got a tribe to carry you now have much more choice

than previously.

The centre row is split 35:30:35, with each section individually adjustable fore and aft, while the outboard sections have a fold-and-flip feature that makes getting to the rear seats easier. Rear air con is standard. Split 50:50, the reasonably roomy third-row seat is electrically operated, as is the tailgate. All rear seats have Isofix child restraint anchors.

The dash is elegant and logical, with Audi's all digital "virtual cockpit" now standard, and the heated front seats are supportive and comfortable.

A 360-degree helicopter camera-view display on the centre screen, Audi's latest self-parking system and warnings for cross traffic when reversing out of a parking space are just some of the highlights of the Q7.

However, the options list is long and nothing on it is cheap.

This is nothing new, but this

the Q7 is impossible to ignore if you're shopping the seven-seater luxury SUV class.

Arriving as we went to press is the first petrol model in the range, the 250kW/500Nm 3.0-litre turbo 55TFSi, priced at \$121,300.

By John Carey

THINGS WE LIKE

- ✓ Seven seats standard
- ✓ Interior quality and versatility
- ✓ Strong, refined, frugal drivetrain
- ✓ New-found agility and poise

THINGS YOU MIGHT NOT LIKE

- ✗ It's still a huge thing to manoeuvre
- ✗ Short warranty
- ✗ Painful options prices
- ✗ Potential reliability issues

SPEX (50TDi)

- Made in Slovakia
- 3.0-litre V6 turbodiesel mild hybrid/eight-speed automatic/all-wheel drive
- 210kW of power from 3500-4000rpm/600Nm of torque from 2250-3250rpm
- 0-100km/h in 6.5 seconds (claimed)
- Warranty: Three years/unlimited kilometres
- Max towing weight 3500kg
- 6.5L/100km highway; 7.2L/100km city; CO₂ emissions are 180g/km. Fuel tank 85 litres.
- Standard: Six airbags, stability control, 20-inch alloy wheels, tyre pressure indicator, 360-degree top-view camera, automatic parking, adaptive cruise, cross traffic alert, leather, power tailgate, three-zone air, drive select, digital radio, navigation.
- Redbook future values: 3yr: 51%; 5yr: 38%

STARS ★★★★★

- Safety ★★★★★ ANCAP
- Performance ★★★★★
- Handling ★★★★★
- Quality and reliability ★★★★★
- Comfort and refinement ★★★★★
- Value for money ★★★★★
- Overall ★★★★★



compare with ...

BMW X7, Land Rover Discovery
Mercedes GLE, Volvo XC90



Audi's five seater Q8 is based on the seven-seater Q7, but with a sleeker, sharper profile, a coupe roofline, a few dimensional adjustments and whopper 21 inch alloy wheels to give it a sportier stance.

The Q8 55TFSi quattro, priced at \$130,200, runs a 3.0-litre V6 turbopetrol engine with 250kW of power and 500Nm of torque, matched with an eight-speed automatic and all wheel drive.

It's a mild hybrid, with 48-volt electrics, a lithium ion battery and a starter motor that can also give the engine a high voltage boost of up to 6kW of power and 60Nm of torque, for five seconds, when you plant the accelerator. The engine is also switched off and decoupled from the transmission in "coasting" mode, on a light throttle between 55-160km/h, yielding fuel efficiency gains on the highway.

A 210kW/620Nm 3.0-litre V6 turbodiesel Q8, badged as the 50TDi quattro, is also available at the same \$129,600 price and specification.

Q8 gets Audi's latest all digital centre stack dash, with a 10.1 inch touchscreen for infotainment, plus an 8.3-inch screen below it for vehicle settings, heating and cooling. Both use a haptic interface, which gives you subtle feedback and a muted click when you touch an icon, mimicking a conventional switch.

Seating is luxurious, there's ample, adjustable legroom and decent headroom in the back stalls, while boot volume is around 15 per cent less than Q7 in five seater mode, but still expansive.

Audi ups the safety tech ante in a big way on Q8, which has 39 driver assistance systems to look after you.

A 3D virtual image of the car on the infotainment screen can be rotated through 360 degrees, so you can see any obstacle nearby before you begin to move, while autonomous emergency

braking extends to stopping the car if it detects you're about to be T-boned at an intersection.

Audi claims a seriously rapid 5.9 seconds for the 0-100km/h sprint in the 55TFSi. Seat of the pants says the Q8 isn't quite that fast. The 3.0-litre V6 is certainly potent, and beautifully smooth, but peak torque doesn't kick in until a high 2900 rpm, so it's not particularly strong at low revs, and the eight speed automatic is very slow to respond when you want a lower gear.

Adaptive air suspension, available only in the \$11,100 Premium plus package, allows you to tailor the ride/handling compromise to suit the road, the load and your speed. I didn't get to drive the standard steel-sprung variant, but colleagues who did reported that the ride was much lumpier and harder than the air sprung examples I

drove, which ironed out a rough road with grace and authority.

Q8 isn't a sports SUV, though. It weighs 2265kg. Enough said. However the Audi is stable at speed, takes corners in a flat, well-balanced manner. A notable dynamic demerit, common on Audis, is imprecise, inconsistently-weighted, uncommunicative steering.

Q8 offers high-end luxe, dazzling tech and bombproof safety in a slick stylish package, but as a drive it's competent rather than class leading, and pricey too.

The SQ8 TDi, with a mild hybrid turbodiesel 320kW/900Nm 4.0-litre V8, is priced at \$166,500.

At the top of the range, the ballistic RS Q8 runs a 441kW/800Nm 4.0-litre twin turbo petrol V8 that flings it from rest to 100km/h in 3.8 seconds. It's priced at \$208,500.

THINGS WE LIKE

- ✓ Beautiful design inside and out
- ✓ Spacious, comfortable interior
- ✓ Luxurious seats
- ✓ Dazzling high tech infotainment
- ✓ Security of quattro all-wheel drive

THINGS YOU MIGHT NOT LIKE

- ✗ Doesn't drive as good as it looks
- ✗ Overpriced, especially compared with Porsche Cayenne
- ✗ Engine lacks low-down torque
- ✗ Transmission slow to respond
- ✗ Sharp ride on standard suspension

SPEX (55TFSi)

- Made in Slovakia
- 3.0-litre V6 turbopetrol/48-volt mild hybrid/eight-speed automatic/all-wheel drive
- 250kW of power at 5500rpm/500Nm of torque from 2900-5300rpm
- 0-100km/h in 5.9 seconds (claimed)
- 8.1L/100km highway; 11.1L/100km city; 95 premium; CO2 emissions are 210g/km; fuel tank 85 litres
- Warranty: Three years/unlimited km
- Standard: Eight airbags, stability control, autonomous emergency braking, adaptive cruise, lane keeping, rear-cross traffic alert, power tailgate, 21-inch alloys, LED headlights, three-zone air, head up display, leather, heated and ventilated front seats, navigation, digital radio, Apple CarPlay and Android Auto
- Redbook future values: 3yr: 58%; 5yr: 45%

STARS ★★★★★

- Safety ★★★★★
- Performance ★★★★★
- Handling ★★★★★
- Quality and reliability ★★★★★
- Comfort and refinement ★★★★★
- Value for money ★★★★★
- Overall** ★★★★★



compare with ...

BMW X6, Maserati Levante, Mercedes GLE coupe, Porsche Cayenne, Range Rover Sport

BENTLEY CONTINENTAL GT FROM \$408,900



The Bentley Continental GT costs \$408,900 for the coupe and \$450,100 for the convertible. But that, folks, is just the deposit.

If you want the James Bond-style rotating touchscreen in the dash, which at the press of a button spins to reveal old-school gauges or a blank piece of timber, that'll cost an extra \$12,300.

Advanced safety features that are standard on a new Toyota Corolla are split into two technology packs that cost \$10,300 or \$16,200.

For the complete safety suite buyers need to shell out \$26,500 for both -- as much as the aforementioned Corolla.

Bentley says buyers prefer to have the choice of leather and woodgrain at no extra charge rather than advanced safety tech as standard.

Then again, what else can they say when the cheapest car in sister brand Volkswagen's range, the \$18,990 Polo hatch, has AEB standard?

Bentley's view on safety may be outdated but the rest of

the car has a fresh approach. The only carryover part is the glovebox handle.

The all-aluminium body is longer, wider and sleeker than before.

There are 82 LEDs in each headlight, the housings etched with grooves inspired by crystal glasses.

Under the stretched bonnet is the VW Group's 404kW/770Nm twin turbo 4.0-litre petrol V8.

You can also choose the epic 467kW/900Nm 6.0-litre twin-turbo W12, tested here, priced at \$439,000 for the coupe and \$483,400 for the convertible.

It's paired to an eight-speed twin-clutch auto and the all-wheel-drive hardware sends power primarily to the rear wheels.

The clean sheet of paper has enabled Bentley to create a slightly larger cabin, although the back seat is still better suited to suitcases rather than passengers.

The interior is a mix of modern technology, with a digital

instrument display and 12-inch wide touchscreen, and old school chrome, timber and leather.

Each car has 2.8 km of thread for more than 310,000 stitches in the seats and trim.

The new Continental GT comes into its own, though, on an open road.

The hand-assembled W12 has phenomenal grunt and makes light work of the car's 2244kg mass.

Acceleration for a 2.24 tonne lump is mind-bending, with a claimed 0 to 100km/h time of 3.7 seconds.

There's some debate about whether the switch to a twin-clutch auto was the right move.

Big powerful engines customarily work best with torque converter autos but Bentley changed to a twin-clutch because non-buyers apparently wanted a more sporty transmission.

Bentley has done a fair job of smoothing the shifts to make it feel like a conventional auto around town, but it does trip

up occasionally when braking quickly or easing off the accelerator after a short burst.

Adaptive air suspension is standard. Comfort over bumps on the standard 21-inch rims and optional 22s is pretty good given the low profile tyres.

Grip in corners is profound and the brakes, among the largest fitted to a production car, are as impressive as the acceleration.

The best way to describe it: Rolls-Royce luxury meets Porsche performance.

Minor complaints: the steering can feel vague in comfort mode and the exhaust is too quiet, even in sport mode.

Most mega luxury car buyers may prefer to travel incognito but I reckon there will still be plenty who want to make a grand entrance. Or departure.

By Joshua Dowling

THINGS WE LIKE

- ✓ Astonishingly quick for a 2.2-tonne car
- ✓ Ample grip and big brakes
- ✓ Comfortable over bumps despite low profile rubber
- ✓ Absolutely luxurious interior
- ✓ Looks the business

THINGS YOU MIGHT NOT LIKE

- ✗ Long list of expensive options, including safety aids that ought to be standard
- ✗ Steering and transmission a bit so-so in certain conditions
- ✗ Emits enough CO2 to warm the planet all by itself
- ✗ Short warranty

SPEX (W12 Coupe)

- Made in England
- 6.0-litre twin turbopetrol W12/eight-speed dual clutch/all-wheel drive
- 467kW of power from 5000-6000rpm/900Nm of torque from 1350-4500rpm
- 0-100km/h in 3.7 seconds (claimed)
- 9.5L/100km highway; 16.7L/100km city; 98 octane; CO2 emissions are 278gkm
- Warranty: Three years/unlimited km
- Standard: Six airbags, stability control, blind spot monitoring, lane departure alert, adaptive cruise, camera, Bluetooth, navigation, voice control, leather upholstery, 21-inch alloy wheels, keyless entry and starting, automatic parking, air suspension
- Redbook future values: 3yr: 54%; 5yr: 40%

compare with ...

Mercedes-Benz S65 AMG coupe, Porsche Panamera Turbo, BMW M850i



STARS ★★★★★

- Safety **Not yet tested**
- Performance ★★★★★
- Handling ★★★★★
- Quality and reliability ★★★★★
- Comfort and refinement ★★★★★
- Value for money ★★★★★
- Overall** ★★★★★

BENTLEY BENTAYGA FROM \$364,800



If you need proof the world has gone mad for SUVs, look no further. Bentley's Bentayga is one of the most extreme and expensive of the breed.

The Bentayga is based on the Audi Q7/Q8, with Bentley acquired by Germany's Volkswagen-Audi Group in 1998.

The range opens with the 404kW 4.0-litre twin turbopetrol V8 Sport, at \$364,800.

Audi's top of the range RS Q8, with the same engine tuned for 441kW, costs \$208,500.

The Bentayga buyer pays an extra \$156,300 for the Bentley badge.

Unique to Bentayga is a 467kW/900Nm, 6.0-litre twin turbopetrol W12 Speed, priced at \$501,800.

A Breitling clock on the dash costs an extra \$8122. There is already a digital clock in the car's instrument display. Bentley claims Breitling can only build four of these particular in-car clocks each year. Maybe they're still learning ...

Other options include a \$4447 picnic table set and \$30,852

carbon ceramic brakes.

You can design your own colour scheme for your Bentayga, with exterior satin paint, in any colour your like, adding just \$69,312.

Radar cruise control is part of a \$16,816 "touring" pack, while shag pile floor mats are \$2066. A cigarette lighter is \$1251. It's all a bit ridiculous, really.

You can order your Bentayga as a four- or five-seater.

Either way, you get the full London gentleman's club lounge treatment with quilted leather upholstery — the finest bull hides, apparently, sourced only from cool climates (no sweat stains ...), naturally tanned and never overprinted.

It also includes 22-way adjustable front seats with a six-mode massage system, highly polished metal on the dash, centre console and doors, and your choice of seven different timber veneers.

The twin-turbo 6.0-litre W12 uses two V6s mounted back to back in the shape of a W rather

than a V.

Paired with an eight-speed automatic transmission and all-wheel drive, it's one of the key reasons Bentley can move 2.4 tonnes rather quickly.

Bentayga has a claimed top speed of 301km/h, making it the world's fastest SUV. For now ...

We tested Bentley's claimed 0 to 100km/h time of 4.1 seconds and were gobsmacked when our timing equipment flashed up with 4.2 seconds. That's comparable with the Porsche Cayenne Turbo S.

Funny thing is, the Bentayga does not feel particularly fast. Layers of sound-deadening make the whole experience almost hush quiet, and the smoothness of the engine means the power doesn't build like a crescendo; it's instantaneous.

The next surprise that defies the senses is the Bentayga's razor-sharp cornering ability — for a 2.4-tonne SUV, that is.



The massive 22-inch wheels wrapped in sticky Pirelli P Zero tyres work wonders, as does the well-sorted air suspension.

Downsides? There is still a question mark about reliability on any vehicle made by Volkswagen which, in the end, this is.

Our test car, a pre-production model, had an error warning light for the suspension but we were assured nothing was wrong and it drove OK.

If it's any consolation, customers get free business-class travel to their destination if the car breaks down under warranty.

I went into the Bentley Bentayga with low expectations and came away dumbfounded by its breadth of capability — with the exception of actually taking it off-road. It only has a space-saver spare.

For all its merits, however, you can't rationalise such an insane price. And as for the options, well, if you have so much money that the concept of value is entirely meaningless, go right ahead.

By Joshua Dowling

THINGS WE LIKE

- ✓ Agile handling for such a huge beast
- ✓ Awesome acceleration
- ✓ Luxurious massage seats with cooling and heating

THINGS YOU MIGHT NOT LIKE

- ✗ The price is absurd
- ✗ No full-size spare
- ✗ Stodgy, old-school design
- ✗ It's a VW, so reliability could be iffy

SPEX (W12)

- Made in England
- 6.0-litre twin turbopetrol W12/eight-speed automatic/all-wheel drive
- 447kW of power at 5250rpm/900Nm of torque from 1250-4500rpm
- 0-100km/h in 4.1 seconds (claimed)
- 9.6L/100km highway; 19.0L/100km city; 98 octane premium; CO₂ emissions are 296g/km; fuel tank 85 litres
- Warranty: Three years/unlimited kilometres
- Max towing weight 3500kg
- Standard: Stability control, six airbags, blind spot monitoring, 21-inch alloys, heated and cooled seats with massage function, leather, sunroof, Bluetooth, navigation, tri-zone air
- Redbook future values: 3yr: 51%; 5yr: 38%

STARS ★★★★★

- Safety **Not yet tested**
- Performance ★★★★★
- Handling ★★★★★
- Quality and reliability ★★★★★
- Comfort and refinement ★★★★★
- Value for money ★★★★★
- Overall** ★★★★★

compare with ...

Audi Q7/Q8, Porsche Cayenne Turbo, Range Rover Autobiography



BMW's 2011-2019 One Series was the last rear wheel drive hatchback on the market. The 2021 118i, tested here, uses the same body architecture and front wheel drivetrain as the five door Mini (a brand owned by BMW) and the X1/X2 small SUVs.

It's priced at \$47,900.

That's big money for a 1.5-litre hatchback with a mere 103kW of power. A Toyota Corolla, with 125kW up front, can be had for around \$25,000. The Mini Cooper five door – same car, different box, remember – costs around \$34,000.

The 128ti, also front-wheel drive, with a 180kW 2.0-litre turbopetrol, is \$56,900.

The M135i xDrive Pure, at \$65,900, runs a 225kW 2.0-litre turbopetrol, matched with an all-wheel drivetrain. Another \$5000 buys more frills.

Climb into the 118i and your money appears well spent. There's no whiff of poverty pack here. An elegant, minimalist dash, digital dials, quality, soft touch materials, metallic trim and mood lighting give the 118i's cabin the same

ultra-modern, haute couture chic as BMW's premium models.

M Sport gear also includes cloth upholstered, sports front seats that offer all-day comfort and support, plus the fattest-rimmed steering wheel in the business – an affectation this car could well do without.

BMW's iDrive 7 infotainment is slick and graphically stunning, but more complex and less intuitive than previous versions. Voice control was hit and miss in our test car.

BMW fits M Sport suspension, which in concert with runflat tyres makes the ride too firm and unforgiving. It's illogical that the car rides like a hot hatch yet offers shopping trolley performance.

Front wheel drive yields greater space in the back seat where adults now enjoy easy access and decent legroom. Boot volume increases marginally.

People who can't park will love the 118i. Automatic reverse and parallel parking is standard,

and Reversing Assistant will automatically reverse the car up to 50 metres, steering along the same line you used to drive it forward into the space.

Autonomous emergency braking operates only at speeds up to 80km/h. ANCAP tests rated the One's lane keep assist effectiveness as marginal due to its failure to intervene in critical emergency scenarios.

BMW's 1.5-litre turbo triple is a likeable little slugger, tuned for tractability, refinement and frugality.

It gets the One off the line smartly and pulls the higher gears with ease.

This delivers outstanding fuel efficiency: 4-5L/100km on the highway and 6-8L/100km in town, where auto stop/start helps the cause. Restarts, though, are slow and clunky. I'd had enough after the first half dozen or so and turned it off.

On the move, the seven-speed dual clutch transmission's shifts

are quick, smooth and timely. Sport mode goes looking for upper midrange and top end power that isn't there.

In Eco and Comfort modes, the steering, though sharp, is overassisted, dead on centre at freeway speeds and imprecise. Very un-BMW. Sport mode adds weight and accuracy, but the wheel remains numb.

The 118i darts eagerly into a corner, is well balanced when changing direction and planted on poor surfaces.

That said, it's nothing special, just another competent, tidy, front wheel drive hatchback with sporty pretensions.

A Golf, Mazda3, Corolla or Ford Focus will stay with it on a tight, winding road. Easily.

BMW spent several decades pushing the line that a rear wheel drive is the "Ultimate Driving Machine" and the 118i is proof they were telling the truth.

THINGS WE LIKE

- ✓ Beautiful cabin
- ✓ Much more interior space than previous model
- ✓ Tractable, refined, frugal 1.5-litre engine
- ✓ Great fuel economy
- ✓ Supportive driver's seat

THINGS YOU MIGHT NOT LIKE

- ✗ Overpriced compared with rivals
- ✗ Short warranty
- ✗ Light on for safety features
- ✗ Hard ride
- ✗ Dead steering
- ✗ Slow, clunky auto stop/start

SPEX (118i)

- Made in Germany
- 1.5-litre three cylinder turbopetrol/seven-speed dual clutch automatic/front-wheel drive
- 103kW of power from 4600-6500rpm/220Nm of torque from 1480-4200rpm
- 0-100km/h in 8.5 seconds (claimed)
- 5.3L/100km highway; 7.0L/100km city; 95 octane premium; CO2 emissions are 135g/km
- Warranty: Three years/unlimited km
- Standard: Six airbags, stability control, low speed AEB, blind spot monitoring, head-up display, lane keeping, rear cross traffic alert, digital instruments, iDrive, Apple CarPlay, wireless phone charging, automatic parking, LED headlights, sports seats, 18-inch alloys
- Redbook future values: 3yr: 52%; 5yr: 35%

STARS ★★★★★

- Performance ★★★★★
- Handling ★★★★★
- Quality and reliability ★★★★★
- Comfort and refinement ★★★★★
- Value for money ★★★★★
- Overall** ★★★★★



compare with ...

Audi A1, Ford Focus, Hyundai i30, Mercedes A Class, Mazda3, Mini Cooper, Toyota Corolla, VW Golf



BMW M2 FROM \$102,900



BMW's M division cars have been somewhat hit and miss in recent years — epic on a track, but not so enjoyable in day-to-day driving, where their overreliance on electronics produces a remote, uninvolved driving experience amplified by artificially weighted steering, constipated twin-clutch gearboxes and a frustrating inability to get power to the ground.

Well, BMW has certainly seen and remedied the errors of its ways with the M2.

The M2 Competition, tested here is priced at \$102,900.

A six-speed manual is standard; a seven-speed twin clutch M-DCT gearbox adds \$7000.

The equipment list is extensive and includes electrically adjustable heated seats, leather/Alcantara upholstery, 12 speaker Harman Kardon audio and adaptive headlights.

The M2 is not exactly cheap — the Competition is about \$8000 dearer than the Mercedes A45 AMG S — but it's still the most affordable model in the BMW M range. And, quite possibly, also the best.

At last, here is an M model in which you can access all of its performance.

The M2 gets the twin turbocharger version of the S55 3.0-litre in-line six-cylinder found in the F82 M4, with 302kW and 550Nm of torque and an upgraded chassis to match.

The M2 engine loses 29kW compared with the M4, but torque is the same.

BMW claims a 0-100km/h time of 4.2 seconds for the Competition (4.0 CS), which is just 0.2 seconds slower than the M4 Competition and 0.3 slower than Mercedes'

claim for the A45 AMG.

Steering, accelerator, transmission and stability control responsiveness can be adjusted to individual preferences and accessed via M1 or M2 buttons on the wheel.

Performance-car makers talk breathlessly about weight distribution even though they could be telling us a pile of bunkum.

But the M2 is the first car in which I could truly feel what they were talking about.

With a 50:50 split, it's like a giant sled with a lot of grip and a lot of power.

It gels superbly with the precise steering.

Go too hot into a corner and you can feel it start to run wide long before you're in any serious trouble.

Back off the throttle just a

fraction and the nose tucks in immediately without upsetting the rear of the car. It's beautiful.

The brakes are super-sensitive in stop-start traffic, but they're absolutely glorious when you need them most.

M Sport seats are snug and adjust every which way.

The faux carbon fibre weave in the trim on the doors and dash makes you want to run your fingers over the texture.

If I were to be nit-picky, it needs a bigger digital speed display, the sun visors need to extend to stop side glare on the long doors, radar cruise control would help take the grind out of long trips and automatic emergency braking works only at low speeds.

If they're the harshest criticisms I can come up with, it's safe to say the BMW M2 is close to performance car perfection. Insert "future classic" cliché here.

By Joshua Dowling

THINGS WE LIKE

- ✓ You can use all the power you have paid for
- ✓ Superb balance and mind-boggling grip
- ✓ Precise steering
- ✓ Looks like a real M car
- ✓ The price is right

THINGS YOU MIGHT NOT LIKE

- ✗ Digital speed display is too small
- ✗ Needs longer sun visors to block side glare
- ✗ No automatic emergency braking or radar cruise control

SPEX (Competition DCT)

- Made in Germany
- 3.0-litre six-cylinder turbopetrol/seven-speed DCT/rear-wheel drive
- 302kW of power from 5250-7000rpm/550Nm of torque from 2350-5200rpm
- 0-100km/h in 4.2 seconds (claimed)
- 9.2L/100km combined; 98 octane premium; CO₂ emissions are 209g/km
- Warranty: Three years/unlimited kilometres
- Standard: Six airbags, stability control, Bluetooth with voice control, navigation, digital radio, rear camera, mechanical limited slip differential, bi-xenon headlights, leather upholstery, 19-inch alloys with 245/35 front and 265/35 rear tyres, tyre pressure monitoring, alarm
- Redbook future values: 3yr: 56%; 5yr: 41%



STARS ★★★★★

- Safety: Not yet tested
- Performance: ★★★★★
- Handling: ★★★★★
- Quality and reliability: ★★★★★
- Comfort and refinement: ★★★★★
- Value for money: ★★★★★
- Overall: ★★★★★

compare with ...

Audi RS3, Mercedes-Benz A45 AMG, Porsche Cayman, Toyota Supra

BMW 3 SERIES FROM \$70,900



BMW 3 Series prices start at \$70,900 for the 135kW/300Nm 2.0-litre turbopetrol 320i, with a standard eight-speed automatic. It's available in M Sport or Luxury Line specification.

The 330i sedan is \$77,900. The 330i Touring is \$81,900. Both are also available in M Sport or Luxury Line trim.

Up front is a 2.0-litre turbopetrol with 190kW and 400Nm, sufficient to launch the sedan's lithe 1433kg to 100km/h in a claimed 5.8 seconds.

The 330e plug-in hybrid sedan, with a claimed electric-only range of up to 60km, is \$84,900.

The M340i xDrive, with BMW's signature 3.0-litre turbo straight six tuned for 285kW/500Nm, plus all-wheel drive, is \$111,900. The poverty pack Pure is \$101,900.

The 4 Series coupe starts at \$71,900 for the 420i; the 430i is \$90,900 and the M440i xDrive, with the 285kW six, is \$118,900.

Convertibles are \$89,900, \$107,900 and \$135,900 respectively.

The 330i M Sport is the pick of the range and shapes up as a no-options required performance drive straight out of the box.

Standard are adaptive M suspension with adjustable dampers and a 10mm lower ride height, M Sport brakes and 19-inch M alloys, shod with mixed size – 225/40 front; 255/35 rear – Pirelli PZero tyres.

It's seriously deluxe in the 330i's cabin, with beautiful Vernasca leather-upholstered, power-adjustable sports seats, dark rooflining, textured aluminium trim, an all-digital, configurable 12.3 inch instrument panel, iDrive 7.0, head-up display, wireless phone charging and smartphone-activated locking and unlocking.

The ride harshness of previous Threes on runflat tyres has been banished. The new model's Comfort setting is exactly that, with much improved absorbency at low speeds. Sport works well on the open road, with a firmer though still exceptionally compliant ride quality.

BMW owners will immediately feel at home in the Three's signature twin cockpit, sporty

driving position and firm, supportive seating.

Back seat passengers will be happier with lots more legroom. In this regard the new Three feels almost a big as a Five Series. At 480 litres, the boot is large by class standards.

BMW still has no autonomous emergency braking on the base 320 models. Unbelievable.

The 330i is an immensely capable, satisfying drive.

Most importantly, it talks to you as a BMW sports sedan should, with natural, unfiltered feedback rather than digitally-simulated sensations.

At all times the car responds precisely and predictably to your inputs, even as its dynamic limits – which far exceed legal ones – are approached in Sport and Sport+ modes, which firm up the suspension and add weight to the steering.

If the Pirellis let go mid-corner, you have obviously made several grave errors of judgement.



The steering in particular is a highlight. Sharp, tactile and intuitive, more than any other aspect of the car it shows that BMW has rediscovered the Three's driver-first focus.

With 400Nm of torque available from 1550rpm, the 2.0-litre turbo launches strongly, with zero lag.

An urgent, muscular delivery begins in the lower midrange and builds in potency en route to a sparkling 7000rpm.

In Eco and Comfort modes, the 2.0-litre also returns great fuel economy for such a powerful engine. It will do fives on the highway at a steady 100km/h and single figures in town, assisted by automatic stop/start.

The Ultimate Driving Machine is back, and highly recommended.

THINGS WE LIKE

- ✓ Great value
- ✓ Responsive, powerful, refined 2.0-litre turbo
- ✓ Great fuel economy
- ✓ Superb steering and handling
- ✓ Spacious, comfortable cabin
- ✓ No options required

THINGS YOU MIGHT NOT LIKE

- ✗ Short warranty
- ✗ No AEB on base model
- ✗ Voice control gets it wrong too often
- ✗ iDrive isn't as intuitive as it was
- ✗ Super fat steering wheel rim is a bit silly

SPEX (330i M Sport)

- Made in Germany
- 2.0-litre four cylinder turbopetrol/eight-speed automatic/rear-wheel drive
- 190kW of power from 5000-6500rpm/400Nm of torque from 1550-4400rpm
- 0-100km/h in 5.8 seconds (claimed)
- 5.2L/100km highway; 7.7L/100km city; 95 octane premium; CO2 emissions are 139gkm
- Warranty: Three years/unlimited km
- Standard: Eight airbags, stability control, AEB, adaptive cruise, lane keeping, blind spot monitoring, rear cross traffic alert, 360 degree cameras, speed limit alert, leather upholstery, sports seats, dual zone air, navigation, Apple CarPlay, voice control, wireless phone charging, keyless entry and starting, adaptive LED headlights.
- Redbook future values: 3yr: 53%; 5yr: 37%

STARS ★★★★★

- Safety
Not yet tested
- Performance
★★★★★
- Handling
★★★★★
- Quality and reliability
★★★★★
- Comfort and refinement
★★★★★
- Value for money
★★★★★
- Overall
★★★★★

compare with ...

Alfa Romeo Giulia, Audi A4, Lexus IS, Mercedes C Class, Volvo S/V60



BMW 5 SERIES FROM \$99,900



BMW's seventh-generation 5 Series range opens with the \$99,900 520i, with a 135kW/290Nm 2.0-litre turbopetrol four, matched with an eight-speed automatic. At The \$119,900 530i, tested here, has a 185kW/350Nm 2.0-litre turbopetrol four.

Six cylinder power starts with the \$125,900 530d, with a 195kW/620Nm 3.0-litre turbodiesel straight six.

The 530e, a 2.0-litre petrol-electric plug-in hybrid that can travel up to 67km on electricity alone, is \$122,900.

The 390kW/750Nm, 4.4-litre twin-turbo V8 M550i xDrive Pure is \$139,900, or \$154,900 without the Pure tag but with more gear. This model gets an all-wheel drivetrain.

The 460kW/750Nm 4.4-litre V8 M5 Competition, also with all-wheel drive, costs \$246,900. The 467kW M5 CS is \$274,900.

Every model in the 5 Series line-up comes standard with the suite of radar- and camera-reliant aids BMW calls Driving Assistant Plus. Key features include active cruise

control and lane-keeping. These deliver a level of semi-autonomous driving much like the equivalent systems included under Mercedes' Intelligent Drive umbrella. The BMW's active cruise is fine, but its lane-keeping can annoy with its inconsistent ability to read road markings, just like the E-Class.

Also standard in all Australian-market 5 Series is a package of parking aids, a head-up display and BMW's Connected Drive bundle of online services, app integration and more.

A mid-2020 update included a wider ratio spread for the eight-speed automatic, more efficient fuel injection on petrol engines and a facelift.

The interior is roomy and inviting. Beautifully made and fragrantly luxurious, it's also quite user-friendly.

Instruments are now fully digital on a 12.3 inch screen, still mimicking a traditional twin dial analogue layout and

with different information and graphics depending upon the drive mode selected.

There's comfort to go with the space, too, although the 5 Series' rear seats don't seem quite as comfortable as the E-Class's. The BMW's interior is also impressively quiet and the 530L boot is bigger than ever.

The 5 Series combines a smooth ride with quite outstanding handling. The BMW's electric-assisted steering is excellent.

Every model except the base 520i comes with standard adaptive dampers, which allow the driver to choose exceptionally sharp handling, at some cost to ride comfort, or alter the mix in a more forgiving direction.

The 530i 2.0-litre's delivery is broad, smooth and strong, except in Eco Pro mode, which is sluggish and will give you a true understanding of turbo lag.

Still, Eco Pro does what it says and can return remarkably low

fuel consumption numbers for a car of this size. Around town, where automatic stop start helps the cause, the 530i uses 8-10 litres per 100 kilometres.

At a steady 100km/h the 2.0-litre can get close to five litres per 100 kilometres.

Sport mode puts you into an entirely different machine. The engine becomes much more lively and responsive all the way from idle to its 6700rpm redline, as does the transmission, which offers crisp, well-timed shifts if you leave it to its own devices, or similarly effective manual operation if you use the paddles on the wheel.

The G30 BMW 5 Series is the class leader. The 530i in particular is a bargain, a superb drive, and all the luxury car you could ever need.

THINGS WE LIKE

- ✓ Classy interior ambience
- ✓ Instrument panel user-friendliness
- ✓ Sleek exterior design
- ✓ Adaptive suspension delivers excellent dynamics and a comfortable ride
- ✓ Superb 3.0-litre petrol six

THINGS YOU MIGHT NOT LIKE

- ✗ Like the E-Class, you wonder if some of the tech is really necessary or just a gimmick
- ✗ Rear seat comfort isn't great
- ✗ Run-flat tyres
- ✗ Weak resale values

SPEX (530i)

- Made in Germany
- 2.0-litre turbopetrol four/eight-speed automatic/rear-wheel drive
- 185kW of power from 5200-6500rpm/350Nm of torque from 1450-4800rpm
- 0-100km/h in 6.2 seconds (claimed)
- Warranty: Three years/unlimited kilometres
- 5.5L/100km highway; 7.5L/100km city; 95 octane premium; CO₂ emissions are 141g/km
- Standard: Six airbags, stability control, adaptive suspension, Driver Assistant Plus with radar cruise, automatic emergency braking and cross traffic warning, head up display, Nappa leather upholstery, automatic dual zone air, digital instruments, Connected Drive, iDrive6, 12.3 inch infotainment touchscreen, navigation, Bluetooth for two smartphones, digital radio, 19-inch alloy wheels
- Redbook future values: 3yr: 45%; 5yr: 32%

STARS ★★★★★

- Safety ★★★★★ ANCAP
- Performance ★★★★★
- Handling ★★★★★
- Quality and reliability ★★★★★
- Comfort and refinement ★★★★★
- Value for money ★★★★★
- Overall** ★★★★★



compare with ...

Audi A6, Jaguar XF, Mercedes E-Class



The second-generation BMW X1 shares much of its core technology, including its basic structure, with the latest versions of the Mini, a brand that is 100 percent owned by BMW.

The range opens with the sDrive 18i, at \$47,900. sDrive18d is \$53,900, sDrive20i is \$55,900 and the xDrive25i is \$66,900.

Popular sDrive versions are front-wheel drive instead of rear-wheel drive. xDrive variants use an all-wheel drivetrain.

So the latest X1 may be technically heretical in the eyes of long-term BMW loyalists, but it's likely that compact SUV buyers will embrace it. The advantages of the new direction are plain to see, especially inside the car.

Penned by young, Sydney-born designer Calvin Luk, the second-generation X1 is better proportioned and with the space-efficient crossways engine/front-wheel-drive layout, BMW's smallest SUV now has a much more comfortable, bright and spacious interior than the previous model did.

As in the 2 Series Active Tourer, the tall body means high seating and ample headroom in all five positions. Raising the seats has also benefited legroom.

The standard 40:20:40 split bench in the rear is very spacious.

At the same time, the X1's cargo bay has a little more than 500 litres behind its second-row seat, so the new BMW has much more space than both its main rivals, the Audi Q3 and Mercedes-Benz GLA.

Power is provided by BMW's family of modular engines.

The front-drive sDrive18i runs a 100kW 1.5-litre three-cylinder turbopetrol.

The 18d and 20i have 110kW turbodiesel and 141kW turbopetrol engines respectively, while the all-wheel-drive xDrive 25i gets 170kW 2.0-litre turbopetrol power.

All engines are teamed exclusively with an eight-speed automatic.

BMW's 1.5-litre turbo triple is a

likeable, frugal engine with strong, usable performance for everyday use, and if most of your driving is in the city then it's the obvious engine of choice, certainly over the 2.0-litre turbodiesel.

Although a little grumbly at low revs, the top-spec 2.0-litre turbopetrol four is eager to please, with a pleasantly raspy note when pushed. At the top end, it doesn't quite feel like the full 170kW worth but it is exceptionally frugal. The eight-speed auto cooperates well with the engine, shifting slickly and at the right time.

The BMW's handling in all-wheel-drive models is pleasantly predictable and the electric-assist steering guides the X1 with precision. Drive goes to the front wheels, with the rears engaged only when required.

Outright dynamic ability, especially in tighter corners, isn't quite up to the very high standard of the previous model, particularly in the front-wheel-

drive versions. The taller body rolls more, the steering is less tactile and the front driver isn't quite as well balanced either.

The optional Dynamic Damper Control system fitted to the test car was very soft in Comfort mode — perhaps too soft for comfort on poor-quality country roads in Australia.

Selecting Sport brought an improvement in discipline and tautness while maintaining excellent ride comfort.

This class is now a very close call. Compare X1 with the Mercedes-Benz GLA, Mini Countryman and Volvo XC40, plus the much cheaper, but arguably just as capable, Skoda Kamiq and Volkswagen Tiguan before making your final decision.

By John Carey

THINGS WE LIKE

- ✓ Nicely proportioned exterior design
- ✓ Heaps of interior space
- ✓ Good materials, fit and finish quality
- ✓ Secure, predictable handling
- ✓ Strong performance of 25i

THINGS YOU MIGHT NOT LIKE

- ✗ Short warranty
- ✗ Some work needed on optional adjustable dampers
- ✗ Base models are pricey

SPEX (xDrive 25i)

- Made in Germany
- 2.0-litre turbopetrol four-cylinder/eight-speed automatic/all-wheel drive
- 170kW of power at 5000–6000rpm/350Nm of torque from 1250–4500rpm
- 0–100km/h in 6.5 seconds (claimed)
- Max towing weight 2000kg (only 80kg max towball download, though)
- Warranty: Three years/unlimited kilometres
- 5.9L/100km highway; 8.0L/100km city; 95 octane premium; CO₂ emissions are 151g/km, fuel tank is 61 litres
- Standard: Six airbags, stability control, dual zone air, low speed automatic emergency braking, lane departure warning, camera, rear parking sensors, rain sensing wipers, iDrive with 10.25-inch display, navigation, voice activation, wireless phone charging, leather, head-up display, 19-inch alloy wheels.
- Redbook future values: 3yr: 56%; 5yr: 41%

STARS ★★★★★

- Safety ★★★★★ ANCAP
- Performance ★★★★★
- Handling ★★★★★
- Quality and reliability ★★★★★
- Comfort and refinement ★★★★★
- Value for money ★★★★★
- Overall** ★★★★★



compare with ...

Audi Q3, Mini Countryman, Mercedes GLA, Skoda Kamiq, Volvo XC40, VW TRoc and Tiguan

BMW X3 FROM \$71,900



With the arrival of the third-generation X3, BMW once again has a competitive player in the premium medium-SUV class. The 2021 X3 has a roomier and much more attractive interior, plus better ride comfort and handling.

The X3 range opens at \$68,900 with the sDrive 20i. It runs BMW's base 2.0-litre turbopetrol four, with 135kW of power, matched with an eight-speed automatic and rear-wheel drive. It averages a claimed 7.4L/100km.

All-wheel drive variants open with the the \$74,900 X3 20d. It has a 140kW 2.0-litre turbodiesel four, claimed to average just 5.7L/100km. The \$85,900 X3 30i runs the 2.0-litre turbopetrol four tuned for 185kW, which returns 7.6L/100km, while the \$92,900 X3 30d has a 3.0-litre turbodiesel in-line six. It averages a claimed 6.0L/100km.

The X3 M40i, priced at \$113,900, runs a 265kW

3.0-litre in-line turbopetrol six and a stiffer suspension.

X4 models, with a coupe-style rear end and extra equipment, include the 20i at \$83,900, the 30i at \$93,900 and the M40i at \$121,900.

The 2.0-litre turbodiesel isn't available in the X4.

The first full-house M models in the X3 range, the X3M Competition and X4M Competition, powered by the same 3.0-litre straight six turbo tweaked for 353kW of power and 600Nm of torque, cost \$157,900 and \$164,900 respectively.

They go up against Porsche's Macan Turbo, Alfa's Stelvio Quadrifoglio and Jaguar's F-Pace SVR.

BMW's 2.0-litre turbodiesel will chug around all day on a feathered throttle in the higher gears, returning 8-9L/100km in

town using Eco Pro mode and as little as 5L/100km on the highway.

It makes the usual gravelly diesel noises under acceleration, but they're very faint and in cruise mode it's as silent as a petrol engine.

With 400Nm of torque, and a respectable 140kW of power, it pulls strongly across the bottom end and midrange then, surprisingly, kicks even harder from 3000-4000rpm. Redline is 5500rpm, but you'll never go there.

It's actually quicker than the 2.0-litre turbopetrol X3, clocking a rapid (by four cylinder oiler standards) eight seconds for the 0-100km/h trip.

Base model X3s aren't impressive handlers, feeling quite top heavy in corners, and with overassisted, imprecise steering. While the M40i is impressively quick and agile for an SUV, its

rigid ride is punishing on any road that's not perfectly smooth.

If you're shopping this class, it's worth noting that you don't have to spend the \$70,000-\$90,000 asked by BMW and other luxury German brands to get comparable, or better, ability, size and specification.

Land Rover's Discovery Sport offers more SUV for the money and can also, unlike the Germans, do off-road adventuring as well.

Alfa Romeo's beautiful, engaging and very capable Stelvio starts at \$65,900.

You can get into the Skoda Kodiaq, or VW's loaded Tiguan Highline, for \$50,000-\$55,000, while Subaru's outstanding Forester S can be had for around \$45,000.

An X3 30e plug-in hybrid, with a claimed electric-only range of up to 55km, is due shortly.

By John Carey

THINGS WE LIKE

- ✓ Sleek interior design
- ✓ Generous rear seat room
- ✓ Torquey, frugal engines
- ✓ Quietness and comfort

THINGS YOU MIGHT NOT LIKE

- ✗ Prices are getting up there
- ✗ Long options lists
- ✗ Stiff ride in M40i
- ✗ Handling and steering are pretty ordinary in base models.

SPEX (30i)

- Made in the USA
- 2.0-litre four-cylinder turbopetrol/eight-speed auto/all-wheel drive
- 185kW of power at 5200rpm/350Nm of torque from 1450-4800rpm
- 0-100km/h in 6.3 seconds (claimed)
- 7.6L/100km combined; 95 octane premium; CO2 emissions are 174g/km
- Warranty: Three years/unlimited kilometres
- Standard: Six airbags, stability control, semi-autonomous Driving Assistant Plus, head-up display, surround view camera, rear parking sensors, swivelling LED headlights, 20-inch alloy wheels, leather upholstery, sports front seats, 10-inch infotainment screen, navigation, Bluetooth, digital radio, wireless phone charging, automatic emergency services calling
- Redbook future values: 3yr: 54%; 5yr: 39%

STARS ★★★★★

- Safety **Not yet tested**
- Performance ★★★★★
- Handling ★★★★★
- Quality and reliability ★★★★★
- Comfort and refinement ★★★★★
- Value for money ★★★★★
- Overall** ★★★★★



compare with ...

Alfa Stelvio, Audi Q5, Jaguar F Pace, LR Disco Sport, Mercedes GLC, VW Tiguan, Volvo XC60

BMW X5 FROM \$104,900



BMW's first X5, launched in 2000, immediately became the benchmark against which all other SUVs have since been judged.

This fourth generation opens with the 170kW/450Nm 2.0-litre four-cylinder turbodiesel/eight-speed automatic/all-wheel drive xDrive 25d, priced at \$104,900.

We're testing the xDrive 30d, the top selling variant with a 195kW/620Nm 3.0-litre straight six turbodiesel, priced at \$121,900.

The xDrive 40i, with a 250kW/450Nm turbopetrol six, is \$124,900, the xDrive 45e hybrid is \$135,900 and the M50i, with a 390kW/750Nm twin turbopetrol 4.4-litre V8 is \$157,900, or \$142,900 in Pure specification, with the same drivetrain but less bling.

The hotrod X5 M, with the V8 chipped for 460kW, is \$221,900.

This model expanded in all directions, notably in width and wheelbase. It's still a five seater, with a third row option.

Serious effort has gone into upgrading infotainment and

connectivity on this model, in response to sophisticated new interfaces from Audi and Mercedes. Live Cockpit Professional, as BMW calls it, includes digital instruments, the seventh iteration of iDrive, a built-in SIM card that accesses information and assistance services (and automatically downloads system updates), smartphone integration via the BMW Connected app.

You can lock and unlock the car simply by holding your smartphone close to the external door handles. When you place it in the phone tray, you can start the engine.

We can't tell you what the ride is like in standard form because our car's adaptive air suspension/21-inch alloy wheels/low profile tyres package was sourced entirely from the options list. As tested, the ride varied from plush in Comfort mode to predictably terse though still acceptably compliant in Sport.

Although X5's dash is beautifully designed and finished, the new infotainment is still to be thoroughly debugged and doesn't work as efficiently as it should.

Compared with Audi and Mercedes, BMW's digital instruments lack the same level of customisation, voice control is erratic and at times nonsensical in its response, gesture control is haphazard (as it is on rivals) and iDrive has become less intuitive. Relatively small dash vents also struggle to flow enough cooling air into the cabin on a 35-40 degree summer day, so you have to wind up the fan speed to gale force, which makes a lot of noise.

A plank-like rear bench is spacious enough, but the backrest is not adjustable and tall passengers sit lightly knees up. The boot, accessed via a horizontally split, power tailgate, is huge.

Active steering, stop and go adaptive cruise, 360 degrees/

helicopter view camera coverage and automatic parking are included in a comprehensive safety package.

It's a toss up between X5 and the Porsche Cayenne for best in class dynamics. The BMW is a tight, responsive wagon that can be punted along a winding road – sealed or dirt -- with complete composure and control at speeds that would confound lesser SUVs. Serious off roading is beyond its brief, though.

BMW's 3.0-litre turbodiesel six offers immediate throttle response, serious grunt from idle to redline, outstanding refinement and close to four-cylinder fuel efficiency. The eight speed automatic works so smoothly and efficiently you don't even notice it.

Compare X5 with the new Mercedes GLE, Porsche Cayenne, Range Rover Sport and VW's bargain-priced Touareg before you make a decision.

THINGS WE LIKE

- ✓ Superb turbodiesel engine
- ✓ Dynamics that belie its size and weight
- ✓ Reasonably priced
- ✓ Big cabin and boot
- ✓ Well equipped and no options required

THINGS YOU MIGHT NOT LIKE

- ✗ Infotainment needs more work
- ✗ Air conditioning doesn't flow enough cool air into the cabin on a hot day
- ✗ Short warranty
- ✗ Flat, unsupportive rear bench
- ✗ Runflat tyres

SPEX

- Made in the USA
- 3.0-litre turbodiesel six/eight-speed automatic/all-wheel drive
- 195kW of power at 4000rpm/620Nm of torque from 2000-2500rpm
- 0-100km/h in 6.5 seconds (claimed)
- 7.0L/100km highway; 7.6L/100km city; CO2 emissions are 189gkm; fuel tank 80 litres
- Max towing weight 1900kg
- Standard: Seven airbags, AEB, adaptive cruise, 360 degree cameras, adaptive LED headlights, automatic high beams, 20-inch alloys with runflat tyres (plus a space saver spare), adaptive suspension dampers, a sunroof, power-operated, hands-free tailgate, leather upholstery, power adjustable sports seats.
- Redbook future values: 3yr: 55%; 5yr: 45%

STARS ★★★★★

- Safety ★★★★★
- Performance ★★★★★
- Handling ★★★★★
- Quality and reliability ★★★★★
- Comfort and refinement ★★★★★
- Value for money ★★★★★
- Overall** ★★★★★



compare with ...

Mercedes GLE, Porsche Cayenne, Range Rover Sport, VW Touareg

BMW X7 FROM \$135,900



BMW's first full size seven-seat SUV, the X7 starts from \$135,900 for the 195kW/620Nm 3.0-litre turbodiesel six 30d, tested here. The 3.0-litre triple turbodiesel M50d, with 294kW and 760Nm, is \$181,900, as is the 390kW/750Nm 4.4-litre twin turbopetrol V8 M50i.

The X7 is the stretched, three-row version of the X5.

With the back two rows stowed the cargo floor is close to 2.1 metres in length. With the third row stowed there's more than one square metre of floor space. With all three rows of seats in place, there's still room for luggage, although it'll need to be piled high.

Compared to the X5, you get all this extra space and flexibility for a \$14,000 premium in 30d specification. In a less competitive era, BMW probably would have tried to leverage more out of buyers' wallets.

Standard fare includes four-zone air-conditioning, vents with temperature controls for the first two rows of seats, electric seat adjustment for all occupants,

and as many USB charging ports as there are seats.

Air vents and temperature control to the third row are an optional extra.

Perhaps a bigger sin of omission: curtain airbag coverage doesn't extend to the third-row seats, a highly unusual move for a premium brand that prides itself on its reputation for safety.

There are four ISOFIX child seat mounts (two in each of the second and third rows) and five top-tether points.

The three zone panorama glass roof help make the X7 feel massive. It's certainly wide at two metres (not including the side mirror) which makes it as broad as a Kenworth truck.

The driving position is as tall as a Range Rover's and higher than most rivals.

Cleverly, the infotainment system – with a 12.3-inch wide display – can be operated with gesture controls. Unlike other systems that attempt hand

movements to adjust volume or change tunes, this one works well.

The only downside is that BMW charges an annual subscription fee for Apple Car Play. It's standard on a \$20,000 Hyundai.

The digital widescreen dash display can be personalised and the speed sign recognition works well, including for school zones and roadworks.

Most mainstream brands now offer five-, six- or seven-year warranty coverage but Audi, BMW and Mercedes still only offer three years. BMW's up front servicing plans are good value, though.

On the road the X7 is surprisingly comfortable, despite runflat tyres.

I initially thought the BMW X7 was quiet and refined but it was in fact a touch noisier than the VW Touareg I had on test at the same time.

Most buyers might not notice but it's worth pointing out there are quieter full size SUVs available, if that's a priority.

It's very frugal for such a big wagon. Expect 10-12L/100km overall.

Acceleration is respectable for a car of this size and weight, although we couldn't quite match BMW's claim of 0 to 100km/h in 7.0 seconds using our precision timing equipment in perfectly cool conditions. Our best time was 7.2 seconds.

It's not meant to be a race car but the VW Touareg is faster and more responsive, hitting the same mark in a hot hatch-like 6.4 seconds.

Nevertheless, overall the BMW X7 is a genuinely impressive machine, albeit with a serious, and for some buyers, a deal-breaking flaw, in its lack of side airbag coverage for all rows of seats.

By Joshua Dowling

THINGS WE LIKE

- ✓ Frugal, strong turbodiesel
- ✓ Bold looks
- ✓ Acres of space for people and cargo
- ✓ Clever gesture control infotainment system
- ✓ High driving position
- ✓ Feels more nimble than physics ought to allow.

THINGS YOU MIGHT NOT LIKE

- ✗ Not as quiet or as refined as other SUVs in this class and price range
- ✗ Curtain airbags don't extend to the third row
- ✗ Three-year warranty is below market average
- ✗ Charging for Apple CarPlay is ridiculous

SPEX (30d)

- Made in the USA
- 3.0-litre turbodiesel six-cylinder/eight-speed automatic/all-wheel drive
- 195Nm of power at 4400rpm/ 620Nm of torque from 2000-2500rpm
- 0-100km/h in 7.2 seconds
- Combined fuel consumption 6.8L/100km; CO2 emissions are 178gkm; 80 litre tank
- Max towing weight: 2200kg
- Warranty: Three years/unlimited kilometres
- Standard: Seven airbags, stability control, autonomous emergency braking, adaptive cruise, lane keep assist, 360 degree camera, navigation, digital radio, leather upholstery, four zone air, 20 inch alloy wheels, power tailgate, seven seats, runflat tyres.
- Redbook future values: 3yr: 50%; 5yr: 34%

STARS ★★★★★

- Safety
Not yet tested
- Performance
★★★★☆
- Handling
★★★★☆
- Quality and reliability
★★★★☆
- Comfort and refinement
★★★★☆
- Value for money
★★★★☆
- Overall**
★★★★☆



compare with ...

Audi Q7, Mercedes GLE, Lexus RX, Range Rover Sport, VW Touareg

FERRARI ROMA FROM \$409,888



No tourist is likely to mistake Rome for Portofino, and Ferrari doesn't think its customers will have any problem either. Just as you don't go to Portofino to see the Colosseum, you won't buy the new Roma to enjoy open-air driving.

Back in 2017 Ferrari named its replacement for the California after an exquisite and expensive seaside village on the north-west coast of Italy.

Like its predecessor, the Portofino features a retractable hardtop. And that's something the Roma coupe obviously lacks.

Still, the two have a lot in common: rear-wheel drive, a front-mounted twin-turbo 3.9-litre V8, 2+2 seating and Italian good looks.

The Roma's exterior aims to evoke the flavour of la dolce vita, as Italians call the decadent late '50s and early '60s period immortalised in Fellini's famous film. With its long, low nose and softly sensual curves, the Roma indeed echoes the shapeliness of long-ago Ferraris.

There's nothing old-fashioned about the interior. Its steering wheel - including an oversensitive

touchpad controller - and high-resolution instrument screen are fresh from Ferrari's recent hybrid hypercar, the SF90 Stradale.

Separated by an angled centre console topped by a portrait-oriented touch-screen, Roma's front seats are near perfect for its Grand Tourer role.

While they don't grip hips and torso like those in Ferrari's sports cars, they adeptly combine comfort and support. For overall fit and finish the interior of the Roma is among the best Ferrari has ever produced.

The wheelbase of the Roma is an exact match for the Portofino, but Ferrari says 70 percent of the coupe's aluminium body is new. Its wider front and rear tracks are a sure indication the engineers were chasing better handling.

While the Roma has an improved version of Ferrari's wonderful twin-turbo 3.9-litre V8 and the company's new eight-speed double-clutch transmission (both have also gone into the updated Portofino M), the more important story is what they've done to improve dynamics.

The Roma is the first GT from Ferrari with the full compliment

of five manettino settings: Wet, Comfort, Sport, Race and ESC Off. It's also equipped with the latest generation of Ferrari's SSC (Side Slip Control), a chassis control technology previously offered only in the company's sports models.

The web of electronic vehicle dynamic control systems Ferrari weaves into its cars is tough to understand and even harder to describe... but practically flawless, and very easy to use.

From the driver's seat the electronic sophistication is invisible. What is obvious instead is that the Roma is a car with stellar performance, grip, steering and handling, all of it easily accessible.

The Ferrari's ride comfort is excellent for something that handles so brilliantly, but its transmission in Auto mode is painful at low speed. Its software selects the highest gear the engine will tolerate, which means droning in eighth gear at less than 1000rpm through town centres.

This is a deliberate choice, according to a Ferrari spokesperson, made to maximise the Roma's fuel efficiency. And blame the V8's overall lack of musicality on its new emission-

reducing particulate filters.

Still, the Roma is a car with a logical niche in Ferrari's line-up. It's more accomplished, more spirited and prettier - to most eyes - than the similarly priced Portofino M. And it's a coupe - the natural choice for those who want a traditional Ferrari.

By John Carey

THINGS WE LIKE

- ✓ Reasonably priced by Ferrari standards
- ✓ Beautiful exterior
- ✓ Cosy, high quality interior
- ✓ Great twin-turbo V8
- ✓ Handling and grip

THINGS YOU MIGHT NOT LIKE

- ✗ Transmission is clumsy in Auto mode
- ✗ Exhaust drone at low revs
- ✗ Oversensitive steering wheel touchpad

SPEX

- Made in Italy
- 3.9-litre V8 turbopetrol/eight-speed dual clutch gearbox/rear-wheel drive
- 456kW of power from 5750-7500rpm/760Nm of torque from 3000-5750rpm
- 0-100km/h in 3.4 seconds (claimed)
- 11.2L/100km combined; 98 octane premium; CO2 emissions are 246g/km
- Warranty: Three years/unlimited km
- Standard: Four airbags, stability control, leather/Alcantara upholstery, digital instruments, smartphone connectivity, digital radio, navigation, voice control, keyless entry and starting, alarm, parking sensors, dual zone air, 20-inch alloys
- Redbook future values: 3yr: 64%; 5yr: 53%

STARS ★★★★★

- Safety **Not tested**
- Performance ★★★★★
- Handling ★★★★★
- Quality and reliability ★★★★★
- Comfort and refinement ★★★★★
- Value for money ★★★★★
- Overall** ★★★★★



compare with ...

McLaren 570GT, Mercedes-AMG GT R, Porsche 911 Turbo



FERRARI 812 FROM \$613,888



No Ferrari road car can claim a longer line of descent than those with a high-revving V12 engine up front that drives the rear wheels. This was the layout of the very first road cars the company made in 1950 and the Ferrari-badged racers produced from 1947.

The latest in the Ferrari V12 line is the 812, released in 2017. It's priced at \$613,888 for the Superfast coupe. This is almost \$80,000 less than the car it replaced, the F12berlinetta.

The 812 GTS Spider is \$675,888.

The headline change was the 812's larger and more powerful V12 engine.

Ferrari's engineers increased the piston stroke of the F12berlinetta's 6.3L with a new crankshaft and made major improvements to the intake and fuel-injection systems.

In its new 6.5L capacity, the V12 wails to 8900rpm and delivers 588kW of power.

There are small improvements to Ferrari's speedy seven-speed double-clutch transmission, too, and major changes to the two-seater's chassis. The 812

Superfast adopts both electric assist for the steering and a rear-wheel steering system. It also has wider front tyres and the latest versions of Ferrari's interlinked chassis and drivetrain control software. The aim was to improve on the F12's already hugely impressive handling.

Inside is an all-new instrument panel that blends decently up-to-date infotainment tech with luscious leather and glinting metal. The 812 Superfast's exterior is equally new. Ferrari's aerodynamic engineers insisted on a higher tail than on the F12berlinetta, for reasons of stability, and fine-tuned the airflow around and through the 812 Superfast's multi-pierced bodywork.

So extraordinary are this car's limits that the only sensible place to push it is on a track. Handily, Ferrari has one of its own, the Fiorano Circuit, close by where the 812 Superfast is built in Maranello in Italy's Emilia-Romagna region.

Fiorano is a demanding little circuit. Its mix of high-speed kinks and tight curves is a real test of steering, handling, brakes and drivetrain.

The Superfast's speed and agility, grip and stability are, sometimes literally, breathtaking.

Ferrari's superbly integrated, brilliantly subtle electronic driver aids make it easy and safe to use everything the 812 Superfast has to give. The company claims a 0-100km/h time of 2.9 seconds, and it's believable, as is its claimed top speed of 340km/h.

Twist Ferrari's trademark, steering-wheel-mounted Manettino switch from track-sharp Race mode to street-suitable Sport and the 812 Superfast becomes a wonderful road car. It's almost two metres wide, though, so in traffic it can be a bit fraught.

The seats and driving position are excellent, visibility is way better than from any mid-engined supercar and there's usable room beneath the tailgate for real luggage. Acceleration remains

crushingly ferocious in Sport, but the 812 Superfast is truly docile to drive at ordinary speeds on ordinary roads. The ride is firm but not bumpy and the transmission shifts smoothly.

It's the Ferrari's breadth of ability that makes it a truly great, hugely desirable and addictively enjoyable car. As it should be for the money...

By John Carey

THINGS WE LIKE

- ✓ V12's performance and sound
- ✓ Brilliant double-clutch transmission
- ✓ Handling and ride comfort
- ✓ Improved interior
- ✓ Reduced price compared to the F12berlinetta

THINGS YOU MIGHT NOT LIKE

- ✗ Car's width demands caution
- ✗ Lower price still stratospheric

SPEX

- Made in Italy
- 6.5L V12/seven-speed dual-clutch automatic/rear-wheel drive
- 588kW of power at 8500rpm/718Nm of torque at 7000rpm
- 0-100km/h in 2.9 seconds (claimed)
- 15L/100km combined; 98 octane premium; CO2 emissions are 340g/km
- Warranty: Three years/unlimited kilometres
- Standard: Six airbags, stability control, leather upholstery, dual-zone air, parking sensors, camera, LED headlights, 20-inch alloy wheels, carbon ceramic brakes, self-levelling suspension, Bluetooth, navigation, voice control, Apple CarPlay
- Redbook future values: 3yr: 57%; 5yr: 42%

STARS ★★★★★

- Safety **Not rated**
- Performance ★★★★★
- Handling ★★★★★
- Quality and reliability ★★★★★
- Comfort and refinement ★★★★★
- Value for money ★★★★★
- Overall** ★★★★★



compare with ...

Bentley Continental GT Speed, Lamborghini Aventador S

FORD FIESTA ST FROM \$32,290



There's a saying the car business that goes like this: "Performance costs money. How fast do you want to go?"

There's much more to a great performance car than sheer speed, though, a fact well demonstrated by Ford's Fiesta ST.

It's not quite a hot hatch. With 147kW of power from a 1.5-litre three cylinder turbopetrol, let's call it warm enough. But Ford of Europe, where the ST originates, always turns out a beautifully sorted sports hatchback, including the Fiesta's big brother, the Focus ST. The reason why both cars work so well is that the vital elements -- performance, handling, ride, steering and braking -- all complement each other and form a tightly integrated package.

And being a front wheel drive hatchback, that weighs just 1191kg, the Fiesta is huge fun to drive as well, with superb

feedback and responsiveness to the driver's commands.

The 1.5 features direct and port injection, pulls hard through the midrange and segues into a willing, responsive top end, especially in Sport mode which feels as though another cylinder has kicked in. It's not shouty loud; at higher revs in Sport mode an exhaust valve opens to liberate a nice sporty note.

Ford claims 6.5 seconds to 100km/h using launch control; real world tests report it's closer to 7 seconds.

The six-speed manual slots into each gate easily, though the stubby lever is positioned a tad too low. The clutch is pretty heavy, progressive and easy enough to use around town. There's no auto option.

Stiff, fixed rate suspension features a torsion beam at

the rear and unique "force vectoring" springs that are claimed to improve turn-in sharpness, directional change responsiveness and lateral stiffness. The steering ratio is a very quick 12:1.

A mechanical limited slip differential, torque vectoring by braking, big brakes and sticky 205/40 Michelin Pilots on 18-inch alloys are also part of the ST's dynamic package.

It works well. The Fiesta is very darty and responsive when you point it into a corner, there's little body roll, and the diff/torque vectoring electronics keep the nose tucked in tight when accelerating through the corner. The front end can run out of travel if it hits a decent bump, and there's some torque steer felt through the wheel when the engine hits full midrange boost,

but neither is a big issue. The car is great fun to drive, though you do have to put up with a firm ride as the price for its handling prowess.

In other respects the little Ford is easy to live with. A superb Recaro driver's seat is supportive and comfortable, all the connectivity/infotainment stuff is there, including great Bang and Olufsen sound, voice control that works, digital radio, navigation and the full complement of driver assist safety tech.

Edge protectors that flip out when you open a front door are a clever touch, and there's a reasonable amount of storage.

Back seat space is very tight, but you get a decent sized boot for a small hatchback.

Servicing costs are capped at \$299 a time for the first four years/60,000km, so the Fiesta ST is good value to own as well as to purchase.

If an A grade performance car is measured by driving enjoyment, then it's a bargain.

THINGS WE LIKE

- ✓ Beautifully sorted from nose to tail
- ✓ Good value at the price
- ✓ Punchy, flexible 1.5
- ✓ The joy of changing gears
- ✓ Super sharp, responsive handling

THINGS YOU MIGHT NOT LIKE

- ✗ The ride's a bit rugged on rough roads
- ✗ Tight back seat
- ✗ Some cabin plastics are a bit low rent
- ✗ Tyre noise on coarse bitumen

SPEX

- Made in Germany
- 1.5-litre three cylinder turbopetrol/six-speed manual/front-wheel drive
- 147kW of power at 6000rpm/290Nm of torque from 1600-4000rpm
- 0/100km/h in 6.5 seconds (claimed)
- 5.5L/100km highway; 7.8L/100km city; 95 octane premium; CO2 emissions are 144gkm
- Warranty: Five years/unlimited km
- Standard: Six airbags, stability control, autonomous emergency braking, lane keep assist, blind spot monitoring, rear cross traffic alert, B&O audio, navigation, digital radio, Apple CarPlay, Android Auto, voice control, Recaro front seats, leather wrapped steering wheel, 18-inch alloys.
- Redbook future values: 3yr: 54%; 5yr: 41%

STARS ★★★★★

- Safety ★★★★★
- Performance ★★★★★
- Handling ★★★★★
- Quality and reliability ★★★★★
- Comfort and refinement ★★★★★
- Value for money ★★★★★
- Overall** ★★★★★



compare with ...

Mini Cooper S, Toyota Yaris GR, VW Polo GTi



The days of budget-priced small hatchbacks may soon be behind us.

Few brands can get a Toyota Corolla-sized car close to the \$20,000 drive-away mark these days, as each new model gains more advanced safety tech.

The 2021 Ford Focus, imported from Germany, joins the growing list of hatchbacks that have vacated the bargain basement.

The range opens with the ST-Line, priced at \$30,990.

It runs a 134kW 1.5-litre turbo triple/eight-speed auto/front-wheel drivetrain, as does Focus Active, a faux SUV also priced at \$30,990.

Focus ST, with a 206kW 2.0-litre turbopetrol, costs \$44,890 with six speed manual or seven-speed automatic transmissions.

As Toyota has done with the new Corolla, Ford has added some styling flair to help the pricing medicine go down.

There's another reason Ford has gone all out with the new

Focus: it's an attempt to stem the tide of buyers switching to SUVs.

This model Focus is wider, lower and roomier than its predecessor, while still able to fit in the same size parking space.

The cabin has half as many buttons, with a simpler and more practical design. The automatic gear lever has been replaced by a rotary dial.

There's a tablet-style touchscreen in the middle of the dash, similar to those found in Audi, BMW and Mercedes cars.

The 134kW 1.5-litre three-cylinder turbo petrol motor, paired with an eight-speed auto, is no slingshot but performance is on par with other small cars.

However, there is a noticeable vibration at idle and a thrum once on the move.

It's a trait of three-cylinder engines that Ford has muted well, but you can still feel it

from the seat of your pants and through your foot when pressing the brake pedal.

This is just one of the compromises for frugal engine technology. The other is a thirst for expensive 95-octane premium unleaded fuel.

The eight-speed auto is a smooth operator when accelerating from rest.

It doesn't drone like CVT autos (such as the ones used in the Toyota Corolla, Honda Civic and Subaru Impreza) and doesn't hesitate from rest like twin-clutch autos (such as those used by Volkswagen, Skoda and Renault).

However, some shifts can be a little abrupt, such as when it skips a couple of gears as you floor the throttle to overtake or when coming to a stop.

It's a minor gripe which may be addressed with a software update at a later date.

Most impressive is the way the new Focus hugs the road, like a good German car should. The broader footprint and well-sorted suspension help it glide over the pavement, yet control over body movement, steering precision and overall balance are excellent, as is usually the case with cars engineered by Ford of Europe.

That said, the Toyota Corolla is a pretty good handler, too.

Grip from the 17-inch Continental tyres is superb, although grip usually comes at the expense of longevity, so putting quality tyres on it could be costly.

Overall, though, it's an impressive effort and one that puts the Focus back near the top of the small-car class -- if not in sales then at least as one of the benchmarks for driving enjoyment on the open road.

By Joshua Dowling

THINGS WE LIKE

- ✓ Looks sharp
- ✓ A genuine German hatch, like the Golf
- ✓ Tractable, economical performance
- ✓ Great handling
- ✓ Well equipped with infotainment and safety features

THINGS YOU MIGHT NOT LIKE

- ✗ Price is getting up there
- ✗ 1.5-litre triple does vibrate a bit
- ✗ It also runs on 95 octane premium
- ✗ Focus resale values aren't great

SPEX (ST Line)

- Made in Germany
- 1.5-litre turbopetrol three-cylinder/eight-speed automatic/front-wheel drive
- 134kW of power at 6000rpm/240Nm of torque at 1600rpm
- 0-100km/h in 8.9 seconds
- 4.9L/100km highway; 7.6L/100km city; 95 octane premium; CO2 emissions are 133gkm
- Warranty: Five years/unlimited km
- Standard: Six airbags, stability control, AEB, lane keeping, speed limiter, 180 degree rear camera, rear parking sensors, Automatic headlights and wipers, SYNC3 infotainment, navigation, Bluetooth, voice control, digital radio, Apple CarPlay, Android Auto, 17-inch alloys, leather wrapped steering wheel
- Redbook future values; 3yr: 46%; 5yr: 30%

STARS ★★★★★

- Safety ★★★★★ EuroNCAP
- Performance ★★★★★
- Handling ★★★★★
- Quality and reliability ★★★★★
- Comfort and refinement ★★★★★
- Value for money ★★★★★
- Overall** ★★★★★



compare with ...

Honda Civic, Hyundai i30, Mazda3, Toyota Corolla, Skoda Octavia, Subaru Impreza, VW Golf

FORD PUMA FROM \$29,990



The new Ford Puma is the smallest SUV in the brand's line-up.

There are three models: Puma (from \$29,990), Puma ST-Line (\$32,340) and Puma ST-Line V (from \$35,540).

All three models are powered by the same turbocharged 1.0-litre three-cylinder engine (with 92kW/170Nm) matched to a seven-speed dual clutch automatic sending drive to the front wheels.

Puma's fuel rating label says average consumption is 5.3L/100km but this is based on laboratory tests. During our test drive on mostly inter-urban roads and not much stop-start traffic we averaged between 6.7 and 8.0L/100km, on the recommended premium.

It's not meant to be a hot hatch (despite its sporty appearance) but Puma does the 0 to 100kmh dash in 9.7 seconds, which by any measure today is pretty slow.

To be fair, once it's on the move, the Ford Puma feels perkier than its time suggests and the engine is well matched

to the seven ratios in the dual-clutch automatic gearbox.

All models come with a sensor key with push button start, an eight-inch infotainment screen with Apple Car Play, Android Auto, embedded navigation, digital radio and AM/FM. The cabin also has a wireless phone charging pad.

Up front, there's ample space plus good oddment storage. The back seat has no power sockets or air vents, only mesh back seat pockets, and is a bit of a squeeze for adults.

Safety aids include six airbags, a rear view camera and rear sensors (front sensors are optional), lane keeping assistance, tyre pressure monitors and speed sign recognition. Radar cruise control with automatic stop and go, blind zone warning, and rear cross-traffic alert are part of a \$1500 option pack.

The cargo hold has a space saver spare hidden deep under the boot floor, beneath a waterproof bucket, presumably for wet beach gear.

An adjustable cargo shelf has a choice of slotting in to two heights, making it easy to store items that might otherwise get thrown around in the back.

All models have LED headlights; both ST-Line line variants also gain a 12-inch digital widescreen instrument cluster and a sports body kit. Puma ST-Line V goes further with leather upholstery, 12-speaker premium audio, and tinted rear glass.

A power-operated tailgate is standard on the Puma ST-Line V and a \$750 option on the other models. A panorama sunroof is a \$2000 option on all grades.

Service intervals are 12 months/15,000km whichever comes first. Servicing is capped

at \$299 per visit for up to four years or 60,000km, which undercuts such rivals as the Mazda CX-3, Nissan Juke and Volkswagen T-Cross.

On the road the Ford Puma feels light on its feet and easy and comfortable to drive. It's one of the more impressive twin clutch autos we've sampled, with smooth and intuitive shifts and little to no hesitation and vibration on take-off.

The engine is a smooth operator and quiet and refined for a three-cylinder.

The suspension feels taut over bumps but it's not bone jarring. The trade-off for that extra road feel is confident handling in corners, whether it's a roundabout or a winding mountain pass.

Overall, the Ford Puma brings some welcome styling flair to the city SUV class, largely thanks to its European DNA. It looks sportier than it goes, though.

By Joshua Dowling

THINGS WE LIKE

- ✓ Handsome styling
- ✓ Comfortable and secure driving dynamics
- ✓ Refined engine and gearbox
- ✓ Clever cargo hold.

THINGS YOU MIGHT NOT LIKE

- ✗ It ain't quick
- ✗ Back seat space a bit tight
- ✗ Safety package should be standard, not optional
- ✗ Price is pretty ambitious given the mediocre performance

SPEX

- Made in Romania
- 1.0-litre, three cylinder turbopetrol/ seven-speed dual clutch gearbox/ front-wheel drive
- 92kW of power at 6000rpm/170Nm of torque from 1500-4500rpm
- 0-100km/h in 9.7 seconds
- 4.7L/100km highway; 6.3L/100km city; 95 octane premium, CO2 emissions are 121gkm
- Warranty: Five years/unlimited km
- Standard: Six airbags, stability control, autonomous emergency braking, lane keep assist, speed sign recognition, navigation, Apple CarPlay, Android Auto, wireless phone charging, digital radio, voice control, 17-inch alloy wheels.
- Redbook future values: 3yr: 47%; 5yr: 38%



STARS ★★★★★

- Safety ★★★★★
- Performance ★★★★★
- Handling ★★★★★
- Quality and reliability ★★★★★
- Comfort and refinement ★★★★★
- Value for money ★★★★★
- Overall** ★★★★★

compare with ...

Honda HRV, Mazda CX3, Nissan Juke, Subaru XV, Toyota C-HR, Skoda Kamiq, VW T-Cross



FORD ESCAPE FROM \$35,990



The 2021 Ford Escape makes a serious pitch for the performance buyer, with a 183kW/387Nm 2.0-litre turbopetrol standard across the range and 0-100km/h in six and a bit seconds. No rival offers anywhere near that sort of performance; in fact most are decidedly unsparty.

The Porsche Macan, which will set you back \$84,300, also has a 2.0-litre turbopetrol that produces 183kW/370Nm. It hits 100km/h in 6.7 seconds.

Escape, then, is a performance SUV bargain, kicking off at \$35,000 for the front-wheel drive base model, with an eight-speed auto as standard. ST Line is \$37,990 and Vignale is \$46,590.

ST Line and Vignale are also available with all-wheel drive, priced at \$40,990 and \$49,590 respectively.

A plug-in hybrid is due by the end of the year.

Escape is big on safety and connectivity tech. The full suite of driver assist safety features

is standard in all models, and arguably best in class.

Connectivity includes Ford Pass, an embedded modem that allows you to remotely connect with the car, accessing locking, service data and assistance services from your phone.

Infotainment includes navigation, responsive voice control (with an Australian accent), wireless phone charging and digital radio.

We tested the front-wheel drive ST Line, which adds a body kit, bespoke 18-inch alloys, lowered suspension, digital instruments, a sports steering wheel and dark cabin trim.

The driver's seat is firm and comfortable, but lacks lateral support for the upper body due to insufficient backrest bolstering. The very high seating position doesn't feel right either, given Escape's sports pretensions.

The dash is stylish and efficient, with an unusual rotary gear selector, type A and C USBs, two 12 volt sockets and reasonable oddment storage.

A firm, elevated back seat has plenty of (adjustable) legroom, an adjustable backrest, vents and USBs, so it's well set up for kids. The boot is one of the largest in the class.

Escape goes, stops, steers and handles better than most of its rivals, but it would be better again with all-wheel drive, and we'd suggest that if you're attracted to the Ford because of its performance credentials then the extra \$3000 for all-wheel drive would be money well spent.

One hundred and eighty three kilowatts, and 387Nm, is a lot of grunt to put through the front wheels, which begin to struggle for traction in tighter corners if you get a bit vigorous on

the throttle. Steering feel and precision is also compromised in this situation, and you have to put up with tugging at the wheel, again as the front wheels try to put all that torque to the road.

The engine is pretty thirsty, because fuel economy isn't a priority.

Escape's brakes aren't quite up to its performance potential, either.

Ride comfort is fine, with a firm yet compliant quality that's better controlled than some rivals and comfortable on all surfaces.

Ford has delivered a very different mid-size SUV in the new Escape, and if you find the class a bit dull from the point of view of driving enjoyment, you'll find happiness here. Pick the all-wheel drivetrain, though.

THINGS WE LIKE

- ✓ Unbeatable bang for your bucks
- ✓ Smooth, punchy 2.0-litre turbo
- ✓ Comfortable, spacious cabin
- ✓ Well equipped at the price
- ✓ One of the better handlers in the class

THINGS YOU MIGHT NOT LIKE

- ✗ Eight-speed automatic isn't the smoothest or most responsive transmission around
- ✗ Thirsty
- ✗ Front wheels can struggle for traction under power
- ✗ So so brakes
- ✗ Shopping trolley driving position and unsupportive seat

SPEX (ST Line)

- Made in Spain
- 2.0-litre four cylinder turbopetrol/eight-speed automatic/front-wheel drive
- 183kW of power at 5700rpm/387Nm of torque at 3100rpm
- 0-100km/h in 6.2 seconds
- 6.3L/100km highway; 12.3L/100km city; 95 octane premium; CO2 emissions are 199gkm
- Warranty: Five years/unlimited km
- Standard: Six airbags, stability control, AEB, adaptive cruise, blind spot monitoring, speed sign recognition, lane keep assist, digital instruments, navigation, voice control, digital radio, Apple CarPlay, Android Auto, parking sensors, key fob opening and closing for side windows, sports suspension, sports steering wheel, 18-inch alloys.
- Redbook future values: 3yr: 52%; 5yr: 38%



STARS ★★★★★

- Safety ★★★★★
- Performance ★★★★★
- Handling ★★★★★
- Quality and reliability ★★★★★
- Comfort and refinement ★★★★★
- Value for money ★★★★★
- Overall** ★★★★★

compare with ...

Honda CRV, Hyundai Tucson, Mazda CX5, Skoda Karoq, Subaru Forester, Toyota RAV4, VW Tiguan

FORD MUSTANG FROM \$50,990



Ford gave Mustang a major rework in 2018 and produced the car it should have when it launched the first factory right hand drive model in 2015.

In response to the criticism that the original model was too stiff over bumps, Ford engineers retuned the suspension and fitted better shock absorbers. Magnetically-controlled shock absorbers, which improve comfort even further, are a \$2750 option.

On 5.0-litre V8 models, a switch to Michelin Pilot Sport rubber from the original Pirelli P Zeros also aids cushioning over bumps.

Ford fitted a louder bi-modal exhaust, which, at the press of a button, transforms the Mustang from hush quiet to 1970s muscle-car loud. The V8 also gained 33kW and now produces 339kW.

In early 2020, the 2.3-litre four gained a new twin scroll turbocharger and now produces 236kW and 448Nm, across a wider rev range than previously.

The digital dash has four display modes, from traditional layouts to race-car-inspired

designs. The car itself also has a choice of modes, from comfort and normal to sport and track, which changes throttle response, steering feel and the stability control calibration.

Prices kick off at \$50,990 for the 2.3-litre Fastback six-speed manual. The automatic adds \$3000 and the auto convertible is \$60,290.

The 5.0-litre GT Fastback manual is \$63,690, the auto is \$66,690 and the auto convertible is \$74,890.

The 10-speed automatic works efficiently and intuitively with the 5.0-litre V8.

Closely-spaced lower ratios allow the V8 to mimic a turbo's bottom-end flexibility, and it will pull 10th gear at 100km/h ticking over at 1650rpm.

At the other end of the tachometer, from 5000rpm and up, performance is explosive, supremely responsive and rocket quick – as in a claimed 4.3 seconds from 0-100km/h,

half a second quicker than the previous model with the six-speed auto. Seat of the pants says that's pretty accurate.

Under pressure in Sport+ mode, the 10-speed picks gears with 95 percent accurate timing and impressive smoothness considering the massive torque involved. Paddles are also provided.

Pre-programmed drivetrain/steering/suspension/exhaust modes range from Normal to Dragstrip, or you can mix and match to make your own "My Mode," accessed via the pony button on the steering wheel.

Mustang is still a big, heavy (1784kg) car, but it now drives with Germanic tautness rather than the usual American sloth. It points immediately and accurately into a corner, assisted by sharp, tactile steering and wide (255/40) front rubber.

The body stays flat and well-balanced when changing

direction, it's communicative and controllable under power, and six-piston front Brembo brake calipers, on 380mm discs, pull it up with authority. You could have lots of fun with this at a track.

The Mustang GT is an absolute bargain, and now that the HSV Chevrolet Camaro has become extinct, it has no other direct V8 coupe rival.

If the standard 'Stang isn't enough musclecar for you, local engineering outfit Herrod Performance now offers a factory-developed R-Spec kit, with a supercharger feeding the 5.0-litre V8. No official power figure is quoted, but the US version makes 522kW. A six-speed manual is the only transmission offered; magnetic shocks, a lowered suspension package, plus bespoke wheels/tyres are also fitted. Yours for \$99,980, if there are any left.

THINGS WE LIKE

- ✓ Still great value
- ✓ The V8 is a beautiful thing
- ✓ The suspension rework has worked wonders
- ✓ Strong resale values
- ✓ The digital dash brings the future to a classic design

THINGS YOU MIGHT NOT LIKE

- ✗ Turning circle is huge
- ✗ Visibility not ideal in any direction
- ✗ 2.3-litre still sounds like a vacuum cleaner
- ✗ Ford could have done more to improve the safety score for front and rear occupants rather than just adding external technology

SPEX (GT auto)

- Made in the USA
- 5.0-litre V8 petrol/10-speed automatic/rear-wheel drive
- 339kW of power at 6500rpm/556Nm of torque at 4250rpm
- 0-100km/h in 4.3 seconds (claimed)
- 9.0L/100km highway; 19.3L/100km city; 98 premium; CO2 emissions are 290g/km
- Warranty: Five years/unlimited km
- Standard: Six airbags, stability control, autonomous emergency braking, adaptive cruise, lane keeping assist, leather upholstery, heated and cooled front seats, LED headlights with auto high beam, SYNC3 infotainment with Bluetooth, navigation, Apple CarPlay, Android Auto, digital instruments, 19-inch alloys
- Redbook future values: 3yr: 62%; 5yr: 48%



STARS ★★★★★

- Safety ★★★★★ ANCAP
- Performance ★★★★★
- Handling ★★★★★
- Quality and reliability ★★★★★
- Comfort and refinement ★★★★★
- Value for money ★★★★★
- Overall** ★★★★★

compare with ...

No direct rivals

GENESIS G70 FROM \$59,300



Hyundai's luxury brand Genesis is a (very small) niche brand in Australia.

Its hero car is the Genesis G70, a mid size sedan aimed at the Mercedes-Benz C Class, BMW 3 Series, Audi A4 and Lexus IS.

There's a choice of 179kW/353Nm 2.0-litre turbo four-cylinder power or a 272kW/510Nm twin turbo 3.3-litre V6, both matched with an eight-speed automatic and rear-wheel-drive. These drivetrains are also found in the Kia Stinger.

Each engine is available in three grades. Prices for the four cylinder are \$59,300 (2.0T), \$63,300 (2.0T Sport) and \$69,300 (2.0T Ultimate). The V6 opens at \$72,450 (3.3T Sport) then rises to \$79,950 (3.3T Ultimate) and tops out at \$79,950 (3.3T Ultimate Sport).

These prices may be a touch high, but they include servicing for the first five years, plus a five year warranty.

The interior is a conventional design: a digital dash display, relatively small tablet-style touchscreen, push button start, and sports leather seats.

Leather upholstery and a suede-like roof lining on top end models help give the G70 a lift.

However European rivals have more upmarket interiors and higher resolution infotainment screens. Back seat space is also a bit tight.

As we went to press, there were only three Genesis outlets in Sydney.

Customers must ring for an appointment if they want to take a test drive in the G70.

Genesis will bring the car to them, provided it's within a 70km radius of the dealership. Showrooms in Brisbane and Melbourne are yet to eventuate.

Genesis claims it won't negotiate with customers on

price, but that's rubbish. In the car business, everything is negotiable.

And you can bet that Genesis will be extremely keen to haggle.

Genesis G70 is an impressive drive. Armed with torque vectoring, a mechanical limited slip diff, grippy Michelin tyres and big Brembo brakes, the G70 twin turbo V6 feels secure in corners, the steering is sharp and precise, and the power under your right foot is impressive.

Genesis claims it's a touch quicker than the Kia Stinger from 0 to 100km/h – 4.7 seconds – even though there's no extra power.

On our precision timing equipment we did the 0 to 100 dash in 4.9 seconds.

Translation: the Genesis G70 is properly quick by any measure, an impressive effort for the company's first global sports sedan.

The 2.0-litre four-cylinder isn't as perky, of course, but it also

lacks the refinement of the V6 and is not as responsive or as smooth to drive.

The G70 feels planted in corners and recovers well from bumps on patchwork roads.

Adjustable suspension on V6 variants allows you to tailor the ride/handling compromise to suit the conditions.

The G70 is easily up there with the best from Germany when it comes to rivals with similar outputs and price tags, but the price is still too high for a relatively unknown brand, resale values are weak and its long term future here remains uncertain.

The biggest challenge will be persuading people to pay full price for G70 over its German rivals. Drive it for yourself, and compare it with the benchmark BMW 3 Series, to see if it's worth the money.

By Joshua Dowling

THINGS WE LIKE

- ✓ Twin turbo V6
- ✓ Taut handling and good ride comfort
- ✓ Longer warranty and lower servicing costs than rivals
- ✓ Quality and reliability likely to be better than German brands

THINGS YOU MIGHT NOT LIKE

- ✗ Pricy
- ✗ A new brand, so you're taking a punt on resale values
- ✗ No established dealer network
- ✗ Interior design, infotainment and instrument displays are more Hyundai than Mercedes
- ✗ Four-cylinder lacks refinement
- ✗ V6 likes a drink

SPEX (3.3T Sport)

- Made in South Korea
- 3.3-litre twin turbo V6 petrol/eight-speed automatic/rear-wheel drive
- 272kW of power at 6000rpm/510Nm of torque from 1300-4500rpm
- 0-100km/h in 4.9 seconds
- 7.5L/100km highway; 14.9L/100km city; 95 octane premium; CO2 emissions are 238g/km
- Warranty: Five years/unlimited km
- Standard: Seven airbags, stability control, AEB, blind spot monitoring, adaptive cruise, lane keep assist, LED headlights, navigation, digital radio, Apple CarPlay, Android Auto, wireless phone charging, 19-inch alloy wheels, leather, heated front seats, hands-free boot opening
- Redbook future values: 3yr: 41%; 5yr: 29%

STARS ★★★★★

- Safety **Not yet tested**
- Performance ★★★★★
- Handling ★★★★★
- Quality and reliability ★★★★★
- Comfort and refinement ★★★★★
- Value for money ★★★★★
- Overall** ★★★★★



compare with ...

Alfa Giulia, Audi A4, BMW 3 Series, Lexus IS, Mercedes C Class



Honda's HRV, a compact five-door SUV, combines extraordinary interior flexibility with a punchy drivetrain and handsome styling inside and out.

The base 1.8-litre petrol/continuously variable automatic (CVT) VTi model costs \$25,990. Then it's the same drivetrain with more fruit as you move up to the VTi-S (from \$30,390), followed by the RS (from \$33,690) and then the VTi-LX at \$36,240.

While the 1799cc single-cam i-VTEC unit has seen dependable service in the Civic for years, its pairing with the latest-generation CVT has given the 1.8 a fresh lease on life.

The HR-V is unexpectedly perky off the line and will maintain its eager acceleration right up to the 6600rpm redline (and a bit beyond).

The CVT, meanwhile, is quite atypical in that it is not prone to droning. In most driving situations, it is as fast and responsive as the best autos out there.

All in all, then, the HR-V offers one of the livelier and more

refined drivetrain choices in its ever-growing class.

If you approach a turn too fast, the HRV will ultimately run wide into understeer, of course, but the bottom line is this compact SUV's dynamics are safe, secure and more car-like than its high-riding stance suggests.

Subaru's XV, Skoda Kamiq and Toyota's C-HR are still the best handlers in this class.

After the horror of discovering that its Jazz sibling has devolved into using drum rather than disc rear brakes, the HR-V boasts the latter, for precise and incisive stopping power.

Honda's engineers are also proud of their crossover's rigid yet lightweight structure, which may explain the agreeably supple ride quality on the standard 16-inch wheel and tyre package.

The larger 17-inch alternatives do sacrifice some ride comfort for better handling poise, while they are also more susceptible to transmitting road noise inside the HR-V's

appealingly presented cabin.

For an inexpensive entry-level variant, the base VTi looks and feels a step above most of its equivalently priced competitors, giving the HR-V a real showroom edge.

Standard equipment includes low-speed autonomous emergency braking, but as with the CRV Honda's driver assist safety tech is generally off the pace. Lane departure warning is available only on VTi-LX.

Being Jazz-derived, one of the interior's biggest strengths is its feeling of space and airiness, highlighted by the relatively deep side windows (despite the upsweep design) and high, commanding seating positions.

The clean and uncluttered dash is a very modern piece of kit, dominated by a large central touch screen containing a host of vehicle settings, multimedia, Bluetooth phone and rear-camera displays. It is a very user-friendly example of technology working with, rather than against, the operator.

The rear seat has an abundance of knee and legroom (comparable to many medium SUVs) combined with a comfortably angled backrest.

The inclusion of Jazz-style "Magic Seats" means the whole split rear seat can nestle down low, deep into the cavity where the fuel tank lives in other vehicles, allowing for an exceptionally large extended cargo bay.

The cushion can also be tilted upwards for transporting tall narrow objects like a pair of bikes (with their front wheels removed of course).

Topping things off in the HR-V's tail is a large tailgate and easy-to-load lip height.

In this compact SUV class, the HRV is certainly worth test driving, along with the Kia Seltos, Skoda Kamiq, Subaru XV and Toyota C-HR. The hard part is making a decision.

By Byron Mathioudakis

THINGS WE LIKE

- ✓ Class-leading space efficiency
- ✓ Well equipped
- ✓ Strong and smooth performance
- ✓ Responsive steering and VTi's supple ride

THINGS YOU MIGHT NOT LIKE

- ✗ Front-wheel drive only
- ✗ Flimsy rear luggage cover
- ✗ Some engine noise intrusion at speed

SPEX

- Made in Thailand
- 1.8-litre four-cylinder petrol/CVT/ front-wheel drive
- 105kW of power at 6500rpm/172Nm of torque at 4300rpm
- 0-100km/h N/A
- 5.6L/100km highway; 8.5L/100km city; 91 octane regular; CO₂ emissions are 155g/km
- Warranty: Five years/unlimited km
- Fuel tank capacity 50 litres
- Maximum towing weight 800kg
- Standard: Six airbags, stability control, low speed autonomous emergency braking, tyre pressure monitoring, camera, Apple CarPlay, Android Auto, 16-inch alloy wheels. VTi-S includes lane watch, LED headlights and 17-inch alloys. VTi-LX includes leather trim, sunroof, parking sensors and lane departure warning.
- Redbook future values: 3yr:58%; 5yr: 48%

STARS ★★★★★

- Safety ★★★★★ ANCAP
- Green Vehicle Guide ★★★★★
- Performance ★★★★★
- Handling ★★★★★
- Quality and reliability ★★★★★
- Comfort and refinement ★★★★★
- Value for money ★★★★★
- Overall** ★★★★★



compare with ...

Hyundai Kona, Kia Seltos, Skoda Kamiq, Subaru XV, Suzuki Vitara, Toyota C-HR, VW T-Cross



HONDA CIVIC FROM \$26,290



This Civic is the 10th generation since 1973. We're testing the base model 1.8-litre VTi-S sedan which, at \$26,290, sits below two 1.5-litre turbo variants: the \$28,690 VTi-L, the sports-flavoured \$34,090 RS and the \$35,590 VTi-LX.

Civic hatch is available with the same drivetrains at \$27,300, \$35,600 and \$36,600 respectively. A VTi-L hatch is \$31,100.

Civic sedan has always been one of the largest cars in its class and this model almost qualifies as a medium-sizer. Four adults can spread out and relax in it. There is a twin cockpit-style front cabin, a driving position adjustable for any physique and luxurious front seats. There's also plenty of rear-seat legroom and reasonable headroom despite the raked, coupe-style roofline. The wide, deep boot can be extended with 60/40 split rear seat backs.

Materials, fit and finish on Thai-built Hondas — that's now most of them, including Civic — has often been sub-standard

compared with rivals from Japan and South Korea. This Civic sees a major lift in materials quality, interior design and presentation, now close to the VW Golf and Mazda3 benchmarks.

Civic feels like a big unit from the driver's seat, so around town you're looking for more space to work with than in some small cars. Thin front pillars help with clear forward vision, while a reversing camera with movable guidelines, wide-angle and top-down view modes, plus parking sensors at both ends, make life easy in the shopping centre demolition derby.

A simple, bright, all-digital dash has your speed displayed in huge numbers, handy in our book 'em 'till they bleed speed enforcement culture. The infotainment touchscreen is more convoluted than some in its menu structure but responds to the lightest finger pressure, as does the swipe-style volume control on the wheel.

Apple CarPlay and Android Auto are standard, as is voice activation but only with the phone functions.

VTi-S' 1.8-litre four is matched with a standard CVT transmission. It flatters the engine's humble numbers by launching the car smartly off the line and almost compensating for its lack of low-down pulling power, particularly apparent in Eco mode.

Still, the 1.8 does the job smoothly and honestly, with the payoff being frugal fuel consumption. I had no problem recording single figures.

In cruise mode, where it's impressively refined, it can return a diesel-like 5-6L/100km at a steady 100km/h.

The softly suspended Civic has sophisticated independent rear suspension (rivals have a simple, cheap torsion beam axle) and VTi-S rolls on sensible 16-inch alloys with 215/55 Hankook tyres. Around town, the ride is supple and quiet.

It's certainly no sports car, but this suspension/wheel/tyre setup translates nicely to the highway, where the VTi-S sits on the road with the poise, comfort, refinement and authority of a larger car, especially on messy bitumen.

Civic VTi-S offers value, space, comfort, refinement, big-car confidence with small-car fuel efficiency and — most importantly — stylish design and quality engineering.

A major blot on its copybook is the fact that driver assist safety tech such as autonomous emergency braking, adaptive cruise and blind spot monitoring, now standard on rivals such as Mazda 3 and Toyota Corolla, is not included on VTi-S, so the Civic would not score five ANCAP stars if tested today.

THINGS WE LIKE

- ✓ Looks sharp and well priced
- ✓ Spacious, comfortable cabin
- ✓ Smooth, quiet ride and secure handling on rough roads
- ✓ Refined drivetrain and low fuel consumption on regular unleaded
- ✓ Comfortable driving position and supportive driver's seat
- ✓ Clear, informative instruments and touchscreen

THINGS YOU MIGHT NOT LIKE

- ✗ A bit more grunt wouldn't hurt
- ✗ Driver-assist safety tech only available on higher-spec models
- ✗ Fit and finish not quite there yet
- ✗ Short (every six months) service intervals and warranty

SPEX (VTi-S)

- Made in Thailand
- 1.8-litre four-cylinder petrol/CVT/ front-wheel drive
- 104kW of power at 6500rpm/174Nm of torque at 4300rpm
- 0-100km/h N/A
- 5.0L/100km highway; 8.7L/100km city; regular unleaded; CO₂ emissions are 148g/km
- Warranty: Five years/unlimited km
- Standard: Six airbags, stability control, 16-inch alloy wheels, front and rear parking sensors, rear camera, left-side blind spot monitor, seven-inch touchscreen, Bluetooth, two USB ports, HDMI port, 12V socket, Apple CarPlay, Android Auto, tyre pressure warning, alarm, keyless entry and start, leather-wrapped steering wheel, space saver spare
- Redbook future values: 3yr: 58%; 5yr: 43%

STARS ★★★★★

- Safety ★★★★★
- Performance ★★★★★
- Handling ★★★★★
- Quality and reliability ★★★★★
- Comfort and refinement ★★★★★
- Value for money ★★★★★
- Overall** ★★★★★



compare with ...

Kia Cerato, Mazda3, Subaru Impreza, Toyota Corolla, VW Golf

HONDA CIVIC TYPE R FROM \$54,990



The Honda Civic Type R received an update in 2020. Priced at an ambitious \$54,990, you can have any transmission you like as long as it's a six-speed manual.

Improvements include more responsive adaptive damper electronics, stiffer suspension bushings, new brakes and improved engine cooling.

Inside, there's a new Alcantara-wrapped wheel, new gearshift lever, updated infotainment, artificial engine sound control (why?) and a data logger, so you can assess your lap times in detail.

While most of Honda's rivals have more modern twin scroll, or twin-turbo technology, the Type R's 2.0-litre four, still with 228kW/400Nm, has an old-school single-scroll turbocharger attached to it.

That means not much happens below 4000rpm, but then all hell breaks loose at that point and the chaos continues to the 7000rpm redline.

Honda did this intentionally because, it says, it's part of a Type R's DNA.

That's fine but as far as real-world driving goes, a little more flexibility in the engine's power delivery wouldn't have gone astray.

The Type R feels astonishingly quick once the engine's in "the zone" but the numbers don't stack up to Honda's claim.

Honda publishes a 0 to 100km/h time of 5.7 seconds. Using satellite timing equipment, launch control and Race mode, the best we saw was a pair of 6.2-second times in each direction. And that was on a perfect surface with good grip at a race track in Germany.

Despite the hype, this makes the Civic Type R slower than a VW Golf GTI and Hyundai i30N — both of which are a lot cheaper. Indeed, the Honda is in the same price bracket as the all-wheel-drive VW Golf R (4.9 seconds on our timing equipment) so bang

for your bucks it ain't.

More impressive is the stopping power: from 100km/h to zero, the Type R pulled up in an average of just 33.1m over four emergency stops. This is Porsche 911 territory.

Of course, hot hatches are not all about straight-line performance. The Type R is incredibly precise and agile when it comes to corners.

With the same magnetically controlled suspension technology used in Ferraris and Corvettes, there are three driving modes: Comfort, Sport and Race.

Sport is the sweet spot.

Despite running 20-inch rims with super-low-profile tyres (Continental 245/30s), the Civic Type R is compliant over smooth surfaces and moderate bumps, but it starts to get uncomfortable on bumpy pavement.

There's only so much the superbly snug sports seats can do to cosset you.

Rev-matching technology

makes every gear shift perfect without having to "heel and toe" like a race driver.

But the car still requires concentration. You can feel the steering wheel wriggle as the front tyres scabble for grip, especially in first and second gears, as the mechanical limited-slip front differential finds traction.

The steering can feel a touch too sensitive at freeway speeds but on a race track, it pays dividends.

In Race mode, the car's reflexes are amplified. The steering and throttle inputs are sharper and the stiffened suspension stands up better in tight turns.

A more track-focussed Type R Limited Edition, priced at a hefty \$66,700, adds 20-inch forged BBS alloy wheels with Michelin Pilot Sport Cup 2 tyres, stiffer suspension dampers and quicker steering. The drivetrain is unchanged.

By Joshua Dowling

THINGS WE LIKE

- ✓ Mental turbo performance from 4000rpm
- ✓ Rev matching makes downshifts easy and smooth
- ✓ Incredible stopping power thanks to grippy tyres and massive brakes
- ✓ Typically agile Honda handling
- ✓ Superb sports seats

THINGS YOU MIGHT NOT LIKE

- ✗ Old-school turbo lag
- ✗ A bit pricey
- ✗ Not as quick as Honda says it is
- ✗ Rugged ride on bumpy roads

SPEX

- Made in England
- 2.0L turbopetrol four/six-speed manual/front-wheel drive
- 228kW of power at 6500rpm/400Nm of torque from 2500-4500rpm
- 0-100km/h in 5.7 seconds (claimed)
- 7.1L/100km highway; 11.7L/100km city; 95 octane premium; CO2 emissions are 200g/km
- Warranty: Five years/unlimited kilometres
- Standard: Six airbags, stability control, radar cruise, forward collision warning, automatic emergency braking, lane keeping, left lane camera, parking sensors, rear camera, lap timer, Apple CarPlay, Android Auto, Bluetooth, Brembo brakes, adaptive dampers, 20-inch alloys.
- Redbook future values: 3yr: 60%; 5yr: 44%

STARS ★★★★★

- Safety **Not yet tested**
- Performance ★★★★★
- Handling ★★★★★
- Quality and reliability ★★★★★
- Comfort and refinement ★★★★★
- Value for money ★★★★★
- Overall** ★★★★★



compare with ...

VW Golf GTi/R, Hyundai i30N, Renault Megane RS, Subaru WRX STi



Honda's CR-V, the world's top-selling SUV, lost its way for a while but is now back in serious contention with the fifth generation since 1997. Priced from \$31,300 for the Vi front-drive auto, the latest version has expanded its repertoire with seven-seat availability as part of a range that also includes all-wheel drive but no more diesel option.

Beneath the contemporary styling is Honda's latest 'Earth Dreams' architecture — a sophisticated low-centre-of-gravity platform plus a four-cylinder turbo petrol engine, multi-link rear suspension and a clever fuel-saving all-wheel-drive system that cuts in and out only when required.

This CRV is pleasingly spacious, easy to drive, comfortable, quiet, powerful, economical and agile. So it shares many of the attributes of its better competitors.

Let's take the packaging. This is a true five-seater with heaps of space up front in all directions. Cushy yet supportive seats perched up high, superb all-round vision, a nicely finished

dash featuring a huge central touchscreen that's simple to operate, clear instrumentation, ample ventilation and almost endless storage all prove that Honda has studied SUV buyers' requirements intensively.

That's confirmed in the back. Rear legroom is exceptional, the split backrests recline and there are face-level air vents, while two USB ports should sustain attention-diverting electronics for hours.

The two back seats in the VTi-7 and VTi-L7 are tight and suitable for young kids only, which is usual in this class. If you want seven full-size seats, you need a Mazda CX9.

A full-sized alloy spare is fitted to all variants.

The 1.5-litre four-cylinder turbopetrol powering all models (bar the base Vi, which has a 2.0-litre petrol) provides a respectable dose of acceleration for quick and seamless getaways, assisted by a smooth and unexpectedly responsive CVT continuously

variable transmission. It's also pretty frugal, at least according to the official figures.

Handling is responsive and predictable thanks to quick steering and very assured roadholding. Honda's engineers seem to have dialled in just the right amount of steering effort and feedback.

And though there is an underlying firmness to the ride, with nothing like the cushiness of the outstanding Forester, there's still sufficient suppleness to ably deal with most road irregularities. Quietness is another virtue.

The 1.5-litre VTi front-wheel drive, priced from \$34,200, includes a 7.0-inch touchscreen, automatic air, keyless entry and start with walkaway locking, Apple CarPlay/Android Auto connectivity and alloys.

VTi-X, from \$37,000, adds navigation. The all-wheel-drive VTi-L is \$41,100 and VTi-LX is \$48,500.

Seven seaters start with the VTi-7 front wheel drive at \$36,100. Wireless phone

charging and a power operated tailgate are standard. VTi-L7 is priced at \$44,200.

Honda's full safety kit, including autonomous emergency braking, is now available on all models with the 1.5-litre turbo engine, making the CRV's safety specification more competitive with class leading rivals such as the Subaru Forester and Toyota RAV4. Their blind spot monitoring tech is better, though, because for some bizarre reason Honda's camera-based system works only on the passenger's side.

The fifth-generation CR-V is a roomy, practical, sophisticated SUV. It's taken Honda a while to get the CRV's safety and equipment levels up to front row of the class levels, but it's now much closer to the leaders.

By Byron Mathioudakis

THINGS WE LIKE

- ✓ Strong, refined 1.5-litre turbo
- ✓ Sporty handling
- ✓ Spacious cargo area
- ✓ Well built and reliable
- ✓ Easy and logical control layout
- ✓ Long warranty

THINGS YOU MIGHT NOT LIKE

- ✗ Blind spot monitoring doesn't work on drivers side
- ✗ In five-seaters the middle-centre seatbelt is mounted on the roof
- ✗ Back seats in seven seaters are suitable only for young kids

SPEX (VTi)

- Made in Thailand
- 1.5-litre four-cylinder turbopetrol/seven-speed automatic/front-wheel drive
- 140kW of power at 5600rpm/240Nm of torque from 2000-5000rpm
- 0-100km in 9.9 seconds (claimed)
- 6.2L/100km highway; 9.2L/100km city; 91 octane; CO₂ emissions are 166g/km. Fuel tank is 57 litres
- Warranty: Five years/unlimited kilometres
- Max towing weight: 1000kg
- Six airbags, stability control, parking sensors, navigation, camera, Lane Watch offside camera, automatic air, Apple CarPlay/Android Auto, Bluetooth, auto on/off lights, walk-away auto locking, AUX/USB ports, tyre-pressure monitoring, 18-inch alloy wheels, full-size spare
- Redbook future values: 3yr: 58%; 5yr: 44%

STARS ★★★★★

- Safety ★★★★★ ANCAP
- Performance ★★★★★
- Handling ★★★★★
- Quality and reliability ★★★★★
- Comfort and refinement ★★★★★
- Value for money ★★★★★
- Overall ★★★★★



compare with ...

Mitsubishi Outlander, Mazda CX-5, Nissan X-Trail, Subaru Forester, Toyota RAV4, Volkswagen Tiguan

HYUNDAI I30 FROM \$23,420



You don't mess around with a winning formula, so Hyundai's third-generation i30 offers more of the same: a strong value-for-money proposition, excellent quality and reliability backed up by a generous warranty.

Its styling has been updated for 2021, with sharper lines and a sportier profile.

Prices open at \$23,420 for the 120kW 2.0-litre/six-speed manual i30. A six-speed auto adds \$2000. Active auto is \$26,920 and Elite auto is \$30,220.

A punchy 150kW 1.6-litre turbopetrol powers the N Line hatch, priced at \$29,420. Premium is \$34,220. The seven-speed transmission adds \$2000 to both models.

The i30 sedan, with a longer wheelbase and a 117kW 2.0-litre, starts at \$24,790 for the Active; a six-speed auto adds \$2000 and auto Elite is \$30,790.

N-Line manual sedan is \$30,290; the seven-speed DCT adds \$2000 and Premium is \$37,290.

All models include driver attention warning, low speed autonomous emergency braking with pedestrian and cyclist detection, plus lane keep assist. Automatic models add adaptive cruise control with automatic stop and go in traffic.

A safe exit warning detects vehicles approaching from behind and will sound a warning if you attempt to open a door.

The rear camera can also be switched on while you're driving so you can monitor what's happening behind you.

Base i30 also includes an eight-inch touchscreen, Apple CarPlay/Android Auto functionality, digital speedo, 16-inch alloys, a full size spare, a camera and rear parking sensors.

Elite gets a 10.25 inch infotainment screen, navigation, digital radio, dual zone air, wireless phone charging and keyless entry and starting.

Hyundai's 2.0-litre engine goes well enough, though, like any naturally aspirated four, it

lacks the midrange pulling power of a turbo. Still, with the six-speed auto, it gets off the line smartly, has adequate performance in town, cruises smoothly and quietly and has enough top-end power to safely overtake.

Eco, Normal and Sport modes are provided, but no automatic stop/start.

The suspension is tuned on the firm side for good control, bump absorption and roadholding at speed, but with sufficient compliance for a reasonably comfortable ride in town. The sedan's longer wheelbase adds to composure and comfort, both of which are outstanding in this class.

Switches and controls work with precision and the touchscreen has bright, hi-resolution graphics.

Voice control works only with the Android or CarPlay apps on your USB-connected smartphone, but the Bluetooth connection is quick and reliable.

There's ample driving-position adjustment, clear vision

(assisted by the rear camera with moving guidelines) and a comfortable driver's seat, albeit with a fairly short cushion.

Rear seat legroom in the hatch is a bit tight for tall adults, though the bench itself is firm and comfortable. The sedan's extended wheelbase provides much more back seat space.

Boot space is generous, but you have to lift objects over a high lip and put them into a deep well in the floor. The extended floor has a big step in it, too.

As with the Toyota Corolla, its closest rival, Hyundai's i30 offers set-and-forget motoring, low running costs and exceptional quality at a reasonable price, especially the sedan, which is a standout buy in the small car class. What's not to like about that?

THINGS WE LIKE

- ✓ Excellent value when "drive away no more to pay"
- ✓ The sedan is one of the best drives and deals in the small car class
- ✓ Outstanding quality and reliability
- ✓ Long warranty
- ✓ High-grade infotainment specification in base model
- ✓ Tidy handling and a comfortable ride

THINGS YOU MIGHT NOT LIKE

- ✗ Unimaginative exterior styling in the hatch
- ✗ Tightish back seat space in the hatch
- ✗ Deep boot with high load lip
- ✗ Remote-control steering in the hatch

SPEX (Active auto hatch)

- Made in South Korea
- 2.0-litre four cylinder petrol/six-speed automatic/front-wheel drive
- 120kW of power at 6500rpm/203Nm of torque at 4700rpm
- 0-100km/h N/A
- 5.9L/100km highway; 10.1L/100km city; 91 octane; CO₂ emissions are 173gkm
- Warranty: Five years/unlimited kilometres
- Standard: Seven airbags, stability control, low speed AEB, lane keep assist, adaptive cruise with low speed automatic stop and go, automatic headlights, 16-inch alloy wheels, rear parking sensors, camera, eight-inch touchscreen, Bluetooth, Apple CarPlay/Android Auto, cloth upholstery, full size spare.
- Redbook future values: 3yr: 51%; 5yr: 39%

STARS ★★★★★

- Safety ★★★★★ ANCAP
- Performance ★★★★★
- Handling ★★★★★
- Quality and reliability ★★★★★
- Comfort and refinement ★★★★★
- Value for money ★★★★★
- Overall** ★★★★★



compare with ...

Ford Focus, Mazda3, Subaru Impreza, Toyota Corolla, VW Golf



HYUNDAI I30 N FROM \$41,400



The first product of Hyundai's N Performance division, the i30 N is the creation of Albert Biermann, former engineering chief of BMW's M operation.

At \$41,400, i30 N is the best value in the class, whichever way you look at it. Its 2.0-litre turbo four produces 202kW of power and up to 378Nm of torque on over-boost, so it has the traditional hot hatch value measure (bang for your buck) well covered against rivals at the \$40K price point.

A Fastback variant (pictured), with a longer, lower coupe style body, costs \$42,910. It features the same drivetrain as the hatch, and comparable standard equipment.

The introduction of the Fastback brought a revised suspension package, now also fitted to the hatch.

A slightly softer front end sharpens initial turn-in, improves ride comfort and mid corner traction under power, while the rear suspension has also been recalibrated to give

the car what Hyundai calls "greater playfulness." Hyundai's warranty includes coverage for non-competition track days — bankable quality, reliability and low servicing costs.

Specific performance N hardware includes 19-inch alloys with 235/35 Pirelli P Zeros, an adjustable electromechanical limited slip diff, multilink rear end (the regular i30 has a torsion beam), adjustable dampers all round, larger brakes, extra bracing and a sports exhaust.

Apart from a few discreet N logos, blue stitching, dark rooflining and a fat-rimmed M-style steering wheel, the cabin differs little from a shopping trolley i30.

Our test car's \$3000 Luxury Pack option includes heavily bolstered, heated and power-adjustable Recaro-lookalike front seats, upholstered in suede and leather, that offer great support

when cornering and all-day comfort when cruising.

You can set engine responsiveness, rev matching, limited slip diff operation, exhaust sound, damping, steering weight and stability control intervention to any combination you like in Custom mode, using the infotainment touchscreen. If it's all too hard, just tap the N mode paddle for full-monty everything.

Daily drive modes include Eco — which, of course, not many will use — Normal and Sport.

The 2.0-litre is a touch lazy at low revs but at 2000rpm, a full-fat serve of solid turbo shove arrives and continues unabated to 6250rpm. Sequential shift lights on the instrument panel tell you when it's time to grab another gear.

With a looser and longer throw than the best Euro manuals, Hyundai's gearbox is acceptably slick in action. Rev matching works nicely if you're no heel-and-toe hero; downshifts are

accompanied by loud, menacing staccato bursts of machine gun-like fire from the exhaust, guaranteed to get you a chat with your friendly highway patrol.

A mechanical limited slip diff, together with the adhesive Pirellis, ensures that even on full throttle, the N gets clean, strong drive out of corners.

The more responsive front end means that the 2020 N turns in quickly and accurately, still with a tight, flat attitude but with less of the nose-heavy character of the 2018 hatch, so on a tight, winding road (or track) at speed it requires less effort at the wheel and is an easier, more finely nuanced car to drive.

A great car at a killer price, and highly recommended.

An update is due shortly, including a sedan, lightweight forged 19-inch wheels and an eight-speed dual-clutch automatic transmission option.

THINGS WE LIKE

- ✓ Great value
- ✓ Long warranty and low running costs
- ✓ Punchy, tuneful 2.0 turbo
- ✓ One of the best-handling hot hatches
- ✓ Loaded with serious performance tech and engineering
- ✓ Works as an everyday drive, too

THINGS YOU MIGHT NOT LIKE

- ✗ Fairly basic driver-assist safety specification
- ✗ Touchscreen is too far away and has unresponsive icons
- ✗ Tight back-seat space

SPEX

- Made in the Czech Republic
- 2.0-litre four cylinder turbopetrol/six-speed manual/front-wheel drive
- 202kW of power at 6000rpm
- 353Nm of torque from 1450-4700rpm
- 0-100km/h in 6.2 seconds (claimed)
- 6.4L/100km highway; 10.6L/100km city; 95 premium; CO2 emissions are 186g/km
- Warranty: Five years/unlimited km
- Standard: Seven airbags, stability control, autonomous emergency braking, lane keep assist, tyre pressure monitoring, automatic headlights, camera, rear parking sensors, eight-inch touchscreen, Bluetooth, digital radio, Apple CarPlay, Android Auto, 19-inch alloys, leather-wrapped steering wheel.
- Redbook future values: 3yr: 56%; 5yr: 41%



STARS ★★★★★

- Safety ★★★★★
- Performance ★★★★★
- Handling ★★★★★
- Quality and reliability ★★★★★
- Comfort and refinement ★★★★★
- Value for money ★★★★★
- Overall** ★★★★★

compare with ...

Honda Type R, Renault Megane RS, Subaru WRX, VW Golf GTi

HYUNDAI IONIQ FROM \$35,140



Electric drivetrain technology has progressed to the point where 200km and beyond is now an achievable range, so if you live in a capital city, an electric car is certainly a viable option as your daily driver.

Hyundai's Ioniq is a three-model line-up that includes a pure electric variant, with a claimed range of up to 311km, and a Toyota Prius-style petrol/electric hybrid, where the electric motor's main function is to improve the efficiency of the petrol engine.

Ioniq plug-in, tested here, claims up to 63km on electricity alone from its 8.9kWh lithium-ion battery. In hybrid mode, where it switches between 1.6-litre petrol and battery power, sometimes using both depending upon how and where you're driving, its range can exceed 600km.

Priced from \$42,410 in Elite specification, or \$46,950 for the Premium, as tested, Ioniq plug-in is \$7270 more expensive than the equivalent petrol/electric hybrid. The pure electric

model costs \$48,790 (Elite) and \$53,010 (Premium).

Plug-in means exactly that. You can charge Ioniq's battery at home, in about two hours using a wall-mounted charger that costs \$1950 (including installation), or by plugging the supplied lead into a 10-amp household power point. Using that method, I recharged the test car's battery from dead flat to 100 per cent in three hours, 50 minutes.

If you forget, or the battery runs out of charge while you're driving, no problem. Ioniq automatically goes into hybrid mode.

I got 40km on electricity alone, but in optimum conditions — city traffic, where frequent braking puts charge back into the battery — Hyundai's claimed 63km is possible. In hybrid mode, with about 80 per cent highway and 20 per cent around town driving, the test car averaged

3.0-3.5L/100km, so you can do 1000km on a tank. Hyundai's claimed 1.1L/100km is fantasy.

The battery is warranted for eight years/160,000km.

I also drove the pure electric Ioniq Elite, mainly to check its claimed range against reality.

As with other EVs, you can get close to Ioniq's claimed 311km around town, but out on the open road, expect this to fall to about 200km. Then you need to find a charging station.

Refined and luxurious, Ioniq has a comfortable ride, a supportive driver's seat and hushed cabin in electric (EV) mode. You hear only a faint drone from the petrol engine at highway speeds and virtually no wind noise.

Rear seat space is fine for most adults; the seat is firm and comfortable and vents are provided, but no connectivity.

All the must-have safety tech is standard, though autonomous emergency braking works only at speeds up to 80km/h.

Performance, especially in EV mode, is sedate but we're not in a hot rod here, are we? The objective is efficiency, not tyre-frying acceleration.

It's fine in daily driving and when you need a shove, the petrol engine kicks in with reasonable enthusiasm, assisted by a responsive six-speed dual-clutch transmission.

You can select EV, Hybrid or Sport mode, which extracts maximum hybrid performance and adds weight to the steering. But "Sport?" Not even close.

Tight, solid and planted, Ioniq's dynamics are a highlight. Locally tuned, independent suspension (at both ends) offers excellent control and compliance, even on rough roads. It's heavy, but a low centre of gravity means it doesn't feel ponderous. I've driven plenty of "normal" cars that are less capable and enjoyable at speed.

THINGS WE LIKE

- ✓ Combines the best of petrol and electric drivetrains
- ✓ Spacious and comfortable
- ✓ Hyundai quality and reliability
- ✓ Safe and secure

THINGS YOU MIGHT NOT LIKE

- ✗ It's not exactly excitement-plus
- ✗ The interior is pretty dull, too
- ✗ AEB works only up to 80km/h
- ✗ No spare, just a repair kit

SPEX

- Made in South Korea
- 1.6-litre petrol/electric hybrid/six-speed dual-clutch automatic/front-wheel drive
- 104kW of power/240Nm of torque (combined)
- 1.1L/100km (claimed, combined); regular unleaded; CO2 emissions are 26g/km (combined)
- Warranty: Five years/unlimited km
- Standard: Seven airbags, stability control, AEB, adaptive cruise, blind spot monitoring, lane keeping, rear cross traffic alert, Bluetooth, Apple CarPlay, Android Auto, 16-inch alloy wheels, dual-zone air, navigation. Premium includes heated and cooled, power adjustable, leather upholstered front seats, a sunroof and wireless phone charging
- Redbook future values: 3yr: 50%; 5yr: 37%

STARS ★★★★★

- Safety ★★★★★
- Performance ★★★★★
- Handling ★★★★★
- Quality and reliability ★★★★★
- Comfort and refinement ★★★★★
- Value for money ★★★★★
- Overall** ★★★★★



compare with ...

Nissan Leaf



HYUNDAI VENUE FROM \$20,690



Hundai's Venue, a small SUV, starts at \$20,690 (plus on road costs) for the six-speed manual; a six-speed automatic adds \$2020.

Powered by a 90kW 1.6-litre petrol four, driving the front wheels, Venue's standard equipment list includes 15-inch alloy wheels, cloth upholstery, a camera, eight-inch touchscreen infotainment with Apple CarPlay/Android Auto, voice control (only via either of these apps), fast, reliable Bluetooth connectivity, USB and 12 volt sockets (one each) and cruise control.

Hyundai's Auto Link app connects you to the car via your smartphone. Functions include monitoring how efficiently and smoothly you drive, keeping a record of your trips, battery condition, tyre pressures, a log book for business use, locating the vehicle, accident/breakdown assistance contacts and sharing your location and trips with friends and family via social media.

Active specification, at \$22,620 (manual) and \$24,640

(automatic, tested here) adds 17-inch alloys, rear parking sensors, power folding side mirrors and a leather wrapped steering wheel and gear lever.

The auto-only Elite, with a sunroof, tinted rear glass, navigation with live traffic updates, digital radio and automatic air-con, is \$26,490.

You sit high, with great vision around the car thanks to the tall roof. Add wide opening doors, and no bending required entry or exit, and it's easy to see why an SUV often sells itself as soon as a prospective customer climbs into the driver's seat.

Fit and finish (including exterior paint) are excellent, the controls work with smoothness and precision and the cabin plastics don't feel cheap and nasty. I've heard tinnier audio in much pricier cars, too.

Tall front occupants impinge on rear seat legroom, and it's a vents/connection sockets free-

zone in the Active. The high roof, elevated bench and tall windows will keep kids much happier than the claustrophobic confines of a small car's back seat.

A cleverly-designed boot allows you to configure a deep, covered compartment under a flush floor, or a single, large carrying space. A handy storage slot on the back seat keeps the load cover out of the way when not required, and the extended floor is flat.

Go's safety specification includes autonomous emergency braking with pedestrian detection, lane keep assist, driver attention warning – including a chime if you're daydreaming in traffic and the car in front starts to move – automatic high beams and tyre pressure monitoring. Elite adds blind spot monitoring and rear cross traffic alert.

Venue's 1.6-litre four pulls with surprising ease on a light throttle, aided by appropriately-spaced ratios in the automatic.

Its 90kW of power is delivered pretty willingly at the top end, though fuel consumption around town can get towards double figures if you're vigorous on the pedal.

The 1.6 is also remarkably smooth and quiet for a small atmo four, especially on the highway where tyre, wind and road noise are also well muted.

Switchable traction control modes – sand, mud and snow – are a figment of the marketing department's imagination rather than literal indicators of off-road ability.

Vague, overassisted steering at 100km/h, and grabby brakes at low speed, detract from an otherwise impressive drive. Locally tuned suspension strikes a spot on ride/handling compromise, and as with so much else about it, the Hyundai Venue feels much more comfortable, solid and planted on the open road than its bargain price suggests it should.

THINGS WE LIKE

- ✓ Good value
- ✓ Excellent quality and reliability
- ✓ Spacious, comfortable cabin
- ✓ Decent safety specification
- ✓ Low engine, wind and road noise levels
- ✓ 1.6 goes OK and runs on regular unleaded
- ✓ Secure handling and a comfortable ride

THINGS YOU MIGHT NOT LIKE

- ✗ Vague, overassisted steering at highway speeds
- ✗ Grabby brakes in town
- ✗ No vents or sockets in the back seat

SPEX (Active auto)

- Made in South Korea
- 1.6-litre four cylinder petrol/six-speed automatic/front-wheel drive
- 90kW of power at 6300rpm/151Nm of torque at 4850rpm
- 0-100km/h N/A
- 5.9L/100km highway; 9.5L/100km city; regular unleaded; CO2 emissions are 165gkm
- Standard: Six airbags, stability control, autonomous emergency braking with pedestrian detection, lane keep assist, driver attention warning, automatic high beams and tyre pressure monitoring, camera, Apple CarPlay/Android Auto, 15-inch alloys, rear parking sensors, leather wrapped steering wheel and gear lever.
- Redbook future values: 3yr: 53%; 5yr: 39%



STARS ★★★★★

- Safety **Not yet tested**
- Performance ★★★★★
- Handling ★★★★★
- Quality and reliability ★★★★★
- Comfort and refinement ★★★★★
- Value for money ★★★★★
- Overall** ★★★★★

compare with ...

Honda HRV, Kia Stonic, Mazda CX3, Mitsubishi ASX, Suzuki Vitara

HYUNDAI KONA FROM \$26,600



The 2021 Hyundai Kona is the first major update since the original model arrived in 2017.

There are six models, starting with the base Kona, priced from \$26,600. Active is priced from \$28,200, Elite from \$31,600 and Highlander from \$38,000.

These are powered by a 110kW 2.0-litre four-cylinder petrol engine, matched to a CVT auto and front-wheel drive.

New for 2021 are Kona N-Line and N-Line Premium, both all-wheel-drive and powered by a 146kW, 1.6-litre four-cylinder turbopetrol matched to a seven-speed twin clutch automatic.

The first SUVs to wear Hyundai's sports N label are priced at \$36,300 and \$42,400..

Kona includes autonomous emergency braking, lane-keeping assistance, adaptive cruise, 16-inch alloy wheels, wireless Apple Car Play, an 8.0-inch infotainment screen, and a rear camera.

Kona Active gains leather seats, 17-inch alloy wheels, rear parking sensors, rear privacy glass, and power folding side mirrors.

The full suite of advanced safety tech doesn't arrive until

Elite, which gains blind spot warning, rear cross traffic alert, as well as a sensor key with push button start and a 10.25-inch infotainment screen with embedded navigation and wired Apple CarPlay.

Highlander gets 18-inch alloy wheels, LED headlights, front parking sensors, a head-up display, power adjustable front seats and heated rear seats.

Helpful touches on all models include extendable sun visors, and a warning in the dash that advises when the car ahead drives off in stop-start traffic.

As this article was written, Hyundai's wireless Apple CarPlay/Android Auto connectivity, used on base and Active variants, was plagued with electronic gremlins that, in our experience, disconnect the phone every few seconds.

The connection is so ineffective, Hyundai should perhaps stop claiming Apple Car Play is a feature. Most car makers back up their wireless systems by giving customers

the option of using a USB cord. Hyundai does not, so it's back to old school Bluetooth to make or take calls or stream music.

A fix is coming, but as this article was published Hyundai couldn't indicate when.

Elite and Highlander have wired Apple Car Play and Android Auto and that set-up works fine.

The Kona isn't going to win a grand prix or hug corners like a hot hatch, but it's capable enough for the daily grind and an easy, stress-free drive.

As before, the Kona has a comfortable cabin, there's plenty of oddment storage, and all buttons are well placed and intuitive to use.

The suspension is a little more comfortable on the cheaper models that run 16- and 17-inch wheels and taller tyres.

The 18-inch tyres on the N-Line have plenty of grip, though they can be noisy on coarse road surfaces.

The 2.0-litre models are surprisingly perky; the 1.6-litre turbo fitted to N-Line doesn't

quite have the performance advantage you would expect.

The N-Line did the 0 to 100 dash in 8.8 seconds, only marginally quicker than the 9.5 second time for the 2.0-litre.

N-Line's twin-clutch auto is sleepy from rest – as is the case with most examples of this type of transmission – and doesn't move off the line with the same briskness as the standard Kona.

Once under way, the twin-clutch can also jolt from first to second gears, however it's a smooth operator the rest of the time.

The Hyundai Kona has received some worthwhile updates but there are better SUVs around for similar money, such as the Skoda Kamiq, Kia Seltos and Subaru XV.

By Joshua Dowling

THINGS WE LIKE

- ✓ Base 2.0-litre drivetrain goes well and runs on regular unleaded
- ✓ Hyundai does great quality and reliability
- ✓ Clean dash layout
- ✓ Strong resale values

THINGS YOU MIGHT NOT LIKE

- ✗ Wireless Apple CarPlay/Android Auto connectivity on base and Active models doesn't work properly
- ✗ N-Line 1.6 turbo doesn't quite have the go to match the show
- ✗ Twin clutch auto isn't the best, either
- ✗ Rear seat and boot space aren't huge
- ✗ Full safety spec should be standard across the range

SPEX (Active)

- Made in South Korea
- 2.0-litre four cylinder petrol/CVT/ front-wheel drive
- 110kW of power at 6200rpm/180Nm of torque at 4500rpm
- 0-100km/h N/A
- 5.0L/100km highway; 8.3L/100km city; 91 octane regular; CO2 emissions are 148gkm; fuel tank is 50 litres
- Maximum towing weight: 1300kg
- Warranty: Five years/unlimited km
- Standard: Six airbags, stability control, AEB, lane-keep assist, adaptive cruise, wireless Apple Car Play/Android Auto, 8.0-inch infotainment screen, wireless phone charging, leather seats, 17-inch alloys, space saver spare, rear parking sensors, rear privacy glass and power folding side mirrors.
- Redbook future values: 3yr: 60%; 5yr: 48%

STARS ★★★★★

- Safety ★★★★★
- Performance ★★★★★
- Handling ★★★★★
- Quality and reliability ★★★★★
- Comfort and refinement ★★★★★
- Value for money ★★★★★
- Overall** ★★★★★



compare with ...

Mitsubishi ASX, Honda HRV, Kia Seltos, Skoda Kamiq, Subaru XV, Toyota C-HR



HYUNDAI KONA ELECTRIC FROM \$62,000



Kona electric is Hyundai's first battery-powered SUV. Prices start at \$62,000 for the Elite. Highlander, which we're testing here, is \$66,000.

The 2.0-litre petrol-powered Kona Elite starts at \$31,600. Highlander is \$38,000.

So you're paying close to twice the price to go EV.

Kona's 150kW single electric motor drives the front wheels. Its 64kWh lithium ion battery now provides a claimed range of up to 484km, up from 450km on the 2020 model.

Hyundai quotes zero to 80 percent capacity recharge times extending from 47 minutes on a 100kW DC public fast charger to six hours and 50 minutes with three phase power and an optional 10.5kW on board charger.

Using a 10amp household power point will take up to 28 hours.

Servicing is cheap because an EV drivetrain has few moving parts and no fluids, apart from battery coolant. Kona electric costs \$165 every 12 months/15,000km (whichever comes first.) A 2.0-litre petrol

Kona costs \$264-\$364 per service.

The battery is warranted for eight years/160,000km.

Kona is smaller inside than it looks. A high SUV seating position, clear vision, informative digital instruments and plenty of handy storage on a split level centre console make life easy and comfortable for the driver, but rear seat legroom and boot space are tight.

You get the worksburger safety specification, including adaptive cruise with stop/go in traffic and autonomous emergency braking in forward and reverse.

The 2021 update adds blind spot monitoring plus safe exit warning, which alerts you if a vehicle is approaching from behind as a door is being opened.

A 2.0-litre petrol-powered Kona won't see which way the EV went. Press the accelerator in Sport mode and the Hyundai immediately surges forward on a muscular, ultra-smooth

395Nm of torque.

Eco mode still offers diesel-like grunt -- without the noise, turbolag or carcinogenic emissions. All you hear in Kona is a faint whirr from the electric motor.

Paddles allow you to adjust the level of regenerative braking. Maximum provides strong retardation when you lift your right foot, to the extent that you can almost leave the brake pedal alone.

The hydraulic brakes, though powerful, are also extremely abrupt.

Handling is cumbersome. Nexen tyres lack grip, steering is lifeless and the suspension doesn't quite control body movement as it should. This also makes for a slightly nautical ride, though comfort and compliance are pretty good.

You can achieve 400km-plus of range in city driving, where you're crawling along in traffic, frequently stopped, on the

brakes or off the accelerator -- all of which contribute to eking out maximum range, especially in Eco mode.

Open road speeds dramatically increase power consumption because your right foot is nearly always on the go pedal, and unless you're coasting downhill the battery gets no regenerative charge. On one highway drive in the 2020 model, 243km of range was showing when we set off and our test car travelled 98km. At that distance, the battery's remaining range had fallen to 120km. So, basically, the Kona lost one kilometre of range for every four kilometres it travelled.

The trip computer keeps recalculating range as you travel, but as in any EV, if you make the mistake of believing the range you have when you set off is the distance you can drive before it's time to plug in, you may end up stranded. They don't call it range anxiety for nothing.

THINGS WE LIKE

- ✓ Incredibly smooth and quiet compared with a petrol or diesel drivetrain
- ✓ Works a treat in the city where range anxiety isn't an issue
- ✓ Comfortable ride
- ✓ Comprehensive safety spec
- ✓ Cheap servicing

THINGS YOU MIGHT NOT LIKE

- ✗ Trying to find a recharging station in a country town
- ✗ Sloppy handling
- ✗ Small interior
- ✗ Doesn't feel like a \$60K car from the driver's seat
- ✗ No spare

SPEX

- Made in South Korea
- Electric motor/lithium ion battery/single speed reduction gear/front-wheel drive
- 150kW of power/395Nm of torque/64kWh battery
- 0-100km/h in 7.6 seconds (claimed)
- Range: up to 484km (claimed)
- Warranty: Five years/unlimited kilometres
- Standard: Six airbags, stability control, AEB, blind spot monitoring, adaptive cruise, rear cross traffic alert, lane keep assist, Apple CarPlay, Android Auto, navigation, digital radio, leather faced upholstery, heated and cooled front seats, 17 inch alloy wheels
- Redbook future values: 3yr: 56%; 5yr: 43%



STARS ★★★★★

- Safety ★★★★★
- Performance ★★★★★
- Handling ★★★★★
- Quality and reliability ★★★★★
- Comfort and refinement ★★★★★
- Value for money ★★★★★
- Overall** ★★★★★

compare with ...

Mitsubishi Outlander PHEV

HYUNDAI TUCSON FROM \$29,640

S



Hundai's Tucson mid-size SUV range opens with the 121kW/203Nm 2.0-litre four-cylinder direct-injection petrol/six-speed manual front-wheel-drive Active, at \$29,640. Active X is \$32,640. A six-speed auto adds \$2500.

Front-wheel drive Elite automatic is \$38,200.

All-wheel-drive petrol variants kick off with the 130kW/265Nm 1.6-litre turbopetrol/seven-speed dual-clutch-automated manual Elite at \$41,200. In top-of-the-range Highlander specification, it's \$46,850.

The 135kW/400Nm 2.0-litre turbodiesel/eight-speed automatic all-wheel-drive Active is \$37,440. Active X is \$40,440, Elite is \$43,500 and Highlander is \$49,150.

Hyundai is pitching Tucson ActiveX 2.0-litre petrol as the value-for-money variant, with 17-inch alloy wheels, leather-faced seats, dynamic parking guidelines on the rear camera and a big touchscreen infotainment system. Apple

CarPlay and Google Android Auto compatibility are standard across the range.

Hyundai's five years/unlimited-kilometres warranty is another value-add on ActiveX.

Automatic emergency braking from speeds up to 65km/h and lane-departure warning/lane keep assist are standard on Active and Active X automatics. Elite and Highlander add AEB from up to 80km/h, pedestrian detection, blind spot monitoring, adaptive cruise and rear cross traffic alert.

The 2.0-litre direct-injection engine's relatively low peak torque figure is produced at a very high 4700rpm, so performance is leisurely, especially with a full load of kids. Eco, Normal and Sport modes give you the option of trading off performance for fuel economy via different transmission shift points.

Hyundai's local suspension-tuning expertise, underpinned by a strong, rigid body, delivers great roadholding and control on rough surfaces with a firm, comfortable ride and precise steering. Tucson ActiveX pushes the front end and gets a bit messy in tight corners — like every other front-wheel-drive SUV — while the brakes, though powerful, are wooden in feel.

The stark, functional dash, swathed in textured grey plastic, features bright, illuminated instruments, a clear, easy-to-navigate, responsive touchscreen and two 12-volt outlets.

There's ample driving position adjustability, unimpeded vision all round, a comfortable driver's seat and plenty of storage.

It's hardly a premium cabin but it's quiet and fit and finish quality are fine. I've heard tinnier sound systems in much more expensive cars, too.



Tucson's back seat has reasonable legroom, a firm, comfortable cushion and adjustable backrest angle. Three will fit, but the centre belt is housed in the roof and fiddly to use, and no vents are provided. Three Australian standard and two ISOFIX mounts are fitted.

The big load area has a low floor, high-opening tailgate, 12-volt outlet, bag hook, net and cargo blind.

A full-size spare on an alloy wheel is under the floor.

Tucson is a well-made, capable SUV that would be easy to live with as a family wagon, but compared with the Ford Escape, Mazda CX-5, Subaru Forester and VW Tiguan it still misses out on important safety features that these rivals include across the range, notably in base models.

THINGS WE LIKE

- ✓ Plenty of space
- ✓ Well equipped
- ✓ Secure handling and comfortable ride
- ✓ Easy to drive
- ✓ Excellent quality and reliability plus a long warranty

THINGS YOU MIGHT NOT LIKE

- ✗ 2.0-litre engine lacks torque
- ✗ Rivals at this price point have all-wheel drive
- ✗ Cabin is a bit grey, plasticky and downmarket
- ✗ Only the top-spec models get full driver assist safety tech
- ✗ No 12-volt outlet or vents in back seat

SPEX (ActiveX automatic)

- Made in South Korea and the Czech Republic
- 2.0-litre four-cylinder petrol/six-speed automatic/front-wheel drive
- 121kW of power at 6200rpm/203Nm of torque at 4700rpm
- 0-100km/h N/A
- Warranty: Five years/unlimited kilometres
- 6.1L/100km highway; 11.0L/100km city; regular unleaded, CO₂ emissions are 185g/km. Fuel tank: 62 litres
- Standard: Six airbags, stability control, AEB, lane keep assist, 17-inch alloy wheels, rear camera and parking sensors, automatic headlights, leather-faced seats, Bluetooth, Apple CarPlay, heated, folding side mirrors, roof rails
- Redbook future values: 3yr: 57%; 5yr: 44%

STARS ★★★★★

- Safety ★★★★★ ANCAP
- Performance ★★★★★
- Handling ★★★★★
- Quality and reliability ★★★★★
- Comfort and refinement ★★★★★
- Value for money ★★★★★
- Overall** ★★★★★

compare with ...

Ford Escape, Kia Sportage, Mazda CX-5, Nissan X-Trail, Subaru Forester, VW Tiguan



HYUNDAI SANTA FE FROM \$44,700



Hundai's 2021 Santa Fe range opens with the 200kW 3.5-litre V6 petrol/eight-speed automatic/front-wheel-drive Wagon, at \$44,700. Active is \$48,300, Elite is \$54,300 and Highlander is \$61,700.

The 148kW 2.2-litre turbodiesel/eight-speed automatic/all-wheel drive Wagon, tested here, is \$48,200. Active is \$51,800, Elite is \$57,800 and Highlander is \$65,200.

The 2.2-litre turbodiesel produces hefty outputs for its size and is one of the best four-cylinder turbodiesels in the business, matching (or beating) the best German engines in performance, refinement and fuel efficiency.

It's very responsive from low revs, exceptionally smooth and strong in the midrange and pulls willingly across the top end to well past 4500rpm.

Eco, Comfort, Sport and Smart (adaptive) drivetrain modes can be selected, and auto stop/start is fitted.

The eight-speed dual clutch automatic is a seamless fit

with the engine, and shifts are timely, quick and smooth.

Santa Fe's all-wheel drive system varies the torque split according to drive mode and traction.

The base model tested runs non-adjustable suspension, tuned with ride comfort as a priority. Even so, Santa Fe's handling is controlled, secure and well-balanced at highway speeds and on poor road surfaces. The ride is quiet and pretty luxurious.

The cabin, at base model level, is a bit austere and you're surrounded by every shade of grey. That said, the instruments and control layout are legible, very easy to use, and everything is close at hand.

Storage includes a large centre console box, a handy shelf above the main glovebox, and rubber liners for all compartments. Two USBs and a 12 volt socket are in the dash.

Infotainment includes wireless phone charging and an eight inch touchscreen, but

no navigation or digital radio until Elite specification.

Be aware that Hyundai's wireless connectivity for CarPlay and Android Auto has been plagued by problems and a fix is still in progress.

Safety tech includes adaptive cruise, collision warning (including at intersections), automatic emergency braking, traffic crawling, blind spot monitoring, lane change assist and rear cross-traffic alert. Automatic parking and a head up display are also standard on Highlander.

The base model's driver's seat is a bit of a plank and unsupportive on longer journeys. A few tall drivers may want more legroom.

The 60/40 split middle row is a firm bench that's wide enough for three. Each section slides on tracks to adjust legroom -- of which there's plenty -- and the backrest angle is also adjustable. Two USB sockets are fitted.

Two individual row-three seats, suitable for kids up to teen age,

are easily raised into position using straps. A clever one touch mechanism slides and folds the kerbside section of the row two bench for rear access. The gap into the rear seats is narrow, but young kids will have no problem climbing in. Vents and air conditioning controls are provided.

In five-seat mode the boot floor is long, low and easy to load. Release buttons unlock the row two seatbacks, which flip forward for an extended floor that's two metres long.

A full-size spare on an alloy wheel is mounted externally, under the boot.

The Santa Fe 2.2 turbodiesel is one of the best seven-seater SUVs on the market, and the base model as tested is great value for money. Compare with the Skoda Kodiaq, Mazda's CX-8/CX-9, Kia Sorento (its twin under the skin) and VW's Tiguan Allspace.

THINGS WE LIKE

- ✓ The 2.2-litre turbodiesel is a beauty
- ✓ Good value, especially base model and Active specification
- ✓ Lots of occupant and boot space
- ✓ Well equipped with safety tech
- ✓ Comfortable ride and secure handling
- ✓ Outstanding quality and reliability

THINGS YOU MIGHT NOT LIKE

- ✗ Overly intrusive lane keep assist
- ✗ Unsupportive driver's seat
- ✗ Base model cabin is 70 shades of grey plastic
- ✗ Apple Carplay/Android Auto wireless connectivity has issues

SPEX

- Made in South Korea
- 2.2-litre four cylinder turbodiesel/ eight-speed dual clutch automatic/ all-wheel drive
- 148kW of power at 3800rpm/440Nm of torque from 1750-2750rpm
- 0-100km/h N/A
- 5.3L/100km highway; 7.5L/100km city; CO2 emissions are 160g/km; fuel tank is 67 litres
- Maximum towing weight: 2500kg
- Standard: Six airbags, stability control, adaptive cruise, collision warning, AEB, traffic crawling, blind spot monitoring, lane change assist, rear cross-traffic alert, cloth upholstery, eight-inch touchscreen, wireless phone charging, four USBs, rear seat air con, 17-inch alloys.
- Redbook future values: 3yr: 60%; 5yr: 44%

STARS ★★★★★

- Safety **Not yet tested**
- Performance ★★★★★
- Handling ★★★★★
- Quality and reliability ★★★★★
- Comfort and refinement ★★★★★
- Value for money ★★★★★
- Overall** ★★★★★



compare with ...

Kia Sorento, Mazda CX8/CX9, Skoda Kodiaq, Toyota Kluger, VW Tiguan Allspace

HYUNDAI PALISADE FROM \$60,000



Hyundai's Palisade is a monster-sized, US sourced, luxury SUV that represents great value for money if you need a seven or eight seater wagon.

Prices kick off at \$60,000 for the 217kW 3.8-litre petrol/eight-speed automatic/front wheel drive Palisade; the 147kW 2.2-litre four cylinder turbodiesel/eight-speed automatic/all-wheel drive is \$64,000.

Eight seats, arranged in a 2-3-3 layout, are standard.

Highlander specification, with the same drivetrains, costs \$71,000 and \$75,000 respectively. It also offers the no cost option of substituting two individual middle row seats, with a walk through to the rear bench, for a seven seat layout.

Palisade is built to the highest quality standards, exceptionally spacious and comfortable, and loaded with equipment, especially at Highlander level where it rivals the big German

wagons such as Audi's Q7, BMW's X7 and the Mercedes GLS – but gives you up to \$50,000 change, better reliability and much lower servicing costs.

Palisade includes essential driver assist safety tech, a full size spare, leather upholstery, Infinity audio, wireless smartphone charging and big touchscreen infotainment, with navigation, that's easy and intuitive to use.

Highlander adds surround cameras, including blind spot camera coverage on each side of the vehicle (displayed on the instrument panel when you indicate to change lanes) plus a power tailgate, Nappa leather, heated and cooled front and row two seats, rear door blinds and two sunroofs.

Curtain airbags extend to the third row and in Highlander you also get an audible alert if a side door is opened when a vehicle is

approaching from the rear, but autonomous emergency braking only operates at speeds up to 70km/h.

Seating is luxurious up front and in the second row. The driving position is more recumbent and car-like than most SUVs, but you're still a long way off the ground so vision in all directions is fine.

All seats get roof mounted vents (three zone air is standard) and there are seven USB connectors and 16 cupholders in the cabin.

Accessing row three requires just the push of a button, and while it's more suitable for kids than adults, it's one of the bigger back stalls around. In eight seater mode, you still have a decent sized boot as well; with row three folded into the floor, the load space is enormous.

We tested the 2.2-litre turbodiesel Highlander, and

while the petrol engine is plenty potent, Hyundai's latest turbodiesel is much better suited to shifting a heavy load, with lots of torque and fuel consumption that can be up to half that of its petrol counterpart. It's also exceptionally smooth and quiet, and a seamless fit with the push button eight speed automatic.

The diesel also runs all-wheel drive, which again is a better fit in a large, heavy SUV than front wheel drive, with superior safety and traction, especially in wet, slippery conditions.

Hyundai Australia tunes its vehicles' suspension for local roads, and Palisade's ride/handling compromise is superb for such a big wagon, as is steering feel and precision. Again, comparison with much more expensive German SUVs is valid, because the Hyundai drives every bit as capably, comfortably and confidently as any of them.

Highly recommended.

THINGS WE LIKE

- ✓ Outstanding value
- ✓ Refined, torquey, frugal turbodiesel
- ✓ Outstanding quality and reliability
- ✓ Luxurious, comfortable, spacious cabin
- ✓ Outstanding ride/handling compromise

THINGS YOU MIGHT NOT LIKE

- ✗ The front grille looks awful
- ✗ Bridgestone Duelers aren't the stickiest tyres around

SPEX (Highlander 2.2 diesel)

- Made in South Korea
- 2.2-litre four cylinder turbodiesel/eight-speed automatic/all-wheel drive
- 147kW of power at 3800rpm/440Nm of torque from 1750-2750rpm
- 0-100km/h N/A
- 6.2L/100km highway; 9.2L/100km city; CO2 emissions are 193gkm; fuel tank is 71 litres
- Max towing weight: 2200kg
- Warranty: Five years/unlimited km
- Standard: Six airbags, stability control, AEB, adaptive cruise, blind spot monitoring, lane keep assist, rear cross traffic alert, surround cameras, head-up display, Nappa leather upholstery, navigation, Infinity audio, heated and cooled front and row two seats, dual sunroofs, power tailgate, 20-inch alloys.
- Redbook future values: 3yr: 58%; 5yr: 42%

STARS ★★★★★

- Safety
Not yet tested
- Performance
★★★★★
- Handling
★★★★★
- Quality and reliability
★★★★★
- Comfort and refinement
★★★★★
- Value for money
★★★★★
- Overall**
★★★★★



compare with ...

Audi Q7, BMW X7, Mercedes GLS, Volvo XC90



JAGUAR I-PACE FROM \$128,248



Jaguar aimed ambitiously high with its I-Pace mid-size luxury SUV. “The target was to create the best electric vehicle on the planet,” says Jaguar technical design director, Wolfgang Ziebart.

I-Pace matches the Tesla Model X for performance, driving range and efficiency. But I-Pace is better designed and built than anything from the audacious American company adored by EV evangelists. Mercedes EQC is similar in size, but slightly less powerful (330kW), slower and with a shorter range, claimed to be up to 350km. Audi’s e-tron produces 230-265kW and claims a range of “over 400km.”

Porsche’s 320-460kW Taycan is in another league, as its \$190,400 starting price indicates.

I-Pace is available in three model grades — the \$128,248 S, \$137,848 SE and \$151,448 HSE.

The Jaguar’s chassis cradles a large, flat 90kWh lithium-ion battery pack beneath the floor.

This can store enough energy for a driving range up to 470km, according to the new and more realistic WLTP standard. Driving aggressively will reduce this to around 300km.

There’s an electric motor for each axle, so the Jaguar is all-wheel drive. The motors are identical, so each contributes equally to the vehicle’s combined 294kW and 696Nm power and torque maxima.

Topping the EV tech is a mostly aluminium hatchback body with small front and rear overhangs. Inside are five seats and a large cargo compartment. The cabin’s interior design is one of Jaguar’s best. The instrument panel is classy and there’s no shortage of storage spaces or power outlets. Rear seat legroom is large-car abundant, head room sufficient.

Standard equipment in the base S model is hardly \$130K worth, though: fake leather,

no digital radio, no wireless phone charging, no blind spot monitoring or adaptive cruise, no power tailgate. You get more gear in a \$50,000 Mazda CX5.

Jaguar has added Apple CarPlay/Android Auto for 2021.

Though the battery pack means I-Pace weighs a hefty 2200kg or so, performance is on the wild side of exciting. Jaguar claims it rips from 0-100km/h in just 4.8 seconds. Initial acceleration is neck-straining strong.

Screen-selectable options allow the I-Pace driver to choose how it feels and sounds to drive. “Creep” mode mimics the way a conventional auto car edges forward while idling if the driver’s foot isn’t on the brake. With Creep disabled and regenerative braking set to High, the I-Pace can be driven much of the time using only the accelerator pedal.

The Jaguar steers and handles with great grace, considering

its weight. Ride comfort, on air-spring suspension (a \$2400 option in Australia) is good. Noise levels are impressively low, especially with the EV soundtrack function switched off.

I-Pace can be charged at a rate of 63km per 15 minutes at a 50kW public fast charger, but you’ll need the \$425 cable to do it. You’ll also need to spend an extra \$1500 or so for the 7kW home or workplace AC wall-box charger needed to make the Jaguar a properly practical proposition.

It takes about 13 hours to charge the battery; a 10-amp household power point would take days.

While Australia’s charging network is still underdeveloped compared to much of the rest of the world, those prepared to make the leap now, and with the budget, will find that Jaguar has produced a very convincing luxury EV.

By John Carey

THINGS WE LIKE

- ✓ Amazing acceleration
- ✓ Excellent handling
- ✓ Spacious, elegant cabin
- ✓ Adjustable drivetrain characteristics
- ✓ Feels like the future is here already
- ✓ Three-year charging subscription

THINGS YOU MIGHT NOT LIKE

- ✗ Skinny standard equipment list and too many expensive options
- ✗ Lack of fast charging infrastructure out of major cities can cause range issues
- ✗ Paying \$1500 extra for wall-box home charger
- ✗ Long recharge times

SPEX (\$)

- Made in England
- 90kWh Li-ion battery/two electric motors/epicyclic transmission/all-wheel drive
- 400kW of power/696Nm of torque (combined system outputs)
- 0-100km/h in 4.8 seconds (claimed)
- Warranty: Three years/unlimited km; 8 years/160,000km on battery
- Standard: Six airbags, stability control, autonomous emergency braking, lane keeping assist, automated parking, rear cross traffic alert, 18-inch alloy wheels, fake leather upholstery, dual-zone air, 10-inch infotainment touchscreen, navigation, Bluetooth, voice control.
- Redbook future values: 3yr: 53%; 5yr: 41%

STARS ★★★★★

- Safety **Not yet rated**
- Performance ★★★★★
- Handling ★★★★★
- Quality and reliability ★★★★★
- Comfort and refinement ★★★★★
- Value for money ★★★★★
- Overall** ★★★★★



compare with ...

Audi e-tron, MB EQC, Tesla Model X



It was only five years ago that Jaguar decided it needed a competitor in the premium compact SUV segment, where models including the Audi Q3, BMW X1 and Range Rover Evoque were boosting their brands' sales.

Getting the E-Pace to market as quickly as possible was a priority for the latecomer, according to vehicle line director, Alan Volkaerts.

For this reason, it uses technology already developed for other models in the Jaguar Land Rover portfolio.

D8 won't mean anything to potential customers, but inside JLR it's the codename for the set of building blocks used to make both the Range Rover Evoque and newer Land Rover Discovery Sport. The E-Pace is built on the same foundations.

Jaguar was able to create a version of D8 that's a little larger than Evoque but substantially smaller than the Discovery Sport yet the E-Pace inherited their chassis components — suspension, steering, brakes and more — and body structure basics.

Volkaerts admits choosing the pressed-steel D8 platform

is the chief reason E-Pace is hundreds of kilos heavier than obvious rivals. Speed to market was a higher priority than low weight. One obvious result is that the hefty Jaguar uses more fuel than, for example, equivalent versions of the BMW X1.

But the E-Pace is the first Jaguar powered entirely by JLR's latest Ingenium engines. Its turbocharged 2.0-litre petrol four is designed for high power and low emissions.

There are two variants in the E-Pace.

The P250 punches out 183kW and 365Nm — more than the class average. The P300 delivers 221kW and 400Nm. Both come teamed with a nine-speed automatic and all-wheel drive.

Jaguar took the axe to the overcomplex E-Pace model range in early 2020, and it now comes in just four variants.

Prices start at from \$65,900 for the P250 R Dynamic. The SE is \$69,335 and the R-Dynamic HSE is \$73,900.

The P300 Sport is \$82,200.

The interior, which draws on the F-Type sports car for inspiration, is more appealing than other Jaguar sedans and SUVs. Rear seat room is sufficient for tall adults and the cargo compartment is big.

Centrepiece of the good-looking instrument panel is a wide touch screen that's easy to use. There are plenty of points, both 12-volt sockets and USBs, to recharge devices on the move.

While the steering of the E-Pace is feel-free, the Jaguar is agile for an SUV.

But its cornering pace comes at a cost. Its firm suspension jiggles and sometimes jolts on rougher surfaces.

Acceleration from the most powerful petrol and diesel engines is strong, as expected, because E Pace boasts some of the highest outputs in the compact SUV class, especially against German rivals at comparable prices. But the automatic sometimes dithers over which of its many gears to select.

Overall, the E-Pace is an attractive premium compact

SUV, blending style with practicality and driving pleasure.

That said, like most Jaguars, it's underdone in some areas too, notably infotainment and standard equipment. Volvo's XC40, VW's T-Roc and Tiguan and the Skoda Kamiq are the pick of the compact SUV class.

By John Carey

THINGS WE LIKE

- ✓ Willing, frugal engines
- ✓ Elegant interior design
- ✓ Sporty handling
- ✓ Big cargo compartment
- ✓ Reasonable rear seat space

THINGS YOU MIGHT NOT LIKE

- ✗ Firm suspension means the ride isn't supple
- ✗ Dithery automatic
- ✗ Too many expensive options

SPEX (P250 R Dynamic)

- Made in Austria
- 2.0-litre four-cylinder turbopetrol/nine-speed automatic/all-wheel drive
- 183kW of power at 5500rpm/365Nm of torque from 1200-4500rpm
- 0-100km/h in 7.5 seconds (claimed)
- 6.6L/100km highway; 9.5L/100km city; 95 octane premium; CO2 emissions are 174gkm
- Warranty: Three years/unlimited kilometres
- Standard: Six airbags, stability control, automatic emergency braking, lane keep assist, blind spot monitoring, adaptive cruise, 360 degree cameras, 10-inch touchscreen, Bluetooth, navigation, voice control (phone and audio only) leather upholstery, dual zone air, 18-inch alloys, power tailgate
- Redbook future values: 3yr: 54%; 5yr: 40%

STARS ★★★★★

- Safety ★★★★★ ANCAP
- Performance ★★★★★
- Handling ★★★★★
- Quality and reliability ★★★★★
- Comfort and refinement ★★★★★
- Value for money ★★★★★
- Overall** ★★★★★



compare with ...

Audi Q3, BMW X1, Mercedes GLA, Mini Countryman, Skoda Kamiq, Volvo XC40, VW T-Roc and Tiguan



JAGUAR F-PACE FROM \$76,244



Jaguar's F-Pace's mostly aluminium body draws on the basic elements of Jaguar's XE and XF sedans. Size-wise, the F-Pace is something of an in-betweenie. It's larger than a BMW X3, for example, but not as big as an X5.

It's certainly spacious enough to be a very useful family wagon. The 650-litre cargo compartment is a whopper and the rear seat, which features a three-piece folding backrest, is roomy.

F-Pace prices begin at \$76,244 for the 183kW 2.0-litre turbopetrol four P250 R-Dynamic S, with an eight-speed auto and all wheel drive. The SE is \$80,584.

The 221kW 3.0-litre straight six twin turbodiesel D300 R-Dynamic SE is \$96,194.

The 294kW 3.0-litre straight six P400, with an electric compressor-driven turbo, is \$98,654 in SE specification and \$110,404 in HSE trim.

Both straight six engines also feature mild hybrid assistance.

The ballistic SVR, with a 405kW 5.0-litre supercharged V8, is \$142,294. It flings the

F-Pace from rest to 100km/h in just four seconds.

Though bulkier than other middleweight premium SUVs, the F-Pace has been skilfully styled. It's a very good-looking SUV indeed. At least from the outside.

The instrument panel features a broad, curved glass, landscape-oriented touchscreen for its infotainment system, and the cabin was given a restyling job in mid-2020 in a bid to lift its visual quality up to the high standards of its mostly German opposition.

F-Pace's party trick is the optional Activity Key, a waterproof wristband with an integrated transponder that allows you to leave your keys securely in the vehicle when you don't want to take them with you — if you're going for a swim or a surf, for example.

The transponder locks the vehicle and temporarily disables the key fob, so until you return it can't be started.

To drive, the F-Pace is among the best in class.

All variants blend ride comfort and handling agility with rare skill.

Jaguar collaborated with sister company Land Rover on the AWD set-up and although its drivetrain is high range only, the F-Pace has a decent degree of off-road ability, arguably more than its bitumen-focused German rivals.

So what is "mild hybrid"? F-Pace's in-line six cylinder turbodiesel and turbopetrol engines use a 48 volt power supply, with regenerative energy from coasting and braking stored in a separate lithium ion battery, to boost bottom end and midrange performance and run the automatic stop start system. At no stage does the car run on electricity alone.

Tough EU emissions standards are driving this technology, and the result is excellent fuel efficiency in the light of these engine's capacity and outputs: 7.4L/100km for the diesel and 8.7L/100km for the petrol.

While the four isn't as sophisticated, it delivers

perfectly adequate performance and, because it weighs less, slightly better handling.

The F-Pace has standard autonomous emergency braking and adaptive cruise control in all equipment grades. A late 2020 update added blind spot monitoring and rear cross traffic alert as well.

Jaguar is owned by the same Indian conglomerate as Land Rover, and the F-Pace is also available with a Range Rover badge in the shape of the Velar.

In this class, Porsche's Macan is far and away the best drive, but it's on the small side and, of course, pretty pricey. Volvo's XC60 is a great family wagon and good value too, as is the Alfa Romeo Stelvio. If you're not wedded to a "prestige" brand, try the Ford Escape, Skoda Kodiaq, Subaru Forester and VW Tiguan Allspace.

By John Carey

THINGS WE LIKE

- ✓ Comfortable ride and tidy handling
- ✓ Muscular, frugal straight sixes
- ✓ Potent supercharged V8
- ✓ Rear seat and cargo space
- ✓ Solid and well built

THINGS YOU MIGHT NOT LIKE

- ✗ Limited front-seat knee room
- ✗ High, hard rear seat centre position
- ✗ Expensive servicing and short warranty

SPEX (P400)

- Made in England
- 3.0-litre turbopetrol six/eight-speed automatic/all-wheel drive
- 294kW of power at 5500rpm/550Nm of torque at 2000rpm
- 0-100km/h in 5.4 seconds (claimed)
- 6.9L/100km highway; 11.6L/100km city; CO₂ emissions are 202g/km; fuel tank is 82 litres
- Max towing weight 2400kg
- Warranty: Three years/unlimited kilometres
- Standard: Six airbags, stability control, 20-inch alloy wheels, leather upholstery, 11.4 inch touch screen, parking sensors, Bluetooth with voice control, navigation, power tailgate, automatic emergency braking, lane departure warning, tyre pressure monitoring, blind spot monitoring, LED headlights, surround cameras, space saver spare
- Redbook future values: 3yr: 55%; 5yr: 43%

STARS ★★★★★

- Safety **Not yet tested**
- Performance ★★★★★
- Handling ★★★★★
- Quality and reliability ★★★★★
- Comfort and refinement ★★★★★
- Value for money ★★★★★
- Overall** ★★★★★



compare with ...

Alfa Stelvio, Audi Q5, Mercedes GLC, Porsche Macan, Volvo XC60

KIA STINGER FROM \$50,050



Kia's Stinger, a big, sporty, four-door coupe, opens at \$50,050 for the 200S, with a 182kW 2.0-litre turbopetrol four/eight-speed automatic and rear-wheel drive.

Stinger GT Line is \$57,730.

More serious performance lives under the bonnet of the 330S, priced at \$53,830. Its 3.3-litre twin turbo V6 generates 274kW of power, put to the road via the same drivetrain. The top of the range GT, tested here, is \$63,760.

Stinger is Kia's first attempt at a genuine GT performance car, and it shares architecture and mechanicals with the Genesis G70.

Stinger's handsome, distinctive sheetmetal is in marked contrast to its plain interior, which has perhaps too much in common with Kia's humble hatchbacks.

GT is loaded though, with luxurious heated and cooled front seats, upholstered in Nappa leather, plus a full suite of driver assist safety features and worksburger infotainment, with a 10.25 inch touchscreen,

multiple smartphone connectivity and great sound.

Voice control works only when you pair your smartphone via Apple Carplay or Android Auto. So if you don't have one of these apps, you have to do everything, including making calls, using the touchscreen.

The 3.3-litre turbo is a superb engine, with outstanding responsiveness and refinement. When you lean on the accelerator using launch control this thing flies, clocking a claimed, and believable, 4.9 seconds for the 0-100km/h sprint, accompanied by a rich, mellow note.

It likes a drink in town, where mid teens can be expected, but the V6 also runs on regular unleaded -- unusual for a high performance turbo, where premium is an almost universal requirement.

The eight-speed's shifts are crisp and smooth, and paddles are provided as well.

GT runs a mechanical limited slip diff, adaptive dampers -- which can be adjusted independently at the front and the rear -- plus 19-inch alloys with 255/35 rear tyres.

This package doesn't work. The back end struggles to put the engine's power -- and its 510Nm of torque -- to the road and the car can become quite snakey and tail-happy under hard acceleration, especially in corners.

However you adjust it, the suspension fails to properly control wheel or body movement, and the entire rear axle/suspension assembly is not as rigidly mounted as it should be, either, so the Stinger is also loose and twitchy if you hit a few bumps.

Drive the Stinger moderately hard and it's a handful, even with stability control trying to keep things in order.

The ride is fussy and unsettled on a typical country road, with lots

of tyre thump as well, so while the badge says GT, the car itself falls a long way short of that standard in terms of comfort and compliance.

On the credit side, the steering is intuitive and precise while Brembo brakes are up to the task of hauling a heavy (1780kg) car safely to a stop.

Rear seat passengers sit slightly knees up, with reasonable headroom and legroom but no footroom under the front seats. Vents, temperature adjustment, nets, 12 volt and USB ports are provided, so it's well set up for kids.

The coupe shape dictates a small, shallow boot compared with a conventional three-box sedan. GT has a power operated tailgate.

Stinger GT is far from perfect, and it won't worry the Germans, but it's an impressive first effort. The drivetrain is a beauty -- now all it needs is a suspension/tyre package to do it justice.

THINGS WE LIKE

- ✓ Refined, muscular V6 turbo
- ✓ Smooth shifting eight speed auto
- ✓ Rear wheel drive
- ✓ Uses regular unleaded
- ✓ Loaded with gear
- ✓ Comfortable driver's seat
- ✓ Long warranty

THINGS YOU MIGHT NOT LIKE

- ✗ Stability and grip compromised under power
- ✗ Loose and twitchy on bumps
- ✗ Noisy, fussy ride
- ✗ No stand alone voice control
- ✗ Shallow boot

SPEX (GT 330)

- Made in South Korea
- 3.3-litre twin turbo V6 petrol/eight-speed auto/rear-wheel drive
- 274kW of power at 6000rpm/510Nm of torque from 1300-4500rpm
- 0-100km/h in 4.9 seconds (claimed)
- 7.5L/100km highway; 14.9L/100km city; regular unleaded; CO2 emissions are 239g/km
- Warranty: Seven years/unlimited km
- Standard: Stability control, seven airbags, automatic emergency braking, radar cruise, blind spot monitoring, 360 degree cameras, Nappa leather upholstery, heated and cooled front seats, head-up display, eight inch touchscreen, digital radio, wireless phone charging, Harman Kardon audio, sunroof, LED headlights
- Redbook future values: 3yr: 61%; 5yr: 45%



STARS ★★★★★

- Safety
Not yet tested
- Performance
★★★★★
- Handling
★★★★★
- Quality and reliability
★★★★★
- Comfort and refinement
★★★★★
- Value for money
★★★★★
- Overall**
★★★★★

compare with ...

Audi S4, BMW M340i, Genesis G70

KIA RIO FROM \$19,090



Kia is a brand heading in the right direction, due to ever-improving products and that hard-to-resist and market-leading seven years/unlimited kilometres warranty.

Its fourth-generation Rio five-door hatchback faces strong competition, though. It has some impressively solid credentials, but also some less-than-impressive failings.

While the industry-best warranty brings an uncommon reassurance to the ownership experience, other obvious attractions include a pleasant, European-influenced design of the exterior and cabin. Ignore the grille and it could be mistaken for a baby Audi.

Fit and finish matches many Japanese and European rivals, and the Rio feels well built and very solid.

Now sold only as a five-door hatch, the latest Rio has matured somewhat.

It's more spacious and has the gender-neutral, non-polarising looks and latest in infotainment technology to attract a younger buyer demographic.

The 1.4-litre four-cylinder twin-cam ekes out just 73kW of power and 133Nm of torque. It is no rocket, especially when combined with a four-speed auto; most rivals have more responsive, efficient six-speed or CVT transmissions.

The range opens with the six-speed manual base S, priced at \$19,090 plus on-road costs; the six-speed auto is \$21,390.

Sport specification costs \$20,590 with the manual and \$22,890 with a six-speed automatic.

Rio GT Line, with an 88kW/172Nm 1.0-litre turbo triple, matched with a seven-speed dual-clutch automatic, is \$24,990.

The little Kia is well equipped. Even the base model gets an excellent, easy-to-use, colour 8.0-inch touchscreen with a reversing camera, digital radio, MP3-compatible music sourcing and smartphone (Apple and Android) mirroring.

There's also two 12V power outlets in the console

and USB sockets for front and rear passengers.

Sport adds 17-inch alloys and cruise control.

There is clever use of space with excellent storage within the double-tier console, centre sliding-lid bin, twin cup holders and door holders for four bottles.

A versatile 60/40 rear seat back arrangement can increase cargo space from an already handy 325 litres to 980 litres. A temporary steel spare is under the floor.

Dark, Euro-look trims are a Kia signature. The base S tested here has quality embroidered seat trims and the supportive driver's pew gets six-way adjustability. Shoulder and head room is comfortable in the rear, but knee room is tight for adults.

Less convincing though is the 1.4-litre engine, which lets down an otherwise fine and well-engineered little car.

The engine and auto work OK on level ground but lose enthusiasm on hills or when you put your foot down, reacting not

with urge but with a noticeable roar as the revs mount. Fuel efficiency isn't great, either.

Tuned locally for the sporty feel favoured by Australian drivers, Kia's boffins have struck an admirable balance between good road manners and a firm yet compliant ride, even on less-than-perfect road surfaces.

The steering, too, is a pleasant surprise with its consistent road feel and sensible level of power assistance at town and country speeds.

An underdone drivetrain and overambitious pricing are the Rio's weaknesses.

However, its many strengths, including warranty, connectivity and safety, may persuade buyers to consider it. Sharp drive away deals, for example from \$21,990 for the manual Sport, are another reason.

By Peter McKay

THINGS WE LIKE

- ✓ Styling inside and out has Euro flavour
- ✓ Seven-year warranty
- ✓ Well-sorted ride, handling and steering
- ✓ Generous array of useful features
- ✓ Solid and well built

THINGS YOU MIGHT NOT LIKE

- ✗ 1.4-litre is slow and gutless
- ✗ Overpriced against competition
- ✗ Real-world fuel economy isn't great

SPEX (Sport)

- Made in South Korea
- 1.4-litre four-cylinder petrol/six-speed automatic/front-wheel drive
- 73kW of power at 6000rpm/133Nm of torque from 4000rpm
- 0-100km/h N/A
- 5.0L/100km highway; 8.2L/100km city; 91 octane; CO₂ emissions are 145g/km
- Warranty: Seven years/unlimited kilometres
- Standard: Six airbags, stability control, autonomous emergency braking, lane keep assist, cruise control, hill-start assist, LED daytime lights, 15-inch alloys, 7-inch touchscreen audio with Bluetooth, navigation, Apple CarPlay and Android Auto, USB and 12V outlets front and rear, automatic headlights, camera, rear parking sensors, electric and folding heated outside mirrors.
- Redbook future values: 3yr: 50%; 5yr: 43%

STARS ★★★★★

- Safety ★★★★★
- Performance ★★★★★
- Handling ★★★★★
- Quality and reliability ★★★★★
- Comfort and refinement ★★★★★
- Value for money ★★★★★
- Overall** ★★★★★



compare with ...

Mazda2, Skoda Fabia, Suzuki Swift, Toyota Yaris, VW Polo

KIA CERATO FROM \$22,190



Kia's Cerato hatch range opens with the 112kW/192Nm 2.0-litre petrol S, with a six-speed manual, priced at \$22,190.

STARS ★★★★★

Safety ANCAP ★★★★★	Quality, reliability ★★★★☆
Green Vehicle Guide ★★★★☆	Comfort and refinement ★★★★☆
Performance ★★★★☆	Value for money ★★★★☆
Handling ★★★★☆	Overall ★★★★☆

A six-speed auto adds \$2800.

Sport is \$24,190/\$26,990 and Sport+, with the auto as standard, is \$30,040.

The 150kW/256Nm 1.6-litre turbo/seven-speed dual clutch automatic GT i \$34,190.

Cerato sedan is available in the same models grades at the same prices.

The 2.0-litre engine is a strong, willing device that returns good economy on regular unleaded, and is a neat fit with the automatic.

Kia's suspension is tailored for our rough roads, so it's pretty firm.

The Cerato is a classy, comfortable piece inside, albeit rather dark and understated in its attempt to mimic a Euro. Autonomous emergency braking, lane keep assist, parking sensors and full smartphone connectivity are standard.

Fit and finish quality are pretty good and the car is backed by Kia's seven-year/unlimited-kilometres warranty, which is the most generous on the market.

Back-seat space is average. There's more in Toyota Corolla or Honda Civic.

A big boot has a full-size spare underneath.

If you're after a small but spacious sedan or hatch the Cerato is certainly worth a drive.

Kia has been advertising the base S manual hatch and sedan at \$24,990 drive away, making them among the cheapest cars in this class. That's a good deal, because they are far from being the worst.

- ✓ Reasonable handling
- ✓ Excellent quality and reliability
- ✓ Longest warranty on the market

THINGS YOU MIGHT NOT LIKE

- ✗ Ride isn't supple
- ✗ Some engine vibration at high revs
- ✗ Back-seat space isn't huge
- ✗ Three-way electric steering is a gimmick

SPEX (S auto hatch)

- Made in South Korea
- 2.0-litre four-cylinder petrol/six-speed automatic/front-wheel drive
- 129kW of power at 6500rpm/209Nm of torque at 4700rpm
- 0-100/h in 9.0 seconds (claimed)
- 5.4L/100km highway; 10.0L/100km city; 91 octane regular; CO₂ emissions are 169g/km
- Warranty: Seven years/unlimited kilometres
- Standard: Six airbags, stability control, AEB, lane keep assist, Apple CarPlay, Android Auto, keyless starting, camera, parking sensors, 16-inch steel wheels
- Redbook future values: 3yr: 53%; 5yr: 37%

THINGS WE LIKE

- ✓ S is one of the cheapest drive away deal in the class

compare with ...

Honda Civic, Hyundai i30, Mazda3, Skoda Octavia, Toyota Corolla

KIA PICANTO FROM \$15,690



Kia's top selling Picanto starts at \$15,690 with a 62kW 1.25-litre four cylinder/five-speed manual. GT Line, with

STARS ★★★★★

Safety ★★★★★	Comfort and refinement ★★★★☆
Performance ★★★★☆	Value for money ★★★★☆
Handling ★★★★☆	Overall ★★★★☆
Quality, reliability ★★★★☆	

extra equipment and sporty bling, is \$17,140.

The auto adds \$1600 to S and X-Line.

Picanto GT, with a 74kW 1.0-litre turbo triple/five-speed manual, is \$19,990.

The Picanto isn't exactly loaded. It does, however, include everything you need to be comfortable, connected and content.

Infotainment includes Apple Car Play and Android Auto compatibility, so you can do just about everything by voice with

your phone, including navigation, on the eight-inch touchscreen.

Wireless phone charging is also standard in Picanto.

Typical of the class, the back seat has limited legroom and is only wide enough for two. A deep boot is the biggest in the class.

Automatic emergency braking (to a stop from speeds up to 80km/h; partial from speeds above 80km/h) is standard. Picanto is the most affordable car on the market with this feature.

Picanto's 1.25-litre naturally aspirated four cylinder/four-speed auto drivetrain does the job OK around town, albeit at a leisurely pace. It's a fun car to drive in traffic.

The Kia also feels confident and secure at speed on the open road, mainly because local suspension tuning favours control over comfort, so the ride is pretty firm.

- ✓ Automatic emergency braking standard
- ✓ Infotainment is sorted too

THINGS YOU MIGHT NOT LIKE

- ✗ Four star ANCAP
- ✗ It's slow
- ✗ Low speed ride can be pretty lumpy
- ✗ Expensive servicing

SPEX

- Made in South Korea
- 1.25-litre four-cylinder petrol/four-speed auto/front-wheel drive
- 62kW of power at 6000rpm/122Nm of torque at 4000rpm
- 0-100/h N/A
- 4.6L/100km highway; 7.9L/100km city; regular unleaded; CO₂ emissions are 134g/km
- Warranty: Seven years/unlimited kilometres
- Standard: Six airbags, stability control, auto emergency braking, cruise, 14-inch steel wheels, Bluetooth, camera, Apple Car Play, Android Auto
- Redbook future values: 3yr: 48%; 5yr: 33%

THINGS WE LIKE

- ✓ Works great as a city runabout
- ✓ Market-leading warranty
- ✓ Smooth and quiet for a small car

compare with ...

Mitsubishi Mirage, Suzuki Swift, Toyota Yaris, Volkswagen Polo



KIA CARNIVAL FROM \$46,880



Kia's fourth-generation Carnival people mover starts at \$46,880 for the 216kW 3.5-litre V6 petrol/eight-speed automatic S model. Si grade is \$52,380, SLi is \$56,880 and Platinum is \$64,680.

The 148kW 2.2-litre four-cylinder turbodiesel is available in the same model grades at a \$2000 premium.

Carnival is a big, heavy wagon with a long wheelbase and ostensibly eight seats, so the relatively high torque outputs of both engines are well suited to shifting a full load of people and gear with ease.

The 2.2-litre turbodiesel, with 440Nm of torque from just 1750rpm, is one of the best around at any price and perfect for this application.

It's very smooth and quiet for a diesel too, and works well with the eight-speed auto.

You can fit eight passengers, with each in an individual seat in row two and a 50/50 split bench in row three.

Access to both rows of rear seats is via sliding doors, power operated on SLi and Platinum, which, in a people mover where kids are piling in and out, are the most safe and convenient option.

They are also great in confined spaces such as garages and shopping centre car parks.

The two outboard seats in row two are fine for adults and there's ample legroom, which can be adjusted on tracks.

Access to row three is via a simple, innovative slide-and-fold operation on the two outboard row-two seats. A similarly clever, easy, one-handed lift and unfold mechanism raises

the row-three seats from the boot floor. Legroom is pretty good here, too, and passengers don't have to squat, as they do in many SUV back stalls.

A separate air-conditioning system with roof vents for rows two and three is standard on all grades bar the base S, and there are USBs and 12 volt outlets for each row.

Everywhere you look, the Carnival has features that work for parents and kids.

Automatic emergency braking, adaptive cruise and lane keep assist are standard. The latter is poorly calibrated and intervenes constantly and unnecessarily.

Safe Exit Assist prevents the power sliding rear doors from opening if a car is detected approaching from behind.

Platinum has row-two and -three sunshades on the side windows. There are storage compartments galore as well.

Another major plus for the Carnival is that with all seats used you still have a big load space — a deep well in the rear floor. It's big enough for the shopping and school bags; there are four bag hooks plus a 12-volt outlet.

The driver faces an elegant, functional dash. Surround cameras on SLi and Platinum are handy, because it is a beast to park in tight spaces.

Handling is OK by people mover standards, but Carnival is a big, front-wheel drive wagon with soft suspension so dynamic limits are low. The ride is luxurious and quiet.

At the price, Carnival offers a heck of a lot of people mover for your money.

If it's outright interior acreage and seating capacity you want, the Kia's rivals are Hyundai's eight-seater iMax, Toyota's eight-seater Granvia, VW's seven-seater Multivan and nine-seater Caravelle.

THINGS WE LIKE

- ✓ Excellent petrol and turbodiesel engines
- ✓ Market-leading warranty
- ✓ Plenty of legroom in all rows
- ✓ Big load space with all seats in use
- ✓ Easy access to all seats
- ✓ Heaps of storage

THINGS YOU MIGHT NOT LIKE

- ✗ 3.5-litre V6 is thirsty
- ✗ It's a big thing to manoeuvre in tight spaces
- ✗ More comfortable for six than eight

SPEX (SLi 2.2 CRDi)

- Made in South Korea
- 2.2-litre four-cylinder turbodiesel/eight-speed automatic/front-wheel drive
- 148kW of power at 3800rpm/440Nm of torque from 1750–2750rpm
- 0–100/h N/A
- 5.7L/100km highway; 7.8L/100km city; CO₂ emissions are 170g/km
- Warranty: Seven years/unlimited kilometres
- Standard: Seven airbags, stability control, automatic emergency braking, adaptive cruise, lane keep assist, three-zone air, navigation, 18-inch alloy wheels, power tailgate
- Redbook future values: 3yr 60%; 5yr 49%

STARS ★★★★★

- Safety ★★★★★ ANCAP
- Performance ★★★★★
- Handling ★★★★★
- Quality and reliability ★★★★★
- Comfort and refinement ★★★★★
- Value for money ★★★★★
- Overall** ★★★★★



compare with ...

Hyundai iMax, Toyota Granvia, VW Multivan and Caravelle

KIA STONIC FROM \$21,490



Kia's smallest SUV, the Stonic, is based on the Rio hatchback.

Prices start at \$21,490 for the 74kW/133Nm 1.4-litre petrol/six-speed manual Stonic S; the six-speed auto is \$22,990.

So at base model level Stonic is one of the cheapest SUVs on the market, along with its main rival, the Hyundai Venue.

Stonic Sport, with the same drivetrains, is \$24,490/\$25,990.

We tested the GT Line, at \$29,990, which runs a 1.0-litre three-cylinder turbopetrol, also with 74kW of power but with 172Nm of torque, matched with a seven-speed dual clutch automatic.

Safety specification is basic. Autonomous emergency braking, lane keep assist, six airbags and a camera are standard, but that's about it. A monitor tells you when a rear door is being opened. There's no blind spot monitoring, rear cross traffic alert or adaptive cruise, even as options.

An eight inch touchscreen, Apple CarPlay/Android Auto and 15-inch steel wheels are standard

on S; Sport adds 17-inch alloys, navigation and a few other frills.

GT Line includes sportier suspension, sticky Continental tyres on 17 inch alloys, sunroof and go fast interior décor.

Kia's 1.4-litre, which we've driven in the Rio, is a sluggish, old tech thing, but the 1.0-litre turbo triple is an entirely different proposition. It features clever engineering that's designed to deliver strong pulling power from low revs, making it well suited for city driving and highway cruising. It's not a performance engine, but it does do the job responsively, smoothly and efficiently in everyday driving.

It will return 4-5L/100km on the highway, which is less than some hybrids. Around town, expect 6-7L/100km, assisted by auto stop/start and the refined, well calibrated seven-speed dual clutch

transmission. It runs on regular unleaded, too, which is unusual for a turbo. Most require premium.

Stonic's lane keeping function is overly intrusive, with the wheel being constantly tugged in your hands when the car is still a long way from the lane markings. You can turn it off, but you have to do so every time you start the car.

Stiff suspension on the GT, especially at the front, plus light weight, decent tyres and sharp, accurate steering give the Stonic better than average cornering ability, and it sits on the road very securely.

However the price is an overly firm and at times harsh ride, as the front end in particular fails to absorb road shock. The brakes also lack power.

A clean, uncluttered, stylish dash features easy to read analogue instruments and a high-mounted touchscreen.

Voice control is available only by connecting your phone via Apple CarPlay or Android Auto. There's ample driving position adjustability, and the GT's well bolstered seat is comfortable and supportive. One USB and 12 volt outlet are provided.

Rear seat space is tight, especially legroom. That said, it's not a bad place for kids, with a USB connector, elevated bench and wide opening doors for easy access.

A average-sized boot has a deep well, a couple of bag hooks, and an extendable floor with the 60/40 split fold rear seatback, albeit with a step in the middle.

Stonic GT goes up against some classy rivals, including the Skoda Kamiq, Ford Puma, Toyota C-HR and VW T-Cross. In this company, it's not quite as well sorted on the road, or as well equipped, particularly in driver assist safety tech, as it needs to be.

THINGS WE LIKE

- ✓ Kia's quality and seven years warranty
- ✓ The 1.0-litre is willing and very economical
- ✓ Tidy handling and accurate steering
- ✓ Comfortable driver's seat and driving position
- ✓ Big boot

THINGS YOU MIGHT NOT LIKE

- ✗ GT doesn't quite cut it against \$30K rivals
- ✗ Minimal safety tech
- ✗ Hard ride
- ✗ Tight rear seat space
- ✗ Overly intrusive lane keep assist

SPEX (GT)

- Made in South Korea
- 1.0-litre three cylinder turbopetrol/seven-speed twin clutch automatic/front-wheel drive
- 74kW of power from 4500-6000rpm/172Nm of torque from 1500-4000rpm
- 0-100km/h N/A
- 4.9L/100km highway; 6.4L/100km city; 91 regular; CO2 emissions are 125gkm; fuel tank is 45 litres
- Warranty: Seven years/unlimited km
- Standard: Six airbags, stability control, AEB, lane keep assist, camera, eight-inch touchscreen, Apple CarPlay, Android Auto, sunroof, automatic air, 17-inch alloys, space saver spare.
- Redbook future values: 3yr: 56%; 5yr: 42%



STARS ★★★★★

- Safety **Not yet tested**
- Performance ★★★★★
- Handling ★★★★★
- Quality and reliability ★★★★★
- Comfort and refinement ★★★★★
- Value for money ★★★★★
- Overall** ★★★★★

compare with ...

Ford Puma, Honda HRV, Hyundai Venue, Skoda Kamiq, Toyota C-HR, VW T-Cross



Kia's compact Seltos SUV opens at \$26,790 for the 110kW 2.0 litre petrol/continuously variable automatic/front-wheel drive Seltos S.

Seltos Sport is \$29,790 and Sport+ is \$33,290.

All-wheel drive models start at \$36,790 drive away for the 130kW 1.6-litre turbopetrol/seven-speed dual clutch transmission Seltos Sport+, which we're testing here.

Top spec Seltos GT-Line, with the same drivetrain, is \$42,200.

A huge 10.25 inch touchscreen sits atop the dash. There's no stand alone voice control, so unless you pair your phone via Apple CarPlay or Android Auto, you have to do almost everything by touch – not good, because too much eyes off the road time is involved.

Navigation with live traffic information, 10 years of map updates and digital radio are also included.

The driver's seat lacks upper body support and the head restraint is intrusive if you like the backrest upright.

Back stalls feature plenty of legroom and a firm bench.

No air vents, USB or 12 volt sockets are provided, and there's no 12 volt outlet or bag hooks in the boot, either.

Sport+ includes all the important driver assist tech, plus adaptive cruise. Lane keep assist is very sensitive, so I turned it off.

Seltos Sport+ has been engineered – including the previously mentioned local suspension tuning – to drive like a premium Euro SUV, which it does pretty convincingly.

The bonus with a Kia badge is that you don't have to put up with most of the aggravations of Euro SUV ownership: a short three years warranty, questionable reliability and durability and a premium unleaded thirst.

Expensive servicing is one ownership downside Seltos does share with the Europeans.

Kia's 1.6 pulls easily and smoothly off the bottom, with excellent throttle response, and though it never has to work hard it does spin more willingly, and tunelessly, than most turbos at the top end, especially in Sport mode.

Dual clutch transmissions, notably VW/Audi units, can

hesitate to engage from rest and dither in crawling traffic. Neither problem is evident in the Kia, which shifts with speed and smoothness, apart from Sport mode, which can't keep up with your right foot and is too conservative. Gearshift paddles would be useful.

Kia's local suspension tuning can on some models produce a hard, unforgiving ride, but Seltos strikes the right balance between comfort and handling. It's still firm, though compliant, quiet and well-controlled.

Seltos vies with VW's Tiguan for class handling honours. It's tight and secure on rough roads at speed and well-balanced in corners, with reasonable grip from the Kumho tyres.

Electric power steering has a strong self centring effect thanks to servo-motor assistance. It feels bit weird at first, but you soon get used to it. Steering feel and precision are fine.

All-wheel drive with a locking centre differential (at speeds below 40km/h), hill descent control and a full size spare on an alloy wheel give Seltos greater ability off the bitumen than most SUVs too.

Seltos sounds like something you buy at the chemist, but it's one of the best drives in the compact SUV class, with premium Euro-style drivetrain engineering, dynamics, ride and refinement.

THINGS WE LIKE

- ✓ Strong performance
- ✓ Excellent ride/handling compromise
- ✓ Well equipped with safety features
- ✓ Big boot
- ✓ Seven years warranty
- ✓ Excellent quality and reliability
- ✓ All wheel drivetrain works on dirt roads

THINGS YOU MIGHT NOT LIKE

- ✗ Driver's seat isn't particularly comfortable
- ✗ Touchscreen is too far away and small icons are difficult to hit
- ✗ No stand alone voice control
- ✗ No rear seat vents or device connectors
- ✗ Expensive servicing

SPEX (Sport+)

- Made in South Korea
- 1.6-litre four cylinder turbopetrol/seven-speed dual clutch auto/all-wheel drive
- 130kW of power at 6000rpm/265Nm of torque from 1500-4500rpm
- 0-100km/h: 8.0 seconds (claimed)
- 6.3L/100km highway; 9.5L/100km city, 91 regular; CO2 emissions are 175gkm
- Warranty: Seven years/unlimited km
- Standard: Six airbags, stability control, AEB, blind spot monitoring, rear cross traffic alert, lane keep assist, adaptive cruise, LED headlights, 17-inch alloy wheels, touchscreen, Apple CarPlay, Android Auto, navigation, wireless phone charging.
- Redbook future values: 3yr: 58%; 5yr: 44%

STARS ★★★★★

- Safety ★★★★★
- Performance ★★★★★
- Ride and Handling ★★★★★
- Quality and reliability ★★★★★
- Comfort and refinement ★★★★★
- Value for money ★★★★★
- Overall** ★★★★★



compare with ...

Hyundai Kona, Ford Escape, Mazda CX30, Mitsubishi ASX, Nissan Qashqai, Skoda Kamiq, VW T-Roc

KIA SPORTAGE FROM \$29,490



Kia's Sportage SUV, which shares architecture with Hyundai's Tucson and, size-wise, bridges the gap between compact and medium wagons, starts at \$29,490 for the S front-wheel drive six-speed manual. This model is powered by a 2.0-litre petrol engine with a modest 114kW of power and an even more modest 192Nm of torque. S six-speed auto is \$31,490.

The base drivetrain is also offered in SX at \$31,590 (\$33,590 auto) and the auto SX+ priced at \$38,790.

A 2.0-litre turbodiesel (with 136kW and 400Nm) with on-demand all-wheel drive is available across all grades at \$36,890 for the S, \$38,990 for SX, \$44,190 for the SX+ and \$48,990 for the GT Line, while a 2.4-litre petrol (with 135kW and 237Nm) all-wheel drivetrain is available only in the top-end GT Line at \$46,090.

A six-speed auto is used on petrol models; the diesel is matched with an eight-speed.

The attraction of the 2.0-litre turbodiesel is impossible to dismiss. It is relatively quiet and pulls effortlessly from low in the revs right through the mid-range. Buyers who rack up plenty of kilometres will appreciate the attractive fuel economy, officially rated at 6.8L/100km, and good for close to 7.0L/100km in mixed real-world motoring. The 2.0 petrol in the FWD versions is adequate in everyday use and is flattered by the six-speed auto. The 2.4 petrol is livelier but also lacks the instant response of the diesel, particularly when overtaking or climbing. All engines cooperate easily with the smooth, fast-acting auto transmissions.

Driving aids extend to autonomous emergency braking and lane keep assist across the range. However only GT gets blind spot monitoring and rear cross traffic alert.

Sportage's Australianised suspension tune manages an agreeable blend of ride comfort (even on the GT's 19-inch wheels and low-profile tyres) and cornering poise.

It turns into corners accurately and feels agile, with minimal body roll.

An integrated Drive Mode system has Eco, Normal and Sport modes, each influencing throttle and transmission responses and steering weighting. Overall, the cabin suggests quality and a touch of class, especially in higher-spec versions. The two-tone leather is a grabber, the touchscreen responds swiftly to inputs and is easy to use and read. Apple CarPlay and Android Auto are standard. All grades above Si get an eight-inch touchscreen, JBL audio and navigation.

Thick windscreen pillars and the high dash cowl slightly impede forward vision.

Seats in all variants offer good

support, helped by multiple adjustments including power lumbar in SLi and GT. Rear seats are well shaped with handy knee room and recline but the load area is quite small. Kia provides a full-size alloy spare.

The reliability and durability of Kia vehicles is now among the best in the business.

Kia's industry-leading seven-year warranty and seven-year roadside assist are indicative of the marque's faith in its offerings and helps justify fairly hefty recommended price tags.

Seven-year capped-price servicing is a further attraction that adds value to the deal.

The smartly styled Sportage should be on your test-drive list, with Mazda's CX-5, the Ford Escape, Skoda Kamiq and VW's Tiguan.

THINGS WE LIKE

- ✓ Excellent quality and industry-leading warranty
- ✓ Ride/handling compromise tuned for Australian roads
- ✓ Strong 2.0-litre turbodiesel
- ✓ Classy, comfortable cabin
- ✓ GT's safety features

THINGS YOU MIGHT NOT LIKE

- ✗ At the pricey end of the class
- ✗ No navigation in Si
- ✗ GT's safety features should be available on Si and SLi
- ✗ Thick front pillars

SPEX (S 2.0)

- Made in South Korea
- 2.0-litre four-cylinder petrol/six-speed automatic/front-wheel drive
- 114kW of power at 6200rpm/192Nm of torque at 4000rpm
- 0-100km/h N/A
- 6.1L/100km highway; 10.9L/100km city; regular unleaded; CO₂ emissions are 182g/km; fuel tank is 62 litres
- Warranty: Seven years/unlimited kilometres
- Standard: Six airbags, stability control, autonomous emergency braking, lane keep assist, camera with dynamic parking guidelines, rear parking sensors, Bluetooth, rain-sensing wipers, 17-inch alloy wheels, alarm. SX includes 18-inch alloys, navigation, front parking sensors and leather. GT includes wireless phone charging, sunroof, power tailgate, blind spot detection, automatic parking
- Redbook future values: 3yr: 53%; 5yr: 40%

STARS ★★★★★

- Safety ★★★★★ ANCAP
- Performance ★★★★★
- Handling ★★★★★
- Quality and reliability ★★★★★
- Comfort and refinement ★★★★★
- Value for money ★★★★★
- Overall** ★★★★★



compare with ...

Ford Escape, Hyundai Tucson, Mazda CX-5, Nissan Qashqai, Subaru Forester, VW Tiguan



KIA SORENTO FROM \$45,850



Kia's fourth generation Sorento seven-seater SUV kicks off at \$45,850 for the 200kW 3.5-litre V6 petrol/eight-speed automatic/front wheel drive S model. Sport is \$48,470, Sport Plus is \$52,850 and GT Line is \$60,070.

A 148kW 2.2-litre four cylinder turbodiesel is paired with a dual clutch eight-speed transmission and all-wheel drive in the same model grades: S, at \$48,850; Sport at \$51,470; Sport Plus at \$55,850 (tested here) and GT Line at \$63,070.

Sport Plus diesel weighs in at around 1.95 tonnes – hefty, but not too bad for a wagon of this size with a diesel engine up front. Kia's new "Smartstream" turbodiesel is an all alloy engine, that weighs 19kg less than the iron block engine of the same capacity in the previous model.

It goes nicely, too, with big grunt off idle and through the midrange that makes for completely effortless progress in the higher gears, even when fully loaded. Power drops off at around 4000rpm, but it doesn't matter because you never have to go there. It responds strongly

and immediately whenever you put your foot down, and can hold its own with Europe's best diesel engines.

Eco/Comfort/Sport/Smart (adaptive) drive modes are provided, but Sport is not at all sporty, just a touch busier. Sand/Mud/Snow traction control modes can also be selected on unsealed surfaces. The eight-speed dual clutch transmission works almost – but not quite – as smoothly as a torque convertor automatic, and is used to improve fuel efficiency.

Which it does. The test car used 6.5-7.0L/100km on the highway; expect 8-10L/100km in town.

Handling is surprisingly taut and tidy for 1.95 tonnes, with disciplined body control and secure roadholding from the firm, fixed rate suspension, complimented by quality Continental tyres. The ride is controlled, compliant and comfortable. Steering is typical big SUV though in that it lacks feel and precision.

Sorento is loaded with safety tech, including preventing a rear door from being opened if a cyclist is approaching from behind, AEB that works at

intersections, adaptive cruise and an airbag between the front seats. However the curtain airbags do not extend to row three.

Up front, a new infotainment system features a hi-res 12.3 inch infotainment/system settings screen atop the dash. Unfortunately, it's too far away to reach easily, the menu layout is complex and stand alone voice control is not provided, so it requires way too much eyes off the road time to use safely on the move.

All rows of seats in Sport Plus grade get USB connectors, cupholders and storage, and in its cabin layout Sorento is one of more spacious, practical seven seaters around. There's lots of (adjustable) legroom in the 60/40 split fold second row, plus adjustable back rest angle, and all you have to do to for access to row three is push a button, though the gap for access is still tight. Vents are provided for each row, and row three in Sport Plus also has fan control.

Row three seats are fine for kids up to teen age. They are manually raised from the floor with a strap. A power tailgate

accesses a large cargo bay in five seater mode, and a full size spare is under the floor.

If you're after a full-size seven seater, put Sorento on your test drive list. The extra \$3000 for the diesel/all-wheel drivetrain is money well spent.

THINGS WE LIKE

- ✓ Good value, especially the diesel
- ✓ Diesel provides effortless, frugal performance
- ✓ Spacious cabin
- ✓ Well equipped with convenience and safety features
- ✓ Excellent quality and reliability
- ✓ Long warranty

THINGS YOU MIGHT NOT LIKE

- ✗ Infotainment is overly complex and distracting to use on the move
- ✗ Expensive servicing
- ✗ Numb steering

SPEX (Sport plus diesel)

- Made in South Korea
- 2.2-litre four cylinder turbodiesel/eight-speed dual clutch automatic/all-wheel drive
- 148kW of power at 3800rpm/440Nm of torque from 1750-2750rpm
- 0-100km/h N/A
- 5.3L/100km highway; 7.4L/100km city; CO2 emissions are 159gkm; fuel tank is 67 litres
- Max towing weight: 2000kg
- Warranty: Seven years/unlimited km
- Standard: Seven airbags, stability control, AEB, lane keeping, blind spot monitoring, adaptive cruise, rear cross traffic alert, Apple CarPlay, Android Auto, navigation, digital radio, 8 x USB sockets, part leather upholstery, heated front seats, power tailgate, 19-inch alloys.
- Redbook future values: 3yr: 60%; 5yr: 43%

STARS ★★★★★

- Safety **Not yet tested**
- Performance ★★★★★
- Handling ★★★★★
- Quality and reliability ★★★★★
- Comfort and refinement ★★★★★
- Value for money ★★★★★
- Overall** ★★★★★



compare with ...

Hyundai Santa Fe, Nissan Pathfinder, Mazda CX8/CX9, Skoda Kodiaq, Toyota Kluger

LAND ROVER DISCOVERY SPORT FROM \$67,123



The base Discovery Sport P200 R-Dynamic, tested here, with a 147kW 2.0-litre turbopetrol/nine-speed automatic/all-wheel drivetrain costs \$67,123. That's an almost \$7000 hike from 2020, so the Land Rover has now lost its once considerable value for money advantage over its Audi Q5/BMW X3/Mercedes GLC rivals.

That said, you do still get higher levels of capability and convenience.

Seven seats are standard; rivals have five. Discovery also has credible, as opposed to pretend, off road chops.

Sure, it lacks the low range transfer case of the big Landies, but it does have all-wheel drive (as does the Audi; the BMW and Mercedes are rear-wheel drive), with Terrain Response 2 off-road drivetrain software that maximises traction on tricky surfaces, steep climbs and perilous descents.

Ground clearance (212mm) and maximum fording depth (600mm)

are best in class. Shame about the space saver spare, though.

Interesting tech includes the Activity Key, a waterproof wristband that will lock and unlock the car so you don't have to take the main key when you go for a run or a swim, plus optional camera-enhanced vision behind and in front, the latter at ground level so you can manoeuvre around rocks, big holes and other off road nasties.

If you prefer a diesel, the base model 120kW/380Nm 2.0-litre D165 R-Dynamic, at \$69,423, features a 48 volt mild hybrid drivetrain, also with a nine-speed automatic and all-wheel drive.

The 150kW/430Nm D200 R-Dynamic is \$77,048.

Petrol models top out at \$80,301 for the 184kW/365Nm 2.0-litre P250 R-Dynamic HSE. The P250 R-Dynamic SE is \$75,946.

Discovery Sport is a Tardis, with a lot more interior space than its modest exterior dimensions suggest.

Row two is 40/20/40, with a 60/40 split for adjustable legroom -- of which there's ample, even with tall occupants up front.

Tilting and sliding the larger kerbside section for row three access is a chore though, due to the heavy seat and stiff mechanism. You really have to heave on the seat to move it fore and aft.

Row three is two individual seats, easily raised from the floor. It's too tight for adults, but the idea here is that it's handy if from time to time you've got a couple of stray kids who need a lift. If you fill seven seats on a regular basis, you want a larger wagon.

With 320Nm of torque available from 1250rpm, Land Rover's base 2.0-litre turbopetrol is chipped for strong drive off idle and in the critical 2000-3000rpm range, where grunt and responsiveness mimic a turbodiesel.

It's exceptionally smooth and quiet, with long highway legs. At 100km/h in ninth gear, it's pulling

1600rpm. With the rear axle automatically decoupled in cruise mode to maximise fuel economy, the Disco averages around 7L/100km (on premium), which is pretty frugal for a mid size petrol-powered SUV.

In town, though, it's doing low-mid teens. The nine-speed auto's shifts are usually smooth and timely, but in partnership with automatic stop/start it can occasionally hesitate to engage from rest.

Discovery Sport's suspension is finely calibrated for a smooth, supple ride (helped by baggy 60 aspect ratio tyres) and rock solid roadholding on rough surfaces, including bush tracks.

In tight corners there's some body roll on turn-in, but the car quickly settles and tracks through the bend with good control assisted by tactile, accurate steering and a reasonably svelte -- for a seven seater -- 1867kg mass.

THINGS WE LIKE

- ✓ More SUV for less money than German rivals
- ✓ Spacious, versatile seven seater
- ✓ Loaded with safety tech
- ✓ Reasonable off road ability
- ✓ Tidy handling and a comfortable ride
- ✓ Strong resale values

THINGS YOU MIGHT NOT LIKE

- ✗ A bit thirsty in town
- ✗ Land Rover reliability can be patchy
- ✗ Short warranty
- ✗ Row two seats slide/fold action is heavy and stiff
- ✗ Nine speed auto can dither from rest

SPEX (P200 S)

- Made in England
- 2.0-litre four cylinder turbopetrol/nine-speed automatic/all-wheel drive
- 147kW of power at 5500rpm/320Nm of torque from 1250-4500rpm
- 0-100km/h in 9.2 seconds (claimed)
- 6.9L/100km highway; 10.1L/100km city; 95 octane premium; CO2 emissions are 188g/km; fuel tank is 67 litres
- Max towing weight 2000kg
- Standard: Eight airbags, stability control, AEB, adaptive cruise, blind spot monitoring, lane keep assist, speed sign recognition, Apple CarPlay, Android Auto, navigation, voice control, LED headlights, remote activated windows up and down and leather.
- Redbook future values: 3yr: 60%; 5yr: 48%

STARS ★★★★★

- Safety ★★★★★
- Performance ★★★★★
- Handling ★★★★★
- Quality and reliability ★★★★★
- Comfort and refinement ★★★★★
- Value for money ★★★★★
- Overall** ★★★★★



compare with ...

Audi Q5, BMW X3, Mercedes GLC, Skoda Kodiaq, VW Tiguan Allspace



The Lexus IS sedan range opens with the 180kW 2.0-litre turbopetrol four-cylinder IS 300, available in Luxury and F Sport grades, priced at \$61,500 and \$70,000 respectively.

The 232kW 3.6-litre V6 IS 350 is available in F Sport specification only, priced at \$75,000.

Hybrid power is also available with the IS300h, priced at \$64,500 for the Luxury and \$73,000 for the F Sport.

Two door coupe RC models open with the RC300 Luxury at \$67,990. F Sport is \$75,736.

RC350 Luxury is \$70,736; F Sport is \$78,736.

The go fast RC F, with a 351kW 5.0-litre V8, is \$136,636; the Track Edition is \$165,117.

The Lexus petrol/electric drivetrain, which uses a 2.5-litre four-cylinder engine, develops 164kW, drives the IS to 100km/h in a respectable, if hardly sporty,

8.5 seconds and averages fuel consumption of 4.9L/100km.

The IS300 is the pick of the range because the four's lighter weight, especially up front, has a less detrimental effect on the car's handling than the 3.5-litre V6 in the IS350.

The 180kW 2.0-litre turbopetrol four is matched with an eight-speed automatic and rear wheel drive. There's enough power to keep things interesting and though the Lexus is porky at 1680kg (220kg heavier than BMW's 330i), it's nicely balanced at sane speeds and a very enjoyable drive. Think of it as a sportyish GT rather than a go fast tool de thrill and it shapes up well. The only blot is excessive tyre noise on blue chip bitumen.

The V6 has a potent, responsive and very tuneful top end,

characteristic of a naturally aspirated six. The eight-speed automatic, in day-to-day driving, effectively compensates for its lack of lower midrange and bottom-end torque by unobtrusively picking the right gear most of the time.

Lexus still does not properly understand what Sport means, and in this mode, or the sharper Sport+, the shifts are too late and/or too slow because of relatively dimwitted programming.

As with the previous IS, the car feels secure and agile, however V6 models are still nose-heavy.

Diving into a tight corner at speed sees prodigious understeer and intervention from the stability control, in part also because the Bridgestone Turanza tyres (on the IS 350 F Sport test car) aren't the stickiest in the world.

The steering itself is precise, if quite remote in feel, the ride (on the F Sport's low-profile tyres) is slightly terse but tolerable, and the brakes are up to the job.

In the F Sport you sit in a luxurious, fully-bolstered sports chair with sufficient travel to suit anyone and good vision around the car. Instruments are clear and informative, but the dash and control layout is messy and dated and the infotainment system is complex, gimmicky and light years behind the German equivalents. There's not a lot of oddment storage either.

Legroom in the back seat is comparable with a 3 Series.

Boot space is adequate, there's a 60/40 split-fold rear-seat extension and a temporary spare.

The IS 350 F Sport has a strong price attraction against the likes of BMW's 340i and the Mercedes CLA45 AMG, both of which cost around \$90,000.

However, the bottom line here is that, as a drive, the Lexus is showing its age a bit.

THINGS WE LIKE

- ✓ Loaded and excellent value
- ✓ Rev-happy atmo six-power
- ✓ Outstanding quality, reliability and customer service
- ✓ Luxurious driver's seat

THINGS YOU MIGHT NOT LIKE

- ✗ Eight-speed is slower than the rest of the car
- ✗ Thirsty
- ✗ Understeer in tight corners
- ✗ Limited storage

SPEX (IS 350 F Sport)

- Made in Japan
- 3.5-litre V6 petrol/eight-speed automatic/rear-wheel drive
- 232kW or power at 6400rpm/380Nm of torque at 4800rpm
- 0-100km in 5.9 seconds (claimed)
- 7.4L/100km highway; 13.7L/100km city; 95 octane premium; CO₂ emissions are 225g/km
- Warranty: Four years/100,000km
- Standard: 10 airbags, stability control, leather upholstery, 18-inch alloy wheels with 225/40 (front) and 255/35 (rear) tyres, leather upholstery, Bluetooth with voice control, Mark Levinson audio, DAB+, navigation with SUNA traffic updates, reversing camera, blind spot monitor
- Redbook future values: 3yr: 55%; 5yr: 41%

STARS ★★★★★

- Safety ★★★★★ ANCAP
- Green Vehicle Guide ★★★★★
- Performance ★★★★★
- Handling ★★★★★
- Quality and reliability ★★★★★
- Comfort and refinement ★★★★★
- Value for money ★★★★★
- Overall** ★★★★★



compare with ...

Audi A4, Alfa Giulia, BMW 3 Series, Mercedes C and CLA, Jaguar XE

LEXUS UX FROM \$46,500



Based on Toyota's "New Global Architecture" that also underpins the closely related C-HR and Corolla, the Lexus UX (for Urban Explorer) slots in beneath the NX, though it's really less a pure SUV than a hatch-on-stilts, Mercedes GLA-style.

Indeed, the Merc seems to have informed the UX's positioning as well as proportioning, starting from \$46,500 for the 2.0-litre turbopetrol Luxury. Even the base model is generously equipped, with navigation, a huge display screen, digital radio, LED headlights, powered steering column, electric and heated front seats, keyless entry/start and adaptive cruise control with stop/go.

Next up is the \$9000-extra Sports Luxury, adding 18-inch alloys with runflat tyres (so no spare), leather, vented front seat cushions, upgraded audio, improved reverse camera and jazzier trim.

Finally, the F Sport flagship for just \$500 more scores a body kit, racier front seats, steering wheel and cabin trimmings, adaptive

dampers and "Active Sound Control" for a fruitier exhaust note.

While the low-slung UX might seem tight inside, the cabin is deceptively roomy front and rear, with supportive seating for four (or five at a squeeze), an excellent driving position, modern, distinctive dash layout, high-quality fittings and pleasing attention to detail. The instruments are multi-configurable too — though Lexus' touchpad controller can be infuriatingly fiddly. Where space is limited is behind the seats, due to a pitifully shallow boot.

Two drivetrains are offered: the front-wheel drive petrol UX200 and the petrol-electric hybrid UX250h for \$3500 more. The latter can also be had in all-wheel-drive Sport Luxury and F-Sport hybrid grades for a \$4500 premium.

I'd go hybrid every time as the UX200's 126kW/205Nm 2.0-litre naturally aspirated four-cylinder engine delivers pretty dull performance in this age of rorty turbos, requiring plenty of revs on the (digital) counter

before speed really picks up. The problem with that is it then sounds raucous under even moderate acceleration, sending unwelcome levels of noise and vibration through to the otherwise hushed interior.

Mated to a continuously variable transmission featuring a torque-converter first gear for a more eager take-off feel, Lexus has clearly tuned this unit for economy rather than excitement.

In contrast, the UX250h — which combines the 2.0-litre engine with two electric motors and a different type of CVT — is livelier off the line, quicker through the mid-range and more economical to boot, while providing an altogether sweeter and quieter operation.

We're also hesitant to recommend the top-line F Sport unless you only travel along ultra-smooth roads, because — despite trick adaptive damper tech — the suspension can become harsh and loud, even over moderate bumps. The fact is, with regular rather than

runflat tyres, the base Luxury's standard 17-inch wheel/tyre set-up is the best compromise if comfort is your priority.

Still, the UX can be a rewarding drive thanks to light yet measured steering, sharp handling and secure, controlled and surefooted roadholding. Suspension is via struts up front and wishbones out back.

Overall, the littlest Lexus crossover is a reasonable drive, but remember, it is very grade-dependent. Take a test drive in Toyota's C-HR, too. It's from the same family, but at much lower prices because it's got a Toyota badge.

By Byron Mathioudakis

THINGS WE LIKE

- ✓ Premium cabin
- ✓ Striking design
- ✓ UX250h's performance, refinement and economy
- ✓ Involving steering and handling
- ✓ Quality craftsmanship

THINGS YOU MIGHT NOT LIKE

- ✗ Ride on F-Sport is too firm, too noisy
- ✗ Noisy, rowdy engine in UX200
- ✗ No spare wheel on Sport Luxury and F-Sport grades
- ✗ Fiddly multimedia touchpad
- ✗ Shallow boot
- ✗ No Apple CarPlay/Android Auto connectivity
- ✗ The hybrids can't tow

SPEX (UX250H Luxury)

- Made in Japan
- 2.0-litre four-cylinder petrol-electric hybrid/CVT/front-wheel drive
- 131kW of power (combined) at 6600rpm/188Nm of torque from 4400-5200rpm
- 0-100km in 8.5 seconds (claimed)
- 4.6L/100km highway; 4.3L/100km city; 91 octane; CO2 emissions are 103g/km; fuel tank is 52 litres
- Warranty: Four years/100,000km
- Standard: Eight airbags, stability control, AEB, adaptive cruise with stop/go, lane keep assist, traffic sign recognition, auto high beam, blind-spot monitor, rear cross-traffic alert, parking sensors, camera, tyre-pressure monitoring, digital radio, LED headlights, power-adjustable steering column, powered and heated front seats, leather, roof rails, 17-inch alloys, space-saver spare
- Redbook future values: 3yr: 51%; 5yr: 38%

STARS ★★★★★

- Safety
Not yet tested
- Performance
★★★★☆
- Handling
★★★★☆
- Quality and reliability
★★★★☆
- Comfort and refinement
★★★★☆
- Value for money
★★★★☆
- Overall**
★★★★☆



compare with ...

Audi Q2/Q3, BMW X1/X2, Mercedes GLA, Mini Countryman, Subaru XV Hybrid, Skoda Karoq, Toyota C-HR, Volvo XC40, VW T-Roc and Tiguan



Like many modern SUVs, the Lexus NX targets urban buyers. Entry models are front-wheel drive rather than all-wheel drive because, according to research, many buyers really don't know or care which wheels put the power to the road.

NX's aggressive, exaggerated proportions suggest an attempt to appeal to younger buyers — and there are pleasing details in its lights and garnish — but the result seems too tall for its width and too big for its wheels.

In official sales charts, NX sits in the compact SUV category alongside the BMW X1, Audi Q3 and Mercedes GLA.

However, at 4.6m long, it's actually a whole size larger and a more realistic rival for the Audi Q5, BMW X3/X4, Jaguar F-Pace, Mercedes GLC and the Range Rover Evoque.

Pricing starts towards the bottom of this pack at \$55,700 for the front-wheel-drive NX200t Luxury model and \$61,700 for

F Sport. The AWD Luxury is \$60,200, F Sport is \$66,152 and Sports Luxury is \$73,607.

The NX200t features a 2.0-litre turbopetrol four with a handy 175kW of power and 350Nm of torque. It's a sprightly, willing device.

The Lexus NX300h, as tested here, runs a hybrid driveline comprising a 2.5-litre four-cylinder engine supplemented by an electric motor. It drives the front wheels via a continuously variable transmission (CVT) and draws its power from nickel hydride batteries.

NX300h opens at \$58,200 for the front-wheel-drive Luxury variant. F Sport is \$64,200. All-wheel-drive versions start at \$62,700. F Sport is \$68,700 and Sports Luxury is \$76,814. AWD adds another 50kW electric motor at the rear axle. It comes into play at launch, through corners and in slippery conditions.

The complex software controlling all this means power (147kW) and torque (270Nm) are

the same with or without the rear motor. Zero to 100km/h takes 9.2 seconds. That's leisurely by modern standards and one reason is weight. The NX300h is heavy compared to its rivals at almost two tonnes. The NX200t is around 100kg lighter and more powerful.

The hybrid drivetrain sounds as though it's straining at times, too. CVTs hold the most favourable revs and adjust their internal ratios. The result here is a loud, unremitting note that doesn't rise and fall in the familiar way. It's far from luxurious.

Tall and top-heavy also sums up the NX's dynamics. Despite a firmness to the suspension that's designed to counter body roll, it handles like it looks. There's little here to reward a driver and this is compounded by controls that are distant and lack feedback. The steering is slow and lifeless while the brakes have the uneven, wooden quality typical of regenerative hybrid systems. The

interior presents as spacious, comfortable, modern and premium with stitched surfaces, touch-sensitive switches and up-to-the-minute options, such as a wireless recharging pad for phones. Fit and finish is always a Lexus strongpoint.

However, most of what looks like leather isn't and its rivals have better-quality plastics. Chief among the cabin drawbacks is a control screen that can be hard to read and even harder to navigate using a touchpad to move a cursor. It's frustrating to use and inferior to any of its rivals.

A slow power tailgate accesses a high load floor with a temporary spare underneath. Lexus claims a load capacity of 475 litres but in practical terms it looks a little less accommodating.

As Lexus' first attempt at a compact SUV, the NX arrived late and too underdone compared with a long list of much more accomplished European rivals.

By Phil King

THINGS WE LIKE

- ✓ Lexus quality and reliability
- ✓ Well equipped
- ✓ Comfortable seats
- ✓ Adequate cabin space

THINGS YOU MIGHT NOT LIKE

- ✗ Transmission noise
- ✗ Sluggish performance
- ✗ Frustrating control system
- ✗ Out-of-proportion design
- ✗ Unrealistic fuel economy figure
- ✗ High cargo floor

SPEX (NX300H)

- Made in Japan
- 2.5-litre four-cylinder petrol/electric hybrid/CVT/front- or all-wheel drive
- Combined system outputs: 147kW of power and 270Nm of torque
- 0-100km/h in 9.2 seconds (claimed)
- Max towing weight 1000kg
- Warranty: Four years/100,000km
- 5.5-5.6L/100km highway; 5.8L/100km city; 91 octane unleaded; CO₂ emissions are 131-133g/km; fuel tank is 56 litres
- Standard: Stability control, eight airbags, navigation, camera, front and rear parking sensors, power tailgate, 18in alloys, dual USB, DAB+, Bluetooth, tyre pressure warning, leather-faced seats
- Redbook future values: 3yr: 57%; 5yr: 46%

STARS ★★☆☆☆

- Safety ★★★★★ ANCAP
- Green Vehicle Guide ★★★★★
- Performance ★★☆☆☆
- Handling ★★☆☆☆
- Quality and reliability ★★★★★
- Comfort and refinement ★★☆☆☆
- Value for money ★★☆☆☆
- Overall** ★★☆☆☆



compare with ...

Audi Q5, BMW X3, Jaguar F-Pace, Mercedes GLC, VW Tiguan

LEXUS RX FROM \$73,136



The Lexus RX range opens with the 2.0-litre turbopetrol four-cylinder/six-speed automatic/front-wheel-drive RX300 Luxury priced at \$73,136. F Sport is \$88,136 and Sports Luxury is \$94,836.

The RX350, with a 221kW 3.5-litre V6 petrol/eight-speed auto and all-wheel drive, costs \$83,136 in Luxury specification, \$95,636 for F Sport and \$101,836 for Sports Luxury.

A long wheelbase seven-seater RX350L Luxury is \$86,836 and Sports Luxury is \$103,836. The V6's power is reduced slightly to 216kW in the seven-seater due to a different exhaust.

RX450h petrol/electric hybrid, with a combined 230kW system output from its 3.5-litre V6/twin electric motor/Ni-MH battery/CVT all-wheel drivetrain, is available in the same three model grades, starting at \$92,388 for the five-seater and \$95,888 for the seven-seater.

RX five-seater's wheelbase is actually shorter than the Audi Q5, BMW X3 and Mercedes GLC mid-sizers, all of which are five seaters, like the Lexus,

with comparably-sized cargo bays. These are RX's closest competitors, along with the Jaguar F-Pace and the Land Rover Discovery Sport.

An inevitable front runner in industry benchmark owner surveys — such as JD Powers in the US — which measure initial quality, long-term reliability and owner satisfaction, Lexus is also ranked the most reliable automotive brand in the US by Consumer Reports.

Even at base-model level, RX is loaded. It includes 10-way power adjustable, big bloke-sized armchairs up front, heated, cooled and with supple leather facings. Rear-seat passengers sit quite low and the 60/40 split seat can be adjusted for legroom, of which there's plenty.

The tapered roof kills cargo-bay volume and you can carry more in most rivals.

You're protected by a full-house safety hand with 10 airbags, a rear camera and audible proximity warning, automatic emergency braking, radar cruise, blind spot and rear

cross traffic alerts, lane keeping and vehicle sway warning.

A mouse-style pad on the centre console requires the prehensile dexterity of a neurosurgeon to operate.

It's so fiddly that you have to look closely at the screen for extended periods just to place the cursor in the correct position, which is unsafe.

The 2.0-litre gets interested when you put the boot in, but this is a heavy (1890kg) front-wheel-drive wagon and there's a touch of turbo lag, so it takes a while to get going and acceleration isn't brisk.

Engine vibration under power, especially in the initial stages of acceleration in the lower gears, is excessive. The force-fed 2.0-litre isn't particularly frugal either.

RX is safe and predictable but ponderous in tighter corners, with lots of body roll and twitchiness on rough roads at speed.

Electric steering is lifeless and imprecise while the brakes are powerful, if rather touchy. Ride comfort, fine in town, deteriorates as speeds rise and the bitumen

crumbles.

Lexus updated the RX in mid-2020, fitting a larger infotainment screen, adding Apple CarPlay and Android Auto, pedestrian and cyclist detection, lane keep assist, hands-free power tailgate, plus adaptive LED high beams.

Ride and handling are claimed to have been improved via extra body strengthening, retuned suspension and recalibrated electric power steering.

THINGS WE LIKE

- ✓ Lexus quality and reliability
- ✓ Lexus customer service
- ✓ Stylish cabin
- ✓ Well equipped

THINGS YOU MIGHT NOT LIKE

- ✗ Too expensive
- ✗ Weak resale values
- ✗ Silly infotainment control system
- ✗ 2.0 turbo is a bit thirsty

SPEX (RX300)

- Made in Japan
- 2.0-litre four cylinder turbopetrol/six-speed automatic/front-wheel drive
- 175kW of power at 4800rpm/350Nm of torque from 1650- 4000rpm
- 0-100km/h in 9.2 seconds
- 7.0L/100km highway; 10.0L/100km city; 95 octane premium; CO₂ emissions are 189g/km
- Warranty: Four years/100,000km
- Standard: Stability control, 10 airbags, leather, dual-zone air, navigation, reversing camera, digital radio, alarm, power-operated tailgate, 18-inch alloy wheels, wireless phone charging, LED headlights, automatic emergency braking, lane keeping, blind spot warning
- Redbook future values: 3yr: 52%; 5yr: 39%

STARS ★★★★★

- Safety **Not yet tested**
- Performance ★★★★★
- Handling ★★★★★
- Quality and reliability ★★★★★
- Comfort and refinement ★★★★★
- Value for money ★★★★★
- Overall** ★★★★★



compare with ...

Audi Q5, BMW X3, Mazda CX9, Mercedes GLC, Peugeot 5008

MASERATI LEVANTE FROM \$127,000



Until the Levante, no SUV had ever worn the trident badge of Maserati. But you would never guess from the way this weighty Italian drives. Equipped as standard with air springs and variable dampers, the Levante is more agile on a curvy road than a high-riding 2.2-tonne five-seater has any right to be and, thanks to a little help from Jeep, has more off-road ability than any customer is ever likely to exploit.

Maserati's starting point for development was the Ghibli sedan, and the SUV's overall length and wheelbase are almost the same.

Major changes for the Levante include suspension hardware designed to deliver greater wheel travel, plus the adoption of standard pneumatic suspension that can hoist the vehicle up to 40mm higher for off-road work or lower it by up to 35mm for improved high-speed stability and fuel efficiency.

Mindful of the brand's reputation for handling,

Maserati's engineers chose an aluminium-rich mix for the Levante's body and suspension.

While the Levante isn't light, its weight is at least distributed in the right places.

The company claims the SUV has perfect 50:50 front-to-rear weight distribution and a lower centre of gravity than any competitor.

These physics-friendly fundamentals are a firm foundation for the Levante's driving dynamics.

Levante petrol models run a 3.0-litre, twin-turbo petrol V6, built by Ferrari, matched with an eight-speed automatic and high range only all-wheel drive.

In the base Levante 350, priced at \$127,000, it produces 257kW/500Nm.

The 350 GranSport and GranLusso are \$146,990.

In Levante S Gransport,

priced at \$182,490, it produces 316kW/580Nm of torque, with the 0-100km/h trip taking 5.2 seconds.

GranLusso S is also priced at \$179,990.

A Ferrari-engineered twin-turbo 3.8-litre V8 powers the Levante GTS, priced at \$268,990. It produces 404kW of power and 730Nm of torque, propelling the GTS to 100km/h in 4.2 seconds.

The top spec Trofeo ("race" in Italian) variant gets ultra lightweight, high performance internals that lift peak power to 440kW (torque remains at 730Nm) and reduces its 0-100km/h time to 3.9 seconds.

Trofeo also comes with an eye-watering \$336,990 pricetag.

The Levante's exterior manages to look sleek for an SUV without going totally pseudo-coupe like, say, BMW's X6. But the big Maserati, from

some angles, does look like a small hatchback that's been put on a photocopier and blown up to 150 per cent.

The cabin is luxuriously Italian, with a decently spacious rear seat and a useful 680-litre cargo compartment.

This is also the first Maserati to come equipped with a suite of infotainment and driver-aid technologies to rival the Germans.

In turbopetrol powered big monster SUV territory, the Porsche Cayenne S, priced at \$172,500 with a 324kW 2.9-litre twin turbo, is the best handling big SUV you can buy. In corners, Levante won't see where it went.

And if you want to eyeball the bloke in the Trofeo, the 404kW 4.0-litre twin turbo V8 Cayenne Turbo is also good for 0-100km/h in 3.9 seconds, and you get \$97,990 change in your pocket.

Is a Maserati badge worth the extra money? That's your call.

By John Carey

THINGS WE LIKE

- ✓ Ride and handling on standard air suspension
- ✓ Turbodiesel's torque and refinement
- ✓ Classy interior design and fit-out
- ✓ Decent cargo space

THINGS YOU MIGHT NOT LIKE

- ✗ Looks a bit stodgy
- ✗ Only five seats
- ✗ Radar cruise, lane departure and collision warning are options
- ✗ Porsche Cayenne and Audi Q7 are equally competent and better value

SPEX (S Gransport)

- Made in Italy
- 3.0-litre V6 turbopetrol/eight-speed automatic/all-wheel drive
- 316kW of power at 5750rpm/580Nm of torque from 2000-4750rpm
- 0-100km/h in 5.2 seconds (claimed)
- 12L/100km combined; CO₂ emissions are 272g/km; fuel tank is 80 litres
- Max towing weight 2700kg
- Warranty: Three years/unlimited kilometres
- Standard: Six airbags, stability control, leather upholstery, power tailgate, 8.4-inch touchscreen infotainment, digital radio, Bluetooth, navigation, dual zone air, blind spot and rear cross traffic alert, 20-inch alloys with 265/45 tyres
- Redbook future values: 3yr: 53%; 5yr: 39%

STARS ★★★★★

- Safety **Not yet tested**
- Performance ★★★★★
- Handling ★★★★★
- Quality and reliability ★★★★★
- Comfort and refinement ★★★★★
- Value for money ★★☆☆☆
- Overall** ★★★★★



compare with ...

Audi Q7, BMW X5, Mercedes GLE, Porsche Cayenne, Range Rover Sport, VW Touareg

MAZDA MX-5 FROM \$36,090



MAZDA'S fourth-generation MX-5 kicks off at \$36,090 for the base model 1.5-litre/six-speed manual Roadster. A six-speed auto adds \$2000.

The 2.0-litre GT manual is \$44,020; the auto is \$46,020.

Stowing the lightweight roof opens up an endless sky that no sunroof can match. With the side windows up, heater on and the standard rear deflector in place, alfresco cruising is possible even on a cold night. At speed, conversation requires no raised voices, while lifting and securing the manual top again is no hardship. If it is for you, then you may prefer the 2.0-litre RF power operated folding hard roof model, priced from \$41,400, or \$48,100 in GT trim, again with the auto adding \$2000. GT RS manual is \$51,100.

You lower yourself gently into the MX5, and if you're long of leg there's a bit of yoga involved to get comfortably installed behind the wheel. The seating position is higher than most sports cars, there's no seat height adjustment and no reach adjustment for the wheel either, so you either fit the MX5 or you don't.

You're snugly wrapped in a traditional roadster twin cockpit, facing a slim, minimalist dash, classic satin chrome-ringed analogue instruments and spherical air vents. Mazda's easy to use MZD Connect rotary controller/cursor (plus touchscreen functionality) infotainment system includes navigation, voice control that gets it right most of the time and simple, seamless Bluetooth.

It's a tiny roadster, so there's precious little storage available in the cabin and the 127 litre boot requires a pack light approach to touring.

Two USBs are provided, while a camera, speed sign recognition, low speed autonomous emergency braking, blind spot monitoring and rear cross traffic alert are standard.

The RF's roof goes up and down in about 10 seconds. In blue skies mode, it's calm in the cabin; there's some wind noise around the roof buttresses, but not enough to require raised voices. The driver's seat headrest

has built in speakers – the next best thing to headphones.

The Roadster's 97kW/152Nm 1.5-litre twin-cam engine (based on the Mazda2's unit) is one of the livelier non-turbos we've experienced.

Armed with a lovely manual shifter, it pulls both strongly and sweetly off the line and revs absolutely freely. Only when needing to overtake quickly does its lack of capacity require restraint and caution.

The 135kW/205Nm 2.0-litre engine perfectly demonstrates the attractions of natural aspiration: immediate and proportionate responsiveness to your right foot, a linear power delivery that becomes eager and willing as redline approaches, and a rorty exhaust note.

It revs to 7500 and gets "on the cam" in classic hot four fashion from just below 4000rpm, so you have plenty of revs to play with and you can use them all.

The six-speed manual's lever has a precise, short throw action and the clutch is light and

progressive.

Mazda's "driver and car as one" rhetoric is true. You don't so much sit in this car as wear it. Through a set of corners, you know exactly where the front wheels are pointed, via super sharp steering and intense, uncorrupted feedback from the road.

The MX5 is finely balanced, so not only is it a delight to drive, it's also easy and unintimidating. You don't have to drive it fast to enjoy it, either. Happiness happens at any speed.

It isn't a hard case sports car, so when you point it into a tight corner, it rolls momentarily before settling into a neutral track. Roadholding is superb and even on the choppiest bitumen it never flinches. It should ride like a billycart, but Mazda has engineered reasonable compliance into the suspension, so it's comfortable enough to do long distances.

The Germans could never make a sports car this good for the price because their answer to almost every question is "More." An astounding machine, and highly recommended.

THINGS WE LIKE

- ✓ Zingy, refined performance
- ✓ Light, tight body
- ✓ Superb dynamics
- ✓ Simple, effortless soft-top operation
- ✓ Compelling value for money

THINGS YOU MIGHT NOT LIKE

- ✗ No glovebox, or any other useful storage really.
- ✗ Tyre repair kit; no spare wheel
- ✗ Not overendowed with torque

SPEX (1.5 manual)

- Made in Japan
- 1.5-litre four-cylinder petrol/six-speed manual/rear-wheel drive
- 97kW of power at 7000rpm/152Nm of torque from 4800rpm
- 0-100km/h in 8.3 seconds (claimed)
- 4.9L/100km highway; 7.9L/100km city; 95 octane premium; CO₂ emissions are 139g/km (Euro figures)
- Warranty: Five years/unlimited kilometres
- Standard: Four airbags, stability control, camera, low speed AEB, blind spot monitoring, rear cross traffic alert, auto headlights, cruise, Bluetooth, leather wheel and gear knob, LED headlights, tyre-pressure monitoring, 16-inch alloys
- Redbook future values: 3yr: 53%; 5yr: 34%

STARS ★★★★★

- Safety ★★★★★ (Euro NCAP)
- Performance ★★★★★
- Handling ★★★★★
- Quality and reliability ★★★★★
- Comfort and refinement ★★★★★
- Value for money ★★★★★
- Overall** ★★★★★



compare with ...

Abarth 124 Spider, BMW 220i convertible, Mini convertible



MAZDA2 FROM \$20,990



This is the third generation of Mazda's popular small car.

The Mazda2 hatch is offered with a 1.5-litre/four-cylinder naturally aspirated, direct-injection petrol engine across three spec levels: Pure, Evolve and GT.

Pricing starts at \$20,990 for the Pure manual. A six-speed auto adds \$2000 and is standard on other models. Evolve is \$24,490 and GT is \$25,990.

Pure and GT are also available as a sedan, at the same prices and specification.

All models are well equipped. Pure gets low speed (from speeds up to 30km/h) automatic emergency braking, blind spot monitoring, rear cross traffic alert, lane keep assist, Apple CarPlay and Android Auto.

From Evolve grade up, auto emergency braking in reverse is standard, while the GT adds four cameras that provide a 360 degree bird's eye view of the vehicle.

Revisions to the Skyactiv 1.5-litre engine for 2020 elevate

peak power to 79kW and peak torque to 144Nm.

The cabin features excellent fit and finish quality, clean, minimalist styling and a sophisticated, high-tech feel. Attention to detail befits a more expensive car, from the precise, tactile controls to clear, concise instruments, a sporty, leather-wrapped steering wheel and retro-look spherical air vents.

While most Japanese and Korean brands use touchscreen-only infotainment, Mazda adds the much safer, more efficient rotary controller/cursor interface favoured by German makers. Moving across and within menus is intuitive, complemented by calling/email/message Bluetooth functions, voice control that works with phone, audio and navigation, and a head-up display that shows speed, speed limits (with 100 percent accuracy on test) and navigation prompts.

Back seat space is predictably tight for tall passengers, but four average sized adults will fit comfortably in the Mazda. A huge boot in the sedan – 440 litres, compared with 250 in the hatch – can be extended with the 60/40 split fold rear seat back.

Mazda's 1.5-litre Skyactiv-G engine/six-speed automatic delivers best in class fuel efficiency in town. Our car averaged 6-7L/100km on regular unleaded, complemented by an unusual automatic stop/start system that requires an additional firm press on the brake, after you come to a stop, to kill the engine.

You then need to give the accelerator a similarly decisive poke to get the plot rolling again, because like other naturally-aspirated petrol fours torque is in short supply at low revs.

One of the quietest small cars at highway speeds, the 2 cruises effortlessly at 100km/h with the

1.5 ticking over at 2250rpm in sixth gear, returning a super frugal 4-5L/100km. It makes easy work of hills, again due to responsive, sophisticated drivetrain software that picks the right gear at the right time and prevents hunting.

Open road dynamics are sporty in flavour, with accurate, reasonably talkative steering, disciplined body control, great front end grip and secure roadholding. The ride is pretty firm though, especially around town at low speeds.

Mazda increased the starting price of the 2 by more than \$5000 in early 2020, so it is now one of the more expensive small cars on the market.

That said, it's a premium quality, well-equipped, precision-engineered little machine with best in class standard safety and a big fun to drive factor.

Test drive it back to back with VW's Polo; other front runners in this class include the Skoda Fabia, Kia Rio and Toyota Yaris.

THINGS WE LIKE

- ✓ Outstanding quality and reliability
- ✓ Agile, secure handling
- ✓ Stellar fuel efficiency
- ✓ Simple, classy dash layout

THINGS YOU MIGHT NOT LIKE

- ✗ Not a lot of grunt in the 1.5
- ✗ Rear headroom is just OK
- ✗ Pricey

SPEX

- Made in Thailand
- 1.5-litre four-cylinder petrol/six-speed automatic/front-wheel drive
- 81kW of power at 6000rpm/141Nm of torque at 4000rpm
- 0-100km/h in 10.5 seconds (estimated)
- 4.2L/100km highway; 6.1L/100km city, 91 octane; CO₂ emissions are 114g/km
- Warranty: Five years/unlimited kilometres
- Standard: Pure includes stability control, six airbags, low speed auto emergency braking with pedestrian detection, blind spot monitoring, rear cross traffic alert, Bluetooth, rear parking sensors, lane keep assist, Apple CarPlay, Android Auto, 15-inch alloy wheels. Evolve adds 16-inch alloys, navigation and digital radio; GT adds 360 degree cameras, and partial leather upholstery.
- Redbook future values: 3yr: 60%; 5yr: 45%

STARS ★★★★★

- Safety ★★★★★ ANCAP
- Green Vehicle Guide ★★★★★
- Performance ★★★★★
- Handling ★★★★★
- Quality and reliability ★★★★★
- Comfort and refinement ★★★★★
- Value for money ★★★★★
- Overall** ★★★★★



compare with ...

Audi A1, Honda Jazz, Kia Rio, Toyota Yaris, VW Polo

MAZDA3 FROM \$25,590



Now in its fourth iteration since 2004, the Japanese-built Mazda 3 hatch and sedan series is nowadays a wholly more upmarket proposition, trespassing on the Volkswagen Golf's turf.

Pricing starts from \$25,590 for the 114kW/200Nm 2.0-litre Pure six-speed manual. A six-speed automatic adds \$1000.

Safety is a highlight, with blind-spot monitoring, forward obstruction warning, lane departure alert, lane-keep assist, active cruise control with full stop/go, rear cross-traffic alert, traffic sign recognition, autonomous emergency braking, tyre pressure monitoring and seven airbags.

Add sophisticated infotainment with Apple CarPlay/Android Auto connectivity, digital radio and navigation, plus digital instrumentation, a head-up display and rain-sensing wipers to the usual spec of rear sensors, reverse camera and 16-inch alloys, and it's clear that the base model is hardly bare bones.

The Evolve, priced from \$27,390, boasts dual-zone air (with rear face-level vents), higher-quality trim and rear

armrest, while the G20 Touring, from \$29,790, adds leather, keyless entry and a powered driver's seat with memory.

The gutsier and better-specified 139kW/252Nm 2.5-litre model range includes the \$30,190 Evolve, the \$34,290 GT (with heated front seats, mirrors and steering wheel, Bose audio and leather) and the flagship \$37,790 Astina, with front cross-traffic assist, adaptive LED headlights, surround-view monitor, automatic acceleration and braking in heavy traffic), driver monitoring and sunroof.

The extra kit helps justify premium pricing, but what elevates the latest Three is its presentation and noise/vibration suppression, addressing a long time bugbear with the model.

The dash oozes minimalistic chic, with instruments reminiscent of Porsche's best, switchgear feel to bother Audi, ergonomics on a par with VW and materials quality a Mercedes owner might admire – and all within a roomy, comfortable and practical cabin.

On the flipside, rear-seat entry/exit access and poor rear vision result from the sloping roof

and shallow glass, while cargo capacity is less than most rivals (but better than Corolla hatch).

While the Three's naturally-aspirated four-cylinder engines are smoother and quieter than before, both require a determined right foot if they're to feel as powerful and perky as their lower-displacement turbo rivals.

Once in the higher rev bands, the Mazdas are indeed rapid, and are probably travelling faster than expected due to their far-more hushed characteristics, but greater low-end punch would be appreciated.

Mazda also offers the X20 Astina, from \$40,790, with the world's first production petrol engine with compression ignition – a la diesel.

It's a 132kW/224Nm 2.0-litre, with mild hybrid technology, including a belt driven starter/generator. Mazda claims its Skyactiv X offers the best performance and economy characteristics of both fuels.

Compared with the 2.5-litre petrol-engined Astina automatic, its advantage is 1.0L/100km according to official tests --

5.5L/100km vs 6/5L/100km.

The chassis can certainly handle more power, given the steering's balanced, fluid responses, allowing for effortless, clean cornering. Similarly, the (controversial) shift from a multi-link independent rear suspension system to a torsion beam arrangement has not come at the expense of either dynamic control or ride comfort, retaining the Three's reputation as a real driver's car.

The Three is a likeable alternative to premium German hatchbacks such as BMW's 1 Series and the Mercedes A-Class. At the mid-\$20K pricepoint, test drive the Three back to back with the VW Golf and take your pick. Both are exceptional cars.

By Byron Mathioudakis

THINGS WE LIKE

- ✓ Quiet, refined, stylish cabin
- ✓ Superb handling and roadholding
- ✓ Excellent build quality
- ✓ Well equipped
- ✓ Long list of standard safety features

THINGS YOU MIGHT NOT LIKE

- ✗ Sluggish bottom end and midrange performance compared with turbo rivals
- ✗ Hatch's small boot
- ✗ Access to rear seat restricted by sloping roofline
- ✗ Rear legroom not as generous as class best
- ✗ Poor reversing vision

SPEX (Pure 2.0)

- Made in Japan
- 2.0-litre four-cylinder petrol/six-speed auto/front-wheel drive
- 114kW of power at 6000rpm/200Nm of torque at 4000rpm
- 0-100km in 8.5 seconds (estimated)
- 5.3L/100km highway; 7.8L/100km city; 91 octane; CO2 emissions: N/A
- Warranty: Five years/unlimited kilometres
- Standard: Seven airbags, stability control, AEB, adaptive cruise control with stop/go, lane keep assist, traffic sign recognition, auto high beam, blind-spot monitor, rear cross-traffic alert, rear parking sensors, reverse camera, tyre-inflation warning, dual-zone air, navigation, digital instrumentation, head-up display, digital radio, Apple CarPlay/Android Auto, 18-inch alloys and a space-saver spare
- Redbook future values: 3yr: 58%; 5yr: 47%

STARS ★★★★★

- Safety ★★★★★ ANCAP
- Performance ★★★★★
- Handling ★★★★★
- Quality and reliability ★★★★★
- Comfort and refinement ★★★★★
- Value for money ★★★★★
- Overall** ★★★★★



compare with ...

Ford Focus, Honda Civic, Hyundai i30, Subaru Impreza, Toyota Corolla, Volkswagen Golf



MAZDA6 FROM \$34,590



Mazda's mid-size 6 is available as a sedan and wagon. Prices start at \$34,590 for the 140kW/250Nm 2.5-litre four-cylinder petrol/six-speed automatic Sport sedan. The Touring is \$38,890. GT SP, with a 170kW/420Nm 2.5-litre engine, is \$46,690 and the top-of-the-range Atenza is \$50,090. Wagon versions add \$1300.

Whereas most naturally aspirated petrol fours just don't have the bottom-end and midrange performance of their turbocharged rivals, Mazda's 2.5 is sufficiently strong and responsive across the rev range to work well in town or on the highway and returns great fuel economy.

The 6 is a pretty big unit, though, so the 2.5-litre turbo's 170kW of power – and a hefty 420Nm of torque -- are close to Goldilocks numbers for its layout and purpose.

A broad, muscular delivery, accompanied by a lovely growly

note at the top end, doesn't induce excessive torque steer or readily overcome front tyre grip -- though it can do so in the wet, where traction control is slow to arrest wheelspin.

It's a refined, efficient drivetrain. The six-speed does its thing without fuss; Sport mode raises the revs and paddles are also provided.

Unusually for a turbo, the 2.5 runs on 91 octane. It's reasonably frugal on the highway, returning 6.5-7.5L/100km, but around town it can chew through up to 13L/100km if you leadfoot it. Mazda's auto stop/start is unobtrusive in operation.

Steering is quite slow, especially on initial turn-in, and you get little feedback from the front wheels.

As with any large front driver, pushing it in to tight corners generates understeer, but at

speed the 6 feels light and agile, with tighter body control and roadholding than previously.

It's a very easy, relaxing car in which to cover long distances.

Mazda's new heated, leather driver's seat is absolutely luxurious, properly supportive and good for a 1000km day.

Most of the driver assist safety tech, which includes radar cruise, allows you plenty of adjustment for sensitivity and warning thresholds, and the head-up display is informative and easy to read.

It is activated every time you start the car, so if you don't want it on you have to go to the infotainment system and turn it off. Every time.

MZD Connect infotainment is a fully embedded system, stand alone navigation and voice, but it lacks Apple CarPlay and Android Auto. Voice gets it right most of the time.

Ample storage includes two centre console boxes and a phone tray. Two USB and a 12 volt socket are also provided.

A spacious, comfortable rear seat, with easy access via light, wide-opening doors, has sufficient headroom for occupants up to about 185cm. Two USB slots and vents are also provided.

Mazda has retuned the suspension, primarily to improve the 6's doughy handling, but it hasn't sacrificed ride comfort.

On any surface, at any speed, the GT is firm, compliant and exceptionally quiet.

When you look at the total offering here, in the context of 170kW of power up front, the Mazda 6 GT now shapes up as killer value, not only in its class but also against base model Audi A4, BMW 3 Series and Mercedes C Class, each of which represents a lot less car for a lot more money.

If you're not fixated on a Euro badge, the Mazda is as good as a mid-size sedan gets.

THINGS WE LIKE

- ✓ Made-in-Japan quality
- ✓ 2.5 turbo is a just right fit
- ✓ Loaded with gear
- ✓ Comfortable driver's seat
- ✓ Compliant ride and secure handling

THINGS YOU MIGHT NOT LIKE

- ✗ If you don't want the head up display or auto stop start, you have to disable them every time you start the car
- ✗ Smallish boot in the wagon

SPEX (GT SP)

- Made in Japan
- 2.5-litre four-cylinder turbopetrol/six-speed automatic/front-wheel drive
- 170kW of power at 5000rpm/420Nm of torque at 2000rpm
- 0-100km/h N/A
- 6.2L/100km highway; 10.1L/100km city; 91 octane; CO₂ emissions are 192g/km
- Warranty: Five years/unlimited kilometres
- Standard: Six airbags, stability control, AEB, blind spot monitoring, adaptive cruise, head up display, Bluetooth, navigation, voice control, digital radio, Bose sound, heated seats, leather, dual zone air, adaptive LED headlights, 19 inch alloy wheels
- Redbook future values: 3yr: 53%; 5yr: 36%

STARS ★★★★★

- Safety ★★★★★ ANCAP
- Green Vehicle Guide ★★★★★
- Performance ★★★★★
- Handling ★★★★★
- Quality and reliability ★★★★★
- Comfort and refinement ★★★★★
- Value for money ★★★★★
- Overall** ★★★★★



compare with ...

Honda Accord, Skoda Superb, Toyota Camry, VW Passat



The CX-3 gives Mazda an offering in the hotly contested compact SUV segment.

Powered by a 110kW/195Nm 2.0-litre naturally aspirated petrol engine, the CX-3 is up against more than 20 contenders including Honda's HRV, Nissan's Qashqai and the Renault Captur.

Depending on spec, the CX-3 also offers the option of front- or all-wheel drive (the latter being a true rarity at this end of the market), as well as the choice of six-speed manual or six-speed automatic transmissions.

There are four petrol powered spec levels — base Neo Sport, Maxx Sport, premium sTouring and top-shelf Akari. Prices kick off at \$22,890 for the Neo Sport front wheel drive manual; Maxx Sport manual is \$24,890, sTouring is \$29,090 and Akari is \$34,190.

The six-speed automatic adds \$2000 and the all wheel drive option in Maxx Sport and sTouring and Akari another \$2000.

All models include a camera and autonomous emergency braking from low speeds.

On Maxx grade and up, blind-spot monitoring and rear cross-traffic alert are also standard.

Top spec Akari adds 360 degree camera coverage and adaptive cruise control with stop and go, which can automatically control your progress in heavy stop/start traffic.

Interior space is generous by class standards, with more than adequate rear leg and head room for two full-size adults.

Three back there is tight in the extreme, but the CX-3 is unashamedly pitched at young singles and pre-child couples, so that rear-room-for-three issue — and a relatively modest cargo volume of 264 litres with rear seats up, growing to 1174 litres with the (60/40 split-fold) second row folded — is bang on brief.

Mazda says special attention has been paid to the interior design, right down to the choice of materials and finishes, to deliver a clean, premium feel. There's no doubt that objective has been achieved.

There is better-than-average storage space around the cabin, including clever oddment trays in the front console, big bottle

bins in the doors (front and rear) plus large seat pockets.

The seating position has been designed to hit the sweet spot between the commanding vision of a traditional, high-riding SUV and the impressive handling dynamics of a hatch with a lower centre of gravity.

The CX-3 design team has hit the target: the car combines great visibility with agile dynamics and a firmly planted road feel.

Mazda's naturally aspirated, high-compression Skyactiv petrol engines are certainly fuel efficient but performance is not a strong point and more grunt would definitely be welcome, but the payoff is excellent fuel efficiency — on regular unleaded, too.

Driving several spec and drivetrain variants, we found petrol AWD models to be the pick of the bunch, with nimble handling and greater composure and grip when cornering at speed.

That said, Subaru's all-wheel drive XV has the best ride/handling compromise in this class, while Toyota's C-HR Hybrid is the pick

of them when it comes to drive train performance and efficiency. As an overall value package, the Skoda Kamiq is hard to beat.

Keenly priced, well engineered and a capable, enjoyable drive, the CX-3 is one of the front runners in compact SUVs. Test drive it with these rivals before you make a decision.

By Byron Mathioudakis

THINGS WE LIKE

- ✓ Outstanding quality
- ✓ Comfortable, stylish interior
- ✓ Outstanding fuel efficiency
- ✓ Reasonable value for money

THINGS YOU MIGHT NOT LIKE

- ✗ 2.0-litre petrol is a bit gutless
- ✗ 18-inch alloys on top-spec models compromise ride comfort
- ✗ No rear camera in base Neo
- ✗ No rear-seat air vents

SPEX (2.0 Neo auto)

- Made in Japan
- 2.0-litre four-cylinder petrol/six-speed manual/front-wheel drive
- 110kW of power at 6000rpm and 195Nm of torque at 2800rpm
- 0-100km/h in 10.0 seconds (est.)
- Warranty: Five years/unlimited kilometres
- Max towing weight: 1200kg
- 5.5L/100km highway; 7.7L/100km city; 91 octane. CO₂ emissions are 146g/km; fuel tank is 48 litres
- Standard: Six airbags, stability control, low speed AEB, camera, Bluetooth rear parking sensors, 16-inch steel wheels
- Maxx adds 16-inch alloys, blind spot monitoring, navigation, touch screen. sTouring adds 18-inch alloys while Akari includes leather trim and a sunroof
- Redbook future values: 3yr: 57%; 5yr: 37%



STARS ★★★★★

- Safety ★★★★★ ANCAP
- Performance ★★★★★
- Handling ★★★★★
- Quality, reliability ★★★★★
- Comfort and refinement ★★★★★
- Value for money ★★★★★
- Overall** ★★★★★

compare with ...

Honda HRV, Kia Seltos, Subaru XV, Toyota CH-R, Skoda Kamiq



Mazda's CX30 shares architecture, front wheel drivetrains and dash layouts with the 3 sedan and hatch, so you could accurately describe it as a Mazda3 wagon.

Prices start at \$28,990 for the G20 Pure, with a 114kW 2.0-litre naturally-aspirated petrol four/six-speed manual. The six-speed automatic is \$29,990. Automatic. Evolve is \$31,590, Touring is \$35,190 and Astina, tested here, is \$39,190.

G25 variants, with a 139kW 2.5-litre engine, start at \$36,690 for the Touring; the Astina is \$41,690.

All-wheel drive adds \$2000 to both G25 models.

The X20 Astina all-wheel drive mild hybrid is priced at \$46,690. It uses Mazda's revolutionary new Skyactiv-X engine, the first petrol engine to employ both spark and diesel-style compression ignition. This engine is also available in Astina specification, minus the mild hybrid assistance, for \$38,690.

CX30, like several rivals, well illustrates that fact that a

compact SUV is often less car for more money than the hatchback on which it's based.

This includes interior space. Surely an SUV is bigger than a hatch? Not this one.

CX30's wheelbase is 70mm shorter than the 3 hatch (and sedan.) So rear seat legroom is similarly tight for adults, though access is easier due to the higher roof. CX30's small boot has just 22 litres more capacity than the 3 hatch and 127 litres less than the sedan.

On the road, its 2.0-litre engine has to shift 50kg more metal, so its already lethargic performance is further dulled, and, again due to the SUV's extra mass, fuel consumption rises by .03 litres/100km.

CX30's elevated SUV stance and extra weight also has an intrinsically adverse effect in corners. Mazda has tried to counteract this by fitting very firm suspension, to better control the

car's mass and minimise body roll in tight bends. It works. The CX30 is one of the better handling compact SUVs, but the ride is hard and often jarring, especially at the front end. Lifeless steering exhibits some rack shake in bumpy bends, also exacerbated by the front suspension's lack of compliance.

What Mazda has done here – and it's far from alone -- is take one of the best cars in its class, dumb it down as an SUV, and whack a much higher price on it: an extra \$3200 for G20 Evolve, compared with the same grade 3 hatch and sedan, and a \$4400 slug in Touring specification.

As mentioned earlier, the 2.0-litre, though adequate around town, refined and exceptionally fuel efficient, is slow and unresponsive, especially in the lower half of the rev range, against comparably-priced turbo-powered rivals such as the 1.6-litre Kia Seltos or 1.4-litre VW Tiguan and T-Roc. It's also a plodder

compared with the Subaru XV and Toyota C-HR hybrids.

As with other Mazdas, the CX30 does excel at quality, design and safety. It uses the 3's beautifully simple, elegant dash, which wouldn't look out of place in an Audi, plus the same user-friendly, cursor-based, fully-featured infotainment system. Voice control works across all functions, including navigation.

Astina gets a heated, leather wrapped driver's seat that's comfortable and supportive. You sit low in CX30, as though you're in a sports car rather than an SUV.

Safety tech includes 360 degree camera coverage and an array of other aids you can adjust according to your preferences.

The G20 CX30, though, is too much money for not enough SUV. Kia's Seltos, Skoda's Kamiq, VW's Tiguan and Subaru's XV hybrid are better buying.

THINGS WE LIKE

- ✓ Looks sharper than the average SUV
- ✓ Beautifully designed interior too
- ✓ Good fuel economy on regular unleaded
- ✓ Well equipped with safety features
- ✓ Comprehensive, user friendly infotainment

THINGS YOU MIGHT NOT LIKE

- ✗ Overpriced
- ✗ 2.0-litre is slow and unresponsive
- ✗ Hard ride
- ✗ Dead steering
- ✗ Tight rear seat and boot space

SPEX (G20 Astina)

- Made in Japan
- 2.0-litre four cylinder petrol/six-speed automatic/front-wheel drive
- 114kW of power at 6000rpm/200Nm of torque at 4000rpm
- 0-100km/h in 10.2 seconds (claimed)
- 5.6L/100km highway; 8.0L/100km city; regular unleaded; CO2 emissions are 152gkm
- Warranty: Five years/unlimited km
- Standard: Seven airbags, stability control, low speed autonomous emergency braking, 360 degree cameras, adaptive cruise, lane keep assist, head-up display, speed sign recognition, rear cross traffic alert, navigation, voice control, Apple CarPlay, Android Auto, digital radio, partial leather upholstery, heated front seats, 18-inch alloy wheels
- Redbook future values: 3yr: 56%; 5yr: 44%

STARS ★★★★★

- Safety ★★★★★
- Performance ★★★★★
- Handling ★★★★★
- Quality, reliability ★★★★★
- Comfort and refinement ★★★★★
- Value for money ★★★★★
- Overall** ★★★★★



compare with ...

Honda HRV, Hyundai Kona, Kia Seltos, Toyota C-HR, Skoda Kamiq, Subaru XV, VW Tiguan

MAZDA CX-5 FROM \$31,190



Evolution is the name of the game for one of Australia's most popular SUVs.

Starting from \$31,190, the front-wheel drive Mazda CX-5 Maxx vies with Subaru's Forester and Toyota's RAV4 for safety honours in this class, with autonomous emergency braking front and rear as standard, plus adaptive cruise, rear cross-traffic alert, blind-spot monitoring, lane keep assist, LED headlights with automatic high beam and rear-parking sensors.

Some luxury SUVs at twice the price don't have this much safety technology.

Maxx Sport from \$36,490 is also front-wheel drive. Touring specification, from \$41,280, offers an all-wheel drivetrain, as does GT, from \$46,990, which puts you into luxury equipment territory with a powered tailgate, sunroof, 19-inch alloys, adaptive front headlights (that "see" through corners), heated and powered front seats with driver's-side memory, leather, a Bose audio upgrade and 10.25-inch touchscreen infotainment.

Finally, the flagship Akera, from \$49,380, adds LED cabin

lighting, cooled front seats and a 360 degree camera.

Only the Maxx and Maxx Sport are front-wheel drive, powered by a 115kW/200Nm 2.0-litre four-cylinder petrol engine, with either six-speed manual (Maxx only) or six-speed auto transmissions.

The 2.0-litre engine is a bit gutless. It's not especially quick off the line, works pretty hard and makes a bit of noise as a result of frequently having to rely on lots of revs to get a result.

It's worth the extra \$3000 in Maxx and Maxx Sport for the all-wheel drive, 140kW/252Nm 2.5-litre petrol drivetrain, standard from Touring upwards. From Maxx Sport up, another \$3000 buys a 140kW/450Nm 2.2-litre turbo-diesel, with a six-speed auto and all-wheel drive.

GT and Akera all-wheel drives are also available with a 170kW/420Nm 2.5-litre turbopetrol engine, priced at \$48,590 and \$50,830.

Slick and refined, yet with a sporty edge that suits the Mazda's character, the naturally-aspirated 2.5 petrol

engine brings brisk acceleration across a broad rev range, especially at higher speeds, and returns impressive fuel economy figures to boot.

Both powertrains work harmoniously with the standard six-speed automatic.

Mazda says the key priorities during development of this second-generation CX-5 were to improve comfort and refinement.

Engine and road noise have been quelled, addressing one of the preceding model's biggest issues.

More sound-deadening material, superior door seals, extra carpeting and better aerodynamics have transformed the Mazda to near-premium levels.

The rear backrests now recline in two positions while from Maxx Sport up, rear air vents and a rear USB port make the back seat a happier, more comfortable place for kids.

Throw in deeper windows, thinner pillars and a lower-set dash, and the overall ambience inside is now one of more lightness and space, even though dimensionally hardly anything's

changed. CX-5 is smaller than CRV, Forester and RAV4, more comparable in size to Hyundai's Tucson and the VW Tiguan.

Test drive it with the Tiguan, Escape and Forester.

Be aware, though, that some CX5 owners have had major and potentially hazardous problems with the drivetrain, causing Mazda to recall more than 35,000 vehicles, across several model lines, in 2019.

Mazda ended up in court, defending itself against charges, laid by the ACCC, of unconscionable conduct for allegedly lying to customers about the faults, and failing to comply with its Australian Consumer Law obligations.

By Byron Mathioudakis

THINGS WE LIKE

- ✓ Quieter, more comfortable interior
- ✓ Strong performance from 2.5 and 2.2 diesel
- ✓ Composed handling
- ✓ High safety equipment
- ✓ Strong resale values

THINGS YOU MIGHT NOT LIKE

- ✗ 2.0-litre base engine lacks torque, makes a lot of noise and auto can be reluctant to kick down
- ✗ Reliability issues
- ✗ Slow steering
- ✗ No auxiliary digital speedo on lower-spec models

SPEX (Maxx Sport 2.5 AWD)

- Made in Japan
- 2.5-litre four-cylinder petrol/six-speed automatic/all-wheel drive
- 140kW of power at 6000rpm/252Nm of torque at 4000rpm
- 0-100km in 7.8 seconds (US model)
- 6.4L/100km highway, 9.5L/100km city; 91 octane; CO₂ emissions are 175g/km (approx)
- Warranty: Five years/unlimited kilometres
- Standard: Six airbags, stability control, traction control, Autonomous Emergency Braking front and rear, rear cross-traffic alert, blind-spot monitoring, LED headlights, camera, digital radio, rear parking sensors, keyless start, navigation, dual-zone air, Apple CarPlay, Android Auto, Bluetooth, auto on/off lights, rain-sensing wipers, leather-wrapped steering wheel, 17-inch alloy wheels, and a temporary spare
- Redbook future values: 3yr: 59%; 5yr: 47%

STARS ★★★★★

- Safety ★★★★★
- Performance ★★★★★
- Handling ★★★★★
- Quality and reliability ★★★★★
- Comfort and refinement ★★★★★
- Value for money ★★★★★
- Overall** ★★★★★



compare with ...

Ford Escape, Hyundai Tucson, Kia Sportage, Skoda Karoq, Subaru Forester, Toyota RAV4, VW Tiguan



MAZDA CX-8 FROM \$39,990



Mazda's CX-8 SUV slots between the mid-size CX-5 five-seater and family-sized CX-9 seven-seater. There are four model grades: base Sport front-wheel drive from \$39,990, Touring from \$47,790, GT from \$59,290 and the flagship Asaki from \$62,790.

Standard fare includes low speed autonomous emergency braking (AEB), blind zone warning, rear-cross traffic alert (and rear AEB), a very effective speed-sign recognition system and built-in navigation.

Mazda's infotainment — with a large dial and buttons that fall neatly within reach of your hand in the centre console — is one of the better systems we've used, but does take a bit of practice. Apple CarPlay and Android Auto are standard.

Rear cargo space is generous in the right configuration, though there is only a space-saver spare tyre under the boot floor.

The second-row seat tilts and slides forward at the flick of a lever to gain access to

the third row; it can also be adjusted to give third-row occupants extra knee room once everyone's on board.

All five seats in the back two rows have top tether points for child seats, but only the outer two positions in the second-row seat have Isofix mounts. Asaki LE, at \$69,920, has a six-seat layout with two individual chairs in row two.

The cargo area has two luggage hooks and a 12V socket.

The rear has no air vents in the third row but there are air-conditioning controls and vents for front- and second-row occupants.

The second-row seat has two USB charging ports in the centre armrest; up front there are two USB ports in the centre console and a 12V power point hidden down near the front passenger footwell.

Visibility all round is pretty good; the top-grade Asaki gains a 360-degree camera, although

the display is small and the image at night is grainy.

Mazda is one of the few brands that doesn't have convex mirrors on both sides of the car; the driver's side has a 1:1 mirror which restricts visibility and you come to rely on the blind spot monitor and head checks.

A 2.5-litre turbopetrol is available in Sport and Touring, with a six-speed auto and front wheel drive. It produces 140kW/252Nm.

The 140kW/450Nm 2.2-litre turbo diesel is matched to front wheel drive in GT and Asaki or all-wheel drive across the four model grades. It's zippy enough (it does 0 to 100km/h in a pretty respectable nine seconds), relatively refined for a diesel and fairly economical. After about 500km of mostly freeway and some suburban driving, we averaged between 7 and 7.2L/100km. It would use more with mostly suburban use.

Lane-keeping assistance tech on the flagship was too aggressive, grabbing the wheel so often that the car zig-zagged within its lane like a pinball, so I turned it off most of the time. Low-profile Toyo Proxes tyres are quite noisy, too. Tyre pressure monitoring is standard.

Handling isn't as sharp as most other Mazdas; CX8 lacks the crispness and responsiveness of the CX-5 and CX-9, in part due to the diesel donk's heavier weight over the nose. In general, though, it's a comfortable, secure cruiser with no serious vices.

CX8 is one of the better seven-seat SUV wagons, but you should also have a good look at the Hyundai Santa Fe, Kia Sorento, Skoda Kodiaq and VW Tiguan Allspace before you sign on the dotted line.

By Joshua Dowling

THINGS WE LIKE

- ✓ Made-in-Japan quality and reliability
- ✓ Excellent interior fit and finish
- ✓ Long list of standard safety features
- ✓ Well equipped at the price
- ✓ Frugal, refined turbodiesel

THINGS YOU MIGHT NOT LIKE

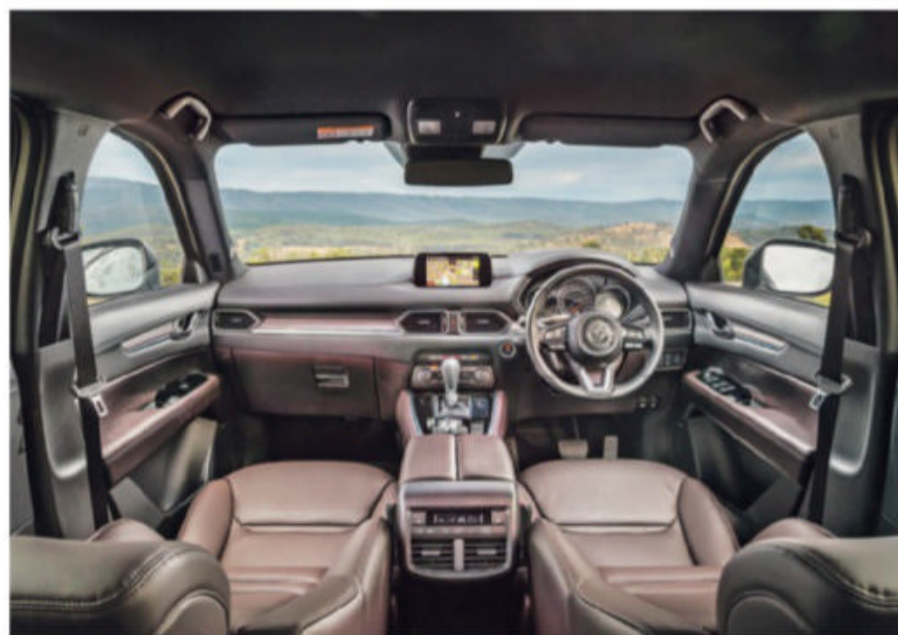
- ✗ Tyres can be noisy on coarse surfaces
- ✗ Grainy rear camera display at night
- ✗ Driver's-side mirror is not wide-view
- ✗ Three people in the middle row is pretty squeezey
- ✗ Space saver spare

SPEX (Sport AWD)

- Made in Japan
- 2.2-litre four-cylinder turbodiesel/six-speed automatic/all-wheel drive
- 140kW of power at 4500rpm/450Nm of torque at 2000rpm
- 0-100km/h in 9.6 seconds (claimed)
- 5.5L/100km highway; 6.9L/100km city; CO2 emissions are 158gkm; fuel tank is 74 litres
- Max towing weight 2000kg
- Warranty: Five years/unlimited km
- Standard: Six airbags, stability control, AEB, rear cross-traffic alert, blind spot monitoring, lane keep assist, speed sign recognition, adaptive cruise, navigation, Bluetooth, digital radio, 17-inch alloy wheels, keyless entry and starting, LED headlights, rear air conditioning
- Redbook future values: 3yr: 58%; 5yr: 43%

STARS ★★★★★

- Safety ★★★★★
- Performance ★★★★★
- Handling ★★★★★
- Quality, reliability ★★★★★
- Comfort and refinement ★★★★★
- Value for money ★★★★★
- Overall** ★★★★★



compare with ...

Hyundai Santa Fe, Kia Sorento, Peugeot 5008, Skoda Kodiaq, Toyota Kluger, VW Tiguan Allspace

MAZDA CX-9 FROM \$45,990



Mazda's CX-9 range starts at \$45,990 for the 170kW 2.5-litre four-cylinder turbopetrol/six-speed automatic/front-wheel-drive Sport. CX9 Touring, with the same drivetrain, is \$53,490, GT is \$62,990 and Azami is \$66,190. All-wheel-drive adds \$4000 to each, except top spec Azami, priced at \$70,625.

We're testing the base-model CX-9 Sport, and it's obvious that Mazda has thought about what parents really want.

Safety is the obvious priority and here the Mazda excels, with a head-up display, adaptive cruise, lane keep assist, a camera, low-speed (below 30km/h) obstacle detection/automatic emergency braking that also works in reverse (at driveway speeds of 2-8km/h), pedestrian detection, rear cross traffic alert, blind spot monitoring, full-length curtain airbags and seat belt indicators for all positions.

The spacious, comfortable 60/40-split middle seat slides

on either side to adjust legroom or let kids into the back. It's elevated and with low window sills kids can watch the world pass by and be happy.

Mazda improved rear seat access in mid 2017, making the second row easier to slide forward and creating a bigger opening for kids to climb in.

A new Azami LE variant, priced at \$73,875, features two luxurious individual seats in row two rather than the other models' three person bench.

The base CX-9 has practical, smart stuff that makes life easy and comfortable for everybody, such as tri-zone air with independent controls for the second row, back seats that require no effort to raise or lower, and a useful-sized boot with a power, hands-free tailgate.

Particularly impressive is the quality of materials, fit and finish in the CX-9's cabin, which is superb

for a base model. Mazda's 2.5-litre four-cylinder turbopetrol/six-speed auto drivetrain is tuned to suit its load-lugging purpose, with strong performance off the line, easy pulling power at low revs and turbodiesel-like torque, so there's never any need for you to thrash it.

In fact, it's a bit too easy to break traction in the front-wheel drive CX-9 if you're a bit vigorous on the accelerator, especially in wet or slippery conditions where the traction control takes too long to kick in.

The front-wheel drive CX-9 also suffers excessive torque steer; where the wheel tugs in your hands under acceleration, the car won't hold a straight line and control is compromised. This isn't fun in wet conditions.

Mazda claims the CX-9 is the most fuel-efficient seven-seater petrol SUV in its class. I averaged 12-13L/100km in town, unladen — frugal for a wagon of this size,

weight and power. It also runs on regular unleaded, an unexpected bonus in a turbopetrol, most of which require premium. It's quick, too, clocking 7.4 seconds for the 0-100km/h sprint.

The CX-9 handles securely and predictably on country roads as long as you appreciate its limitations and don't take the "Sport" spin literally.

It's a capable tourer with a compliant, if not quite supple ride on tall tyres and 18-inch alloys. Excessive tyre noise, a problem on some other Mazdas, isn't an issue here.

Mazda's 2.5-litre turbopetrol delivers that elusive combination of performance and economy in a big SUV. CX-9 Sport also offers blue-chip quality and big-dollar safety features you won't find in most rivals at the price, and all in a spacious and practical package.

THINGS WE LIKE

- ✓ Refined, torquey, frugal engine
- ✓ Premium safety in base model
- ✓ Outstanding quality
- ✓ Easy-to-use infotainment
- ✓ Spacious, versatile, comfortable cabin

THINGS YOU MIGHT NOT LIKE

- ✗ Could be a handful in the wet
- ✗ Traction control needs work
- ✗ Excessive torque steer
- ✗ Back-seat access requires effort
- ✗ Expensive servicing

SPEX (Sport fwd)

- Made in Japan
- 2.5-litre four-cylinder turbopetrol/six-speed automatic/front-wheel drive
- 170kW of power at 5000rpm/420Nm of torque at 2000rpm
- 0-100km/h in 7.4 seconds
- 6.9L/100km highway; 11.0L/100km city; regular unleaded; CO₂ emissions are 197g/km; fuel tank is 72 litres
- Max towing capacity 2000kg
- Warranty: Five years/unlimited kilometres
- Standard: Six airbags, stability control, 18-inch alloy wheels, tri-zone air, AEB, blind spot monitoring, rear cross traffic alert, rear camera and parking sensors, head up display, nine-inch touchscreen, navigation, voice control, digital radio, Apple CarPlay, Android Auto, hands-free power tailgate
- Redbook future values: 3yr: 52%; 5yr: 36%

STARS ★★★★★

- Safety ★★★★★
- Performance ★★★★★
- Handling ★★★★★
- Quality, reliability ★★★★★
- Comfort and refinement ★★★★★
- Value for money ★★★★★
- Overall** ★★★★★



compare with ...

Hyundai Santa Fe, Kia Sorento, Nissan Pathfinder, Skoda Kodiaq, Toyota Kluger, VW Tiguan Allspace



MCLAREN 720S FROM \$499,000



Mclaren's 720S coupe range opens at \$499,000. Luxury specification is \$525,700, as is the Performance variant. The Spider is \$556,000.

It's a relatively practical mid-engined supercar. The luggage compartment between its front wheels has a capacity of 110L and there's also space for stuff on the shelf behind its pair of seats. The slimmed-down A-pillars of its all-new carbon-fibre body structure mean the view ahead is good and its low-mounted engine clears the way for a reasonable look at what's behind.

Not that there's likely to be anything to see back there if you drive the 720S on a wide-open throttle.

According to McLaren, the twin-turbocharged 4.0-litre V8 in the 1.4-tonne 720S churns out 530kW (or 720hp, the number that gives the car its name). This is the same as the nearest equivalent in Ferrari's range, the new F8 Tributo, which runs a 3.9-litre twin-turbo V8. Like the McLaren, the Ferrari has a seven-speed

double-clutch transmission and drives only its rear wheels.

The McLaren, again according to its maker, is also fractionally quicker. It takes only 2.8 seconds to rocket from 0-100km/h, compared to the Italian machine's claimed 2.9 seconds.

The F8 Tributo is priced at \$484,888, which begs the obvious question.

Why would anyone choose to buy the 720S instead of the Ferrari? After all, Ferrari is a legendary name that inspires awe and envy, while McLaren is an outfit many will not know, with a road car heritage that goes back only to 1992 and the amazing F1 supercar.

Part of the answer is the fact that McLaren, as a brand, is more exclusive than Ferrari. Measured either by the annual production of its factory outside London or by Australian sales, it's only half the size of the legendary Italian brand from Maranello. McLarens are rarer and this can be a factor for status-conscious supercar buyers.

McLaren also has a motor sport pedigree, like Ferrari.

The company was founded by a great driver from New Zealand, Bruce McLaren, to design and construct race cars. McLaren was killed in a testing accident in 1970, but cars bearing his name were dominant in Formula One through much of the 1980s.

Maybe the all-round user-friendliness of the 720S is a factor. The ride comfort of the McLaren on normal roads is remarkable, with the suspension able to be adjusted to Comfort, Normal or Track modes. And even though it's easy to drive, the complex, wind-tunnel-honed exterior of the 720S doesn't lack visual drama.

But, most important of all, the McLaren also delivers on a racetrack, the only place it's prudent to use all this car has to give.

It weighs only 1283kg. The acceleration is awesome, in the true sense of this overused word. And it never seems to run out. Each tap of the paddle shifter to go up a gear brings a shove-in-the-back surge that loses little intensity as speed rises. The brakes are immensely and

reliably powerful, the electro-hydraulic steering delightfully direct and full of feel. Its cornering speeds almost defy belief. This is a car that makes speed seem easy and natural.

In short, the McLaren 720S is a very fine supercar. It may even be the best there is in its class — reason enough to consider it.

By John Carey

THINGS WE LIKE

- ✓ Exclusivity
- ✓ Twin-turbo V8's performance
- ✓ Racetrack-ready handling, brakes, steering
- ✓ Public road ride comfort
- ✓ Reasonably practical and easy to drive

THINGS YOU MIGHT NOT LIKE

- ✗ Really thrilling... and really expensive
- ✗ It's not a Ferrari

SPEX

- Made in England
- 4.0L twin-turbopetrol V8/seven-speed dual-clutch automatic/rear-wheel drive
- 530kW of power at 7250rpm/770Nm of torque at 5500rpm
- 0-100km/h in 2.9 seconds
- 7.9L/100km highway; 15.8L/100km city; 98 octane premium; CO2 emissions are 249g/km
- Warranty: Three years/unlimited kilometres
- Standard: Four airbags, stability control, 19-inch front/20-inch rear alloys, carbon ceramic brakes, digital instruments, LED headlights, Bluetooth, navigation, dual-zone air, leather upholstery
- Redbook future values: 3yr: 56%; 5yr: 40%

STARS ★★★★★

- Safety **Not rated**
- Performance ★★★★★
- Handling ★★★★★
- Quality and reliability ★★★★★
- Comfort and refinement ★★★★★
- Value for money ★★★★★
- Overall** ★★★★★



compare with ...

Audi R8, Ferrari F8 Tributo, Lamborghini Huracan

MERCEDES-BENZ A-CLASS FROM \$45,000



Mercedes-Benz's most affordable car is, in some ways, its most advanced. The new A-Class is the brand's first model with MBUX: Mercedes-Benz User Experience. What this means is that the small, front-drive hatch has a Siri-smart assistant to go with its iPhone-luscious screen display.

The range starts with the 100kW 1.3-litre four cylinder turbopetrol/seven-speed twin clutch/front-wheel drive A180, priced at \$45,000.

Moving up to 2.0-litre turbopower, the 165kW A250 is \$57,300 with all-wheel drive.

A Class sedans include the \$46,500 A180 and the all-wheel drive A250 at \$59,600.

The A250e 1.3-litre/plug in hybrid/eight-speed dual clutch/front-wheel drive hatch is \$63,500; the sedan is \$66,500.

The A35AMG hatch, with a 225kW 2.0-litre turbopetrol/seven-speed dual clutch/all-wheel drivetrain, is \$71,700. The sedan is \$72,700.

Once roused by saying "Hey Mercedes", MBUX can deduce that if the driver says something such as "I'm feeling cold", then they would like the cabin temperature increased by a couple of degrees. So that's what it does.

Mercedes-Benz's hope is that the Artificial Intelligence prowess of MBUX will foster a closer "emotional connection" between car and driver.

But those with no idea what that means may fail, understandably, to see the point.

The A-Class already appeals to younger, and presumably more tech-savvy, types than the average Mercedes-Benz buyer.

Though it sometimes fails to make sense of what's said, MBUX more often makes good on Mercedes-Benz's promise of being able to respond to natural language. Even before it utters a single synthetic syllable, though, the car's interior makes an impression.

The flat, widescreen display is the focus point, with two 10.25-inch screens behind a single slim sheet of glass. Elegant, hi-res graphics work with a logical, intuitive menu structure to make the A-Class very user-friendly. Slim and symmetrical, the bi-level dash is adorned with lustrous turbine-look face-level air vents and a minimalist array of physical buttons.

This all new body has grown in every direction while shedding a little weight.

The new shape's larger windows and slimmer pillars bring a welcome improvement in all-round vision.

Enlarged rear doors make access easier, but rear seat space is still tight.

The new A-Class is quieter and the ride is smoother. The electric-assist steering is remote, so the overall flavour isn't especially sporty.

The A180's 100kW/200Nm 1.3-litre turbopetrol four was co-developed with Renault, teamed with a well-behaved seven-speed double-clutch auto. It's a willing little gadget, smooth and strong at low and medium rpm, and exceptionally frugal.

Dynamics are agile and tidy, but nothing special. Torsion beam rear suspension is standard -- an astonishingly cheap engineering compromise on a Mercedes Benz.

If it's a premium German hatch you want, I'd suggest test driving the A180 back to back with a VW Golf 110TSi Highline. You may well decide, for good reason, that the Golf is a better car. You'll also save about \$10,000.

The A180's biggest problem is its price, which isn't matched by its ability, especially when compared with a bunch of very capable and much cheaper rivals. VW's Golf, Ford's Focus, the Mazda 3 and the new Toyota Corolla might lack the high tech vaudeville on the dash, but on the road they are just as good to drive, if not better.

By John Carey

THINGS WE LIKE

- ✓ Sweet, frugal 1.3 turbo works well with seven speed transmission
- ✓ New MBUX car tech
- ✓ High-tech instrument panel design
- ✓ Better driver vision
- ✓ More interior space

THINGS YOU MIGHT NOT LIKE

- ✗ Lack of steering feel
- ✗ Handles no better than a \$25,000 hatchback
- ✗ It's too pricey

SPEX (A180)

- Made in Germany, Hungary and Finland
- 1.3-litre four-cylinder turbopetrol/seven-speed twin-clutch/front-wheel drive
- 100kW of power at 5500rpm/200Nm of torque at 1460rpm
- 0-100km/h in 8.8 seconds (claimed)
- 4.8L/100km highway; 7.2L/100km city; 95 premium; CO2 emissions are 130gkm
- Warranty: Five years/unlimited km
- Standard: Nine airbags, stability control, automated emergency braking, 10.25-inch touchscreen, MBUX, Bluetooth, Apple CarPlay, Android Auto, navigation, LED headlights, 16-inch alloy wheels
- Redbook future values: 3yr: 55%; 5yr: 43%

STARS ★★★★★

- Safety
Not yet tested
- Performance
★★★★☆
- Handling
★★★★☆
- Quality and reliability
★★★★☆
- Comfort and refinement
★★★★☆
- Value for money
★★★☆☆
- Overall**
★★★★☆



compare with ...

BMW 1 Series, Ford Focus, Mazda3, Mini, Toyota Corolla, VW Golf



MERCEDES-AMG A45S FROM \$94,100



Mercedes-AMG's A45S hatchback, and its CLA45S sedan counterpart, are priced respectively at \$94,100 and \$112,000.

Big money for small cars. But their party trick is, well, pretty impressive. It's the world's most powerful series production four cylinder engine, a 2.0-litre turbopetrol that produces an astonishing 310kW of power and 500Nm of torque.

That's sufficient to fling the A45 from rest to 100km/h in just 3.9 seconds, en route to a top speed of 270km/h.

Its specific power output of 155kW per litre is comparable to or better than many supercar engines. Peak torque is at 5000-5250rpm, while peak power kicks in at 6750rpm, en route to a 7200rpm redline.

Power gets to the road via an eight-speed dual clutch automated manual gearbox and all-wheel drive, with torque distributed in any ratio required between the front and rear axles, and also

between the left and right rear wheels via a pair of electronically controlled multidisc clutches. Drive modes include Comfort, Sport+ and Race, plus launch control and a Drift mode for those who like that sort of thing...

The A Class body is massively reinforced to increase torsional and bending resistance. AMG Ride Control suspension has three modes, from comfortable (sort of) to sporty and the front brakes feature six-piston calipers, squeezing ventilated and perforated 360mm discs. Stability control includes rear wheel torque vectoring and steering intervention.

245/35 Michelin Pilot Sport 4 tyres are fitted to 19-inch alloy wheels.

As you may have gathered, this is a very serious performance car. Not many street machines, no matter how performance-focussed, give you something approximating the racecar

experience, but this one comes closer than most.

Its reflexes, responsiveness and overall precision mimic a track special; only the slightly clumsy intervention of its all-wheel drive electronics operating on all four wheels, near its dynamic limits, detract from the purity of the drive.

The 2.0-litre can be completely insane if you want it to be, or docile as a lamb on a light throttle tooling around town. Thankfully, AMG hasn't given it an explosive soundtrack. It's loud, but not shouty.

The eight-speed is a delight to use with with the paddles, and in Race model the shifts are lightning fast and pretty abrupt.

Darting into corners like a deranged ferret, the A45 stays dead flat, focussed on the apex and absolutely glued to the road thanks to all-wheel drive and prodigious grip from the Michelins. And although it

weighs in at 1635kg, it feels light – and very, very tight.

Heavy, numb steering is often the bane of all-wheel drive performance cars. Not here. It's super sharp, accurate, light, loaded with feel and free of torque steer. The brakes are great too.

Downsides? Only the usual for a pointy end performance car. The ride is OK, but sharp-edged bumps will crash the front suspension against its stops, as will speed humps unless you roll over them at walking pace. Tyre roar on coarse bitumen at highway speeds is terrible, to the extent that this would not be a pleasant car in which to do long distances.

Inside, it's an A Class with extra bling, including Burmester sound and lovely AMG sports seats, so have a look at the A Class test for the details.

When you're up this thing for the rent, they don't really matter anyway.

THINGS WE LIKE

- ✓ Thrilling performance
- ✓ And handling
- ✓ Yet you can drive it around town and it won't bite you
- ✓ Gets reasonable fuel economy too
- ✓ Beautiful interior

THINGS YOU MIGHT NOT LIKE

- ✗ Crashy ride on sharp bumps
- ✗ Hates speed humps
- ✗ Extremely loud tyre roar at highway speeds on coarse bitumen

SPEX

- Made in Germany
- 2.0-litre turbopetrol four cylinder/eight-speed dual clutch/all-wheel drive
- 310kW of power at 6750rpm/500Nm of torque from 5000-5250rpm
- 0-100km/h in 3.9 seconds (claimed)
- 7.3L/100km highway; 11.7L/100km city; 98 octane premium; CO2 emissions are 202gkm
- Warranty: Five years/unlimited km
- Standard: Stability control, nine airbags, adaptive cruise, autonomous emergency braking, cross traffic assist, 360 degree cameras, adaptive LED headlights, blind spot monitoring, lane change assist, Burmester audio, data logging, heated AMG sports seats, leather upholstery, sunroof, 19-inch alloys.
- Redbook future values: 3yr: 57%; 5yr: 44%

STARS ★★★★★

- Safety ★★★★★
- Performance: ★★★★★
- Handling ★★★★★
- Quality and reliability ★★★★★
- Comfort and refinement ★★★★★
- Value for money ★★★★★
- Overall** ★★★★★



compare with ...

Audi RS3, BMW M2, Porsche Cayman S

S MERCEDES-BENZ CLA CLASS FROM \$62,100



Mercedes' second generation CLA four door coupe, released in 2019, kicks off at \$62,100 for the 120kW 1.3-litre turbopetrol/seven-speed dual clutch automatic/front-wheel drive CLA200.

The CLA250, with a 165kW 2.0-litre turbo and all-wheel drive, is \$70,100. AMG variants open with the \$85,900 CLA35, tested, here, powered by a 225kW 2.0-litre turbo, while the ferocious CLA45S, with the world's most powerful series production four cylinder engine – a 310kW 2.0-litre turbopetrol – is \$112,000.

As with the previous model, the CLA sits on the A Class platform, however the second generation has a 30mm longer wheelbase, and the body has grown in width and length as well in the pursuit of greater interior space. Wider tracks at both ends improve stability at speed, while the adoption of multilink rear suspension also delivers significant handling benefits.

The sleek four door coupe shape is also one of the most aerodynamically efficient on the road, with a coefficient of drag of 0.23.

The CLA35 isn't a red hot pseudo track screamer like the CLA45S, but it's not exactly slow either. Its 2.0-litre is tuned for an exceptionally broad, punchy delivery that begins just off idle, from where it pulls strongly, with no discernible holes or dips, to around 6500rpm. The 0-100km/h trip takes 6.2 seconds.

It's very smooth for a four cylinder, and as revs rise it takes on a lovely mellow, deep four cylinder note that says "This is a car for grown-ups, not wannabes."

Drive modes include Comfort, Sport and Sport+. Mercedes has copied the Porsche drive mode selector dial on the lower right section of the steering wheel.

The seven-speed dual clutch transmission can be a little tardy, and then abrupt, when moving off from rest, but once underway shifts are fast, clean

and timely. Paddles are provided if you want to change gears yourself, which is the way to go in Sport and Sport+.

On the road, the 35 feels light, agile and responsive. It takes corners under power without the understeer common to many all-wheel drive performance cars, and the steering itself is light and sharp, though not all that communicative.

Body roll is minimal and the 245/35 19 Michelin tyres use the added grip of all-wheel drive to excellent effect. You really would need to have complete brain fade to get into serious trouble in this car.

The ride is pretty good considering the aggressive wheel/tyre combination. Comfort means what it says and even Sport isn't too brutal. Think of it as being on the sporty side of GT. Tyre noise is the main bugbear on long drives. It's loud enough at highway to compromise the voice control's operation – it simply can't work

out what you're saying because of the background noise.

The sports seat isn't particularly comfortable or supportive. The cushion sags a bit and the backrest bolstering could offer more lateral support when cornering.

Although the objective with the second generation was greater space, rear seat legroom is still very tight if there are tall occupants up front, in part because the front footwells are quite shallow. Headroom isn't exactly expansive, either.

The CLA35 is a sweet car, but for \$68,990 you can buy the 225kW BMW M135i, while for \$57,990 – nearly \$30,000 less than the CLA -- you can get into the 213kW Golf R. Both are at least as capable as the Mercedes on the road.

THINGS WE LIKE

- ✓ Idle to redline grunt from the 2.0-litre
- ✓ Agile, responsive handling
- ✓ Idiot-proof levels of grip
- ✓ Beautiful cabin
- ✓ Surprisingly comfortable ride

THINGS YOU MIGHT NOT LIKE

- ✗ Overpriced
- ✗ Excessive tyre roar at highway speeds
- ✗ Tight rear seat legroom and headroom
- ✗ Unsupportive driver's seat
- ✗ Seven-speed can hesitate when moving off from rest

SPEX (CLA35AMG)

- Made in Hungary
- 2.0-litre four cylinder turbopetrol/seven-speed dual clutch automatic/all-wheel drive
- 225kW of power at 5800rpm/400Nm of torque from 3000-4000rpm
- 0-100km/h in 6.2 seconds (claimed)
- 6.3L/100km highway; 9.3L/100km city; 98 octane premium; CO2 emissions are 169gkm
- Warranty: Five years/unlimited km
- Standard: Nine airbags, stability control, AEB, blind spot monitoring, rear cross traffic alert, adaptive cruise, lane keep assist, MBUX infotainment with navigation, voice control, digital radio, Apple CarPlay, Android Auto, wireless phone charging, digital instruments, semi automatic parking, 360 degree cameras, leather upholstery, adaptive dampers, 19-inch alloys.
- Redbook future values: 3yr: 59%; 5yr: 49%

STARS ★★★★★

- Safety ★★★★★
- Performance ★★★★★
- Handling ★★★★★
- Quality and reliability ★★★★★
- Comfort and refinement ★★★★★
- Value for money ★★★★★
- Overall** ★★★★★



compare with ...

Audi S3, BMW M135i, Honda Civic Type-R, VW Golf R

MERCEDES-BENZ GLA FROM \$55,300



As with most SUVs, Mercedes' GLA is based on a car platform, in this case the A Class, with which it also shares drivetrains and many other components as well.

This model is significantly larger than its predecessor, with a much taller body and a higher seating position for the driver.

The base GLA 200, priced at \$55,300, runs a 120kW 1.3-litre turbopetrol four, matched with a seven-speed dual clutch transmission and front-wheel drive.

Standard equipment includes fake leather upholstery, a power tailgate, all-digital instruments and infotainment, voice control, navigation, wireless phone charging, digital radio, automatic parking and 19-inch alloys.

The GLA250 4Matic, at \$66,900, has a 165kW 2.0-litre turbopetrol, an eight-speed DCT and all-wheel drive. It adds lowered suspension, heated front seats and a sunroof.

AMG-equipped variants include the GLA35, tested here, priced at \$83,700, with a 225kW 2.0-litre turbo, and the \$108,100 GLA45, with the power cranked up to 310kW. Both run the eight speed transmission and all-wheel drive.

The AMGs include 20-inch alloys, adaptive sports suspension, leather-wrapped sports seats and an AMG steering wheel; the AMG45 adds AMG brakes, exhaust, all-wheel drive and steering, plus Burmester sound and the complete Driving Assistance safety package.

Notably, Mercedes does not include the full suite of safety tech in lesser GLA models, which miss out on adaptive cruise, rear cross traffic alert and full autonomous emergency braking functionality, all included on the GLA45.

You now get reasonable rear seat legroom, but the boot is

quite small and in the AMG models there's no spare, just a useless "repair kit."

The GLA35 might give away 85kW to the berserk GLA45, but it's more than enough engine to do the job, with that lovely effortless, elastic delivery that characterises an A-grade turbopetrol four. It's strong and tractable when driven on a light throttle; pop the question and it responds enthusiastically, pulling hard from 4000rpm to 6500rpm, especially in Sport and Sport + drive modes.

The eight-speed is similar to VW's DSG in that it can delay momentarily in selecting a gear and moving off from rest, exacerbated by the automatic stop/start system. Once on the move, shifts are smooth, fast and timely, however in the Sports modes it's not quite aggressive enough in its rev limits or shift points.

This applies when you use the paddles in manual mode as well.

Steering is surprisingly light and very precise. The wheel has more controls than an F1 racer, and you can operate the entire infotainment system using swipe and press buttons.

Adaptive suspension allows to you adjust the ride/handling compromise, but the GLA35 isn't particularly convincing in either respect. The ride on rough suburban streets can be harsh and crashy, even in Comfort mode, while the GLA's elevated SUV stance and extra weight make it feel quite top heavy and a touch unwieldy at speed in tight corners, where it is nowhere near as planted, well-balanced or agile as the lower, lighter A35 hatch. The elevated SUV seating position doesn't feel right in a machine with sporting pretensions, either.

THINGS WE LIKE

- ✓ Beautiful engine with go everywhere
- ✓ Mercedes interiors are a lovely mix of retro and modern
- ✓ Comfortable seats
- ✓ Reasonable fuel economy for a performance SUV
- ✓ Light, precise steering

THINGS YOU MIGHT NOT LIKE

- ✗ Only the GLA45 gets full safety spec
- ✗ Feels top heavy and unbalanced at speed in tight corners
- ✗ Ride can be harsh
- ✗ Eight-speed needs more aggressive programming in Sport modes
- ✗ No spare

SPEX (GLA35 AMG)

- Made in Germany
- 2.0-litre four cylinder turbo petrol/ eight-speed DCT/all-wheel drive
- 225kW of power at 5800rpm/400Nm of torque from 3000-4000rpm
- 0-100km/h in 5.2 seconds (claimed)
- 6.8L/100km highway; 10L/100km city; 98 octane premium; CO2 emissions are 179gkm
- Warranty: Five years/unlimited km
- Standard: Nine airbags, stability control, partial AEB, blind spot monitoring, lane keep assist, speed sign recognition, power tailgate, leather upholstery, sports front seats, all-digital instruments and infotainment, voice control, navigation, wireless phone charging, digital radio, automatic parking, adaptive sports suspension and 20-inch alloys.
- Redbook future values: 3yr: 58%; 5yr: 46%

STARS ★★★★★

- Safety
Not yet tested
- Performance
★★★★★
- Handling
★★★★★
- Quality and reliability
★★★★★
- Comfort and refinement
★★★★★
- Value for money
★★★★★
- Overall**
★★★★★



compare with ...

Audi Q3, BMW X1/X2, Mini Countryman, Range Rover Evoque, Volvo XC40, VW T-Cross

MERCEDES-BENZ GLB FROM \$60,200



Mercedes' GLB sits in one of those in-between slots on the SUV size scale. It's a mid-size wagon, but also one of the smaller seven seaters on the market. It goes up against Land Rover's Discovery Sport, Mazda's CX8, VW's Tiguan Allspace and the Skoda Kodiaq.

In all of these vehicles, the extra two seats in the back are generally tight for access and overall space. They're designed for occasional rather than daily use. If you want seven full size seats to transport a tribe on a regular basis, you need a bigger wagon than any of these.

GLB prices kick off at \$60,200 for the GLB200, with a 120kW/250Nm 1.3-litre turbopetrol four driving the front wheels via a seven-speed twin clutch automatic.

The GLB250 4Matic, tested here, runs a 165kW/350Nm 2.0-litre turbopetrol/eight-speed dual clutch auto and all-wheel drive. It's priced at \$74,100.

The Mercedes-AMG GLB35 4 Matic, at \$89,300, produces 225kW/400Nm from its 2.0-litre engine.

Performance from the GLB250's 2.0-litre is reasonable, but at 1.76 tonnes the Mercedes is also pretty heavy, so acceleration is gradual rather than rapid, even in Sport mode. Mercedes claims 0-100km/h in 6.9 seconds. That would be downhill, with a tailwind.

On the highway it can return 6.5-7.0L/100km; around town, you can double that, though 9-10L/100km is achievable, in part thanks to a very efficient, unobtrusive auto stop/start and the transmission's desire to go for the high gears as soon as possible.

Adjustable suspension dampers can be set to Comfort, which gives you a luxurious ride but sloppy body control in corners, or Sport, which firms things up. It's still reasonably comfortable and dynamics are much improved, though the Mercedes always feels heavy and

rather ponderous. The VW, Skoda and Land Rover are just as, if not more, capable, taut and secure at speed on a winding road.

Up front, it's an all-digital affair with touchscreen infotainment and configurable instruments.

There are no less than four interface options to control things such as audio and navigation, which is needless, distracting complexity. Voice control was hit and miss on the test car. There's plenty of storage and connectivity, including two USB type C connectors for every row of seats and wireless phone charging.

The middle row, split 60/40, has adjustable legroom allowing tall adults to travel comfortably. Kids will love it too, because the elevated bench and low window sills afford good vision.

As mentioned previously, the back seats, which fold up from the floor, are cramped for legroom – even with row two pushed forward – and access/exit

is very restricted. Young kids can crawl in and out, but it's almost impossible for an adult.

Boot space is generous in five seater mode and almost non-existent with all seats in use.

The GLB250 includes heated front seats (upholstered in fake cow) and a full length sunroof. Less impressive is the absence of surround camera coverage, adaptive cruise and autonomous emergency braking from high speed. At the price, they should be standard, not optional.

Mercedes' GLB250 is competent enough, but that's all. You're paying well over the odds for the Mercedes badge. Skoda's Kodiaq RS, from \$65,990 and the VW Tiguan Allspace 162TSi, from \$53,190, are arguably better to drive, comparably-equipped and sized SUVs that offer much better value for money.

THINGS WE LIKE

- ✓ Space efficient cabin layout
- ✓ Refined, frugal drivetrain
- ✓ Comfortable ride
- ✓ High tech digital dash
- ✓ Connectivity for every seat

THINGS YOU MIGHT NOT LIKE

- ✗ Overpriced compared with rivals
- ✗ Heavy and ponderous in corners
- ✗ Very tight back seat access
- ✗ Underdone for safety tech at the price
- ✗ Voice control works. Only sometimes

SPEX

- Made in Mexico
- 2.0-litre four cylinder turbopetrol/eight-speed dual clutch auto/all-wheel drive
- 165kW of power from 5500-6100rpm/350Nm of torque from 1800-4000rpm
- 0-100km/h in 6.9 seconds (claimed)
- 6.5L/100km highway; 9.7L/100km city; 95 octane premium; CO2 emissions are 173g/km; fuel tank is 60L
- Max towing weight: 2000kg
- Warranty: Five years/unlimited km
- Standard: Nine airbags, stability control, partial AEB, lane keep assist, blind spot monitoring, speed sign recognition, semi-automatic parking, adaptive high beam, heated front seats, sunroof, navigation, MBUX infotainment, digital radio, wireless phone charging, runflat tyres
- Redbook future values: 3yr: 55%; 5yr: 43%

STARS ★★★★★

- Safety ★★★★★ ANCAP
- Performance ★★★★★
- Handling ★★★★★
- Quality and reliability ★★★★★
- Comfort and refinement ★★★★★
- Value for money ★★★★★
- Overall ★★★★★



compare with ...

Land Rover Discovery Sport, Mazda CX8, Skoda Kodiaq, VW Tiguan Allspace



MERCEDES C-CLASS FROM \$66,900



The Mercedes W205 C Class range opens with the \$66,900 C200 sedan, with a 150kW/300Nm, 2.0-litre turbopetrol/nine-speed automatic. The 190kW/370Nm 2.0-litre turbopetrol C300 is \$75,300 and the C300e hybrid is \$85,100.

In AMG territory, the 287kW/520Nm 3.0-litre twin turbo V6 C43 is \$113,700 and the big banger C63S, with a 375kW/700Nm 4.0-litre twin turbo V8, is \$168,300.

Each drivetrain is also available in the Estate wagon, starting at \$69,500 for the C200 and topping out at \$171,000 for the C63S.

Coupes start at \$71,900 for the C200 and top out at \$173,500 for the C63S. Cabriolets start at \$94,100 for the C200 and top out at \$194,000 for the C63S.

In late 2019 Mercedes revised the C Class's drivetrain lineup. It dropped the mild hybrid 135kW/280Nm 1.5-litre four cylinder turbopetrol from the base C200 and replaced it with a conventional 2.0-litre

turbopetrol, producing 150kW and 300Nm.

The C200 now reaches 100km/h in a claimed 7.1 seconds, 0.6 seconds quicker than the previous model. It also uses more fuel.

At the same time, Mercedes launched the C300e plug in hybrid. This uses a 2.0-litre turbopetrol four, plus a 13.5kWh lithium ion battery.

Combined system outputs are 235kW/700Nm, and Mercedes claims that the C300e can run on electricity alone for up to 52 km. It takes around seven hours to recharge the battery from a 10 amp household power point.

The C300e is pretty quick, with a claimed 0-100km/h time of just 5.4 seconds, and with the drivetrain operating in petrol/electric mode Mercedes claims an average fuel consumption figure of just 2.1L/100km.

Pointy end technology extends to the cabin, where

an all-digital dash includes configurable instruments and a big infotainment screen, with gesture control via touchpads on the steering wheel and centre console, plus a manual controller.

Mercedes fake cow upholstery actually feels more luxe and leathery than the real hide used in some other brands.

It's worth ticking the \$1077 adaptive suspension option on a Benz because it delivers a more compliant ride and assured handling than the standard setup, especially with the W205's runflat tyres. On the C200, it's money well spent.

You sit deep in the C Class, with vast seat travel, but the driver's seat itself, though firm and comfortable, offers little upper body support when cornering.

Rear-seat legroom, maximised by deeply concaved front seat backs, allows tall passengers in the W205 to enjoy more space than in previous models.

Autonomous emergency braking operates up to 105km/h. Blind spot monitoring is also standard; lane keeping and adaptive cruise are optional.

The 2.0-litre gets the C200 off the line with impressive responsiveness and low-speed tractability is excellent, so it works well around town and cruises easily on the open road, though you'll rarely see ninth gear.

If you take the adaptive suspension option, you also get one of the best-handling cars on the road.

The rear-wheel-drive C Class is traditional Benz at its best: beautifully balanced, as solid and tight as they come, and a wonderfully engaging drive, with uncorrupted, intuitive steering, powerful, progressive brakes and premium, staggered-size Continental tyres.

A new C Class, with a larger body, 1.5-litre mild hybrid and plug-in hybrid drivetrains (the latter with a claimed electric-only range of up to 100km) is due by the end of 2021.

THINGS WE LIKE

- ✓ Superb handling and a comfortable ride with adjustable suspension option
- ✓ Stylish, high-tech cabin
- ✓ As safe as they come
- ✓ Great fuel efficiency on the highway
- ✓ Improved rear-seat legroom and comfort

THINGS YOU MIGHT NOT LIKE

- ✗ Ride is a bit harsh on standard suspension

SPEX (C200)

- Made in South Africa
- 2.0-litre four-cylinder turbopetrol/nine-speed automatic/rear-wheel drive
- 150kW of power from 5800rpm/300Nm of torque
- 0-100km/h in 7.1 seconds (claimed)
- 5.5L/100km highway; 9.6L/100km city; 95 octane premium; CO² emissions are 159g/km
- Warranty: Five years/unlimited km
- Standard: Nine airbags, stability control, AEB, blind spot monitoring, automatic parking, dual-zone air, LED headlights, 18-inch alloy wheels, Bluetooth, navigation, digital radio, Apple CarPlay, Android Auto
- Redbook future values: 3yr: 53%; 5yr: 34%

STARS ★★★★★

- Safety ★★★★★
- Performance ★★★★★
- Handling ★★★★★
- Quality and reliability ★★★★★
- Comfort and refinement ★★★★★
- Value for money ★★★★★
- Overall** ★★★★★



compare with ...

Alfa Romeo Giulia, Audi A4, BMW 3 Series, Jaguar XE, Lexus IS

MERCEDES GLC FROM \$70,300



Introduced in 2015, Mercedes' top selling SUV, the GLC, received an overhaul in 2020.

A 2.0-litre turbopetrol four powers the base GLC200 wagon (tested here), priced at \$70,300 plus on road costs. It produces a respectable 145kW of power and 320Nm of torque, delivered via a nine-speed automatic and rear-wheel drive.

While the update's body structure and chassis layout are basically unchanged, adaptive suspension options, including adjustable dampers (\$1900) and air springs (\$3800) are now available, though not fitted to our test car. A renovated cabin includes digital instruments, the latest MBUX infotainment and "Hey Mercedes" voice control smarts.

Must have driver assist safety tech is standard; more sophisticated, semi autonomous functionality, including Distronic adaptive cruise, active steering assist and lane changing, costs \$2600 in the Driver Assistance Package.

Also standard on GLC200 are fake leather upholstery, 19-inch alloy wheels, LED headlights,

a power operated tailgate, dual zone air, digital radio, navigation, Apple CarPlay/Android Auto and Mercedes me connect services, tied to a mobile app.

The GLC300, with a 190kW/370Nm 2.0-litre and all wheel drive, costs \$81,500 (wagon) and \$91,100 (coupe). A GLC300 plug in hybrid wagon is \$90,200.

AMG wagon/coupe variants include the 287kW/520Nm 3.0-litre twin turbo V6 GLC43, at \$115,000/\$121,800, plus the 375kW/700Nm 4.0-litre twin turbo V8 GLC63, at \$168,000/\$174,000.

Mercedes' current obsession with smartphone-style touch interfacing means that you have three sets of touch controls – on the main screen, the steering wheel, and a pad on the centre console. It's pointless complexity and duplication.

GLC hits the sweet spot for size, especially if you have one or two young kids. It's small enough to work well in city traffic, yet accommodating of most parents' day to day requirements. Comfortable, supportive seating

(with an extendable cushion for the driver), plenty of storage, multiple device connectivity options, generous legroom for all and a versatile split fold rear seat/load area arrangement make it an exceptionally practical, easy to live with family freighter.

Standard, non-adjustable "Comfort" suspension on GLC200 is underdamped, so the ride is quite unsettled and, on a rough road, less absorbent than a Benz should be, in part also due to runflat tyres.

Four push button drive modes – Eco, Comfort, Sport and Sport+ – are fitted. There's a vast difference in responsiveness and performance between the first two, which are designed primarily to achieve maximum fuel efficiency, and the Sport settings.

Eco and Comfort are extremely sluggish; Sport and Sport+ are hardly rocket-fuelled either, but you do get a more immediate, vigorous response from the accelerator.

That said, the nine-speed automatic can be slow, indecisive and at times obtrusive in its shifts.

Dynamics are similarly disappointing. Steering is uncommunicative, with Sport mode adding only heft.

Relatively soft suspension can trip and flinch from big hits at the front, where damping control seems compromised by the excessive unsprung weight of the big wheel/tyre combination. A surprising degree of body roll is also evident in corners.

GLC200's size/equipment package is fine, but as a drive it is disappointing.

Despite the Benz badge, the reality is you can buy a better SUV for a lot less money elsewhere.

Try Alfa Romeo's Stelvio, the Ford Escape, Subaru Forester, Skoda Kodiaq and VW Tiguan before you sign up.

THINGS WE LIKE

- ✓ Goldilocks size if you have a couple of young kids
- ✓ Spacious, comfortable, versatile interior
- ✓ Lots of techno wow on the dash
- ✓ Comfortable seating
- ✓ It's a Merc, so A grade safety is a given
- ✓ Strong resale values

THINGS YOU MIGHT NOT LIKE

- ✗ Dull performance
- ✗ Higher than average fuel consumption, on 98 octane premium
- ✗ Loose handling
- ✗ Underdone suspension
- ✗ Choppy ride on rough roads

SPEX

- Made in Germany
- 2.0-litre four cylinder turbopetrol/nine-speed automatic/rear-wheel drive
- 145kW of power from 5500rpm-6100rpm/320Nm of torque from 1650-4000rpm
- 0-100km/h in 7.8 seconds (claimed)
- 6.3L/100km highway; 10.2L/100km city; 98 octane premium; CO2 emissions are 176g/km; fuel tank is 66 litres
- Warranty: Five years/unlimited km
- Standard: Nine airbags, stability control, AEB, blind spot monitoring, rear cross traffic alert, LED headlights, fake leather upholstery, voice control, digital instruments, navigation, Apple CarPlay, Android Auto, digital radio, power operated tailgate
- Redbook future values: 3yr: 65%; 5yr: 52%

STARS ★★☆☆☆

- Safety **Not yet tested**
- Performance ★★☆☆☆
- Handling ★★☆☆☆
- Quality and reliability ★★☆☆☆
- Comfort and refinement ★★☆☆☆
- Value for money ★★☆☆☆
- Overall** ★★☆☆☆



compare with ...

Alfa Stelvio, Audi Q5, BMW X3, Ford Escape, Land Rover Discovery Sport, Subaru Forester, Volvo XC60, VW Tiguan Allspace



MERCEDES E-CLASS FROM \$98,700



The W213 Mercedes E-Class is an exceptionally sophisticated, complicated piece of rolling digital technology. Great. But as a car, is it any good?

We're in the base-model 145kW 2.0-litre turbopetrol E200, priced at \$98,700.

The E300, with a 190kW 2.0 turbopetrol, is \$117,900.

The 155kW E300e plug-in hybrid, which can run for up to 52km on battery power, is \$123,500, while the 220kW 2.0-litre turbopetrol/mild hybrid E350 is \$127,100.

The 320kW 3.0-litre twin turbo, all-wheel drive AMG E53 4Matic is \$162,300.

The 450kW 4.0-litre twin turbo V8 AMG E 63 S 4Matic is \$253,900.

Coupe variants start at \$103,700 for the E200 and cabriolets start at \$130,900 for the E300.

The E Class cabin is dominated by the beautiful widescreen dash, two upright, hi-res LCD screens bonded together to create a customisable instrument and infotainment display that's dazzling in its clarity and sophistication.

Mercedes added its MBUX voice control infotainment system to the range in a late

2020 update, with swipe and tap controls on the screen itself, on a touchpad between the seats and on the steering wheel.

A luxurious, heavily bolstered driver's seat has ample adjustment for any physique.

The back seat is similarly spacious and shaped for two.

Mercedes semi-autonomous technology debuted in the W213 E-Class on its launch in 2018.

The car will automatically slow down, speed up, or come to a stop altogether to maintain a safe separation between you and the vehicles in front.

If you want to change lanes, you hold the indicator wand for a couple of seconds and if the car decides it's safe, it will steer itself into the lane.

The E-Class will also self-steer for a period of up to one minute, at which point an alarm sounds and you have to grasp the wheel to reactivate the system.

If you don't, the car assumes you're unconscious and will then automatically coast to a stop in its lane and switch on the hazard lights.

The system uses cameras and radar to guide the car, so it needs clear road shoulder and lane markings as reference points.

It works fine on major roads, but it won't negotiate roundabouts, can steer only through long, gentle curves and is uncertain in the dark.

Mercedes' long-stroke 2.0-litre turbopetrol in the E200 is refined, quiet and has plenty of accessible, flexible grunt on tap.

The nine-speed works in Germany, but ninth gear isn't engaged until 120km/h-plus — so it's completely irrelevant here.

Expect 11–13L/100km in town and 6–7L/100km on the highway.

This E-Class is lighter and more agile than its predecessors, but it can also become nervous and uncertain in choppy corners because the suspension lacks control.

An E-Class used to glide over rough Australian country roads with regal grace. This one doesn't.

The ride is supple on smooth surfaces but becomes fussy and harsh when driving on

ragged bitumen, so the adaptive suspension option on the base E200 priced at \$2200, is worth taking, as it transforms both ride and handling.

In standard trim, though, BMW's 5 Series is a better car.

THINGS WE LIKE

- ✓ Widescreen dash makes every other car's look obsolete
- ✓ If it's not the safest car in the world I'd like to know what is
- ✓ Spacious cabin finished in high-quality materials
- ✓ Comfortable seats
- ✓ Fuel-efficient 2.0-litre turbopetrol

THINGS YOU MIGHT NOT LIKE

- ✗ Suspension lacks control and the ride deteriorates on rough country roads
- ✗ Semi-autonomous driving tech is a work in progress
- ✗ Unnecessary duplication of infotainment controls
- ✗ No spare
- ✗ Plastic upholstery

SPEX (E200)

- Made in Germany
- 2.0-litre four-cylinder turbopetrol/nine-speed automatic/rear-wheel drive
- 145kW of power at 5500rpm/320Nm of torque from 1200–4000rpm
- 0–100km/h in 7.5 seconds (claimed)
- 5.7L/100km highway; 9.6L/100km city; 95 octane premium; CO₂ emissions are 161g/km
- Warranty: Five years/unlimited kilometres
- Standard: Nine airbags, stability control, Driving Assistance Plus, Active Brake Assist, Evasive Steering Assist, Pre-Safe, 360 degree cameras, automatic parking, Apple and Android smartphone connectivity, digital radio, voice control, 19-inch alloy wheels, dual-zone air, Artico vinyl upholstery
- Redbook future values: 3yr: 49%; 5yr: 35%

STARS ★★★★★

- Safety **Not yet tested**
- Performance ★★★★★
- Handling ★★★★★
- Quality and reliability ★★★★★
- Comfort and refinement ★★★★★
- Value for money ★★★★★
- Overall** ★★★★★



compare with ...

Audi A6, BMW 5 Series, Jaguar XF

MERCEDES-BENZ EQC FROM \$141,400



The shape of things to come from Mercedes-Benz has a familiar form. The German car maker's first pure EV, the EQC 400 is, surprise, surprise, a family sized SUV, priced at \$141,400.

While SUVs are hugely popular, there are other reasons car makers favour an SUV-like shape for upmarket EVs. Their tall bodies accommodate a massive slab of underfloor batteries, while leaving space for a roomy passenger compartment above, and without looking weird.

The EQC has a lithium-ion battery pack weighing 650kg. Protected by a strong impact-absorbing perimeter, it's almost as wide as the vehicle and takes up most of the underfloor space between the front and rear axles. Each axle is driven by a 150kW electric motor via a fixed-ratio gear, making the EQC all-wheel-drive.

All of the EQC's present and future competitors - the already-

here Jaguar I-Pace and Tesla Model X, and the about to arrive Audi e-tron quattro and BMW iX3 - have a similar layout.

Inside, EQC has ample space for five and around 500 litres of cargo. Mercedes-Benz has developed a pleasingly distinctive style for the EQC interior. It's a clean and technical look that adopts different forms and finishes for features like face-level air vents.

EQC is outstanding to drive in at least two respects. Ride comfort is excellent, with a plush, bump-blotting feel to rival Mercedes-Benz's big S-Class limousine. Refinement is superb, with barely a sound to be heard from the vehicle's pair of electric motors. Tyre and wind noise levels are low. EQC's single-speed transmission never needs

to change gear, so acceleration is stunningly smooth.

While the EQC's performance won't surprise a Tesla owner, the surge of instant thrust is sure to impress an EV first-timer. Mercedes-Benz claims a sharp 0-100km/h time of 5.1 seconds, and especially from low speeds it feels very quick.

Based on rates of energy consumption observed at the international press launch of the EQC in Norway, the Mercedes-Benz will deliver a real-world driving range of around 350km in mild to warm weather.

Mercedes claims a range of up to 434km, but as with other EV this is difficult to achieve in the real world, certainly on the open road, where you can expect to cover about 25 percent less than this claimed distance.

Charging the EQC's battery from 10 to 100 percent will take 11 hours using Mercedes-Benz's optional 7.4kW home Wallbox or a public AC charger. Fast DC charging can take the battery from 10-80 percent in around 40 minutes.

While the maximum DC charge rate is 110kW, the actual rate is controlled by software that protects the battery, which comes with an eight-year or 160,000km warranty.

In Norway, the EQC's journey planning and driving range prediction software worked very well. You can count on driving as far as the vehicle says it can go, and finding DC fast chargers where the navigation system says they are.

It's much different in Australia, where range anxiety is still a live issue because fast DC charging stations remain thin on the ground, and EVs are for only the most adventurous, eco-conscious, early adopters.

By John Carey

THINGS WE LIKE

- ✓ So quiet, so quick
- ✓ Luxuriously comfortable ride
- ✓ It's a Mercedes, so safety is a given
- ✓ Clever EV-specific software
- ✓ Ample interior space and beautiful design

THINGS YOU MIGHT NOT LIKE

- ✗ Home charging wallbox costs extra
- ✗ Lack of fast DC charging infrastructure in Australia
- ✗ Range anxiety

SPEX

- Made in Germany
- Dual asynchronous electric motors/80kWh lithium ion battery/single speed transmission/all-wheel drive
- 300kW of power; 760Nm of torque
- 0-100km/h in 5.1 seconds (claimed)
- Power consumption: 20.8-19.7kWh/100km
- Range: 445/471km
- Warranty: Five years/unlimited km
- Standard: Seven airbags, stability control, autonomous emergency braking, adaptive cruise, blind spot monitoring, lane keeping, digital instruments, voice control, navigation, Apple CarPlay, Android Auto, dual zone air, power adjustable, heated front seats, leather upholstery, power tailgate, 21-inch alloys.
- Redbook future values: 3yr: 49%; 5yr: 36%



STARS ★★★★★

- Safety ★★★★★
- Performance ★★★★★
- Handling ★★★★★
- Quality and reliability ★★★★★
- Comfort and refinement ★★★★★
- Value for money ★★★★★
- Overall** ★★★★★

compare with ...

Jaguar i-Pace, Tesla Model X



MERCEDES-BENZ GLE FROM \$107,100



Mercedes-Benz fourth generation GLE range opens with the 300d at \$107,100. It's powered by a 2.0-litre turbo diesel four-cylinder, with a healthy 180kW of power and 500Nm of torque. The GLE 450 at \$119,100 is powered by a 3.0-litre turbopetrol in-line six-cylinder paired to a mild hybrid system (270kW/500Nm), and the GLE 400d at \$126,200 is powered by a 243kW/700Nm 3.0-litre turbo diesel in-line six-cylinder. The AMG GLE 53 wagon features the 3.0-litre in line twin turbopetrol, tweaked for 320kW/520Nm and fed by an electric compressor. It costs \$159,700. Finally, the ballistic AMG GLE 63 S, with a 450kW/850Nm twin turbopetrol 4.0-litre V8, is \$220,600.

Coupe includes GLE450 (\$138,700), GLE53 AMG (\$166,500) and GLE63 AMG S, at \$225,500.

Standard fare includes dual zone air-conditioning with vents to the second-row seats, sensor key with push-button start, two 12.3-inch digital display screens for

instruments and infotainment that cover more than half the width of the dash, a power operated tailgate, electrically operated front seats, ambient cabin lighting with 64 colours, and a large high-resolution heads-up display reflected into the windscreen in the driver's line of sight.

Five-seaters have five fast-charging USB-C ports (the standard USB port is redundant in this model), seven-seaters (which add \$3900) have two more for the third row.

Standard safety includes multi beam LED headlights, autonomous emergency braking, speed sign recognition, a 360-degree camera with a high resolution display, front and rear parking sensors, blind zone warning, rear cross traffic alert and lane-change assist. All tyres except the 22-inch options are runflats, so there's no spare wheel or tyre.

Handy touches include massive pockets for each of the four doors, a generous centre console and twin sun visors to help block side glare in the late afternoon sun.

Air vents and temperature control to the optional third row of seats are not available. However, unlike the BMW X7, curtain airbag coverage does extend all the way to the back row.

We tested the GLE 300d. Under the bonnet is a relatively small 2.0-litre four-cylinder turbo diesel in a class dominated by 3.0-litre six-cylinders.

However, thanks to a new nine-speed auto, it's still relatively brisk (for a family SUV) and yet promises better fuel consumption.

The claimed average consumption is 6.9L/100km, however this number is optimistic.

Driven mainly on freeways and rural roads, you may get close to this number. Driven mainly in the suburbs and stuck in traffic, expect

close to double this – on par with other cars of this type and size.

The GLE has a commanding view of the road ahead but the engine is noisier than some rivals, such as the VW Touareg.

That said, it quiets down once you're on the move and using fewer revs.

We tested an example equipped with the optional AMG appearance pack with 21-inch low profile tyres. The suspension was generally comfortable, though it did fidget over expansion joints in the road.

Steering was light and easy; some drivers may prefer something with more feel.

Overall, despite having a small engine in a big car, the Mercedes GLE 300d is a pleasant environment in which to spend your daily commute and weekends away.

Just run a close eye over the options list before you get too excited by the initial price.

By Joshua Dowling

THINGS WE LIKE

- ✓ Stunning interior design
- ✓ Strong, economical drivetrains
- ✓ Widescreen digital dash displays
- ✓ Roomy, practical and comfortable interior
- ✓ Option of third-row seats.

THINGS YOU MIGHT NOT LIKE

- ✗ Lots of expensive options
- ✗ Big wheels compromise ride comfort
- ✗ A bit pricey compared with rivals

SPEX (GLE300d)

- Made in the USA
- 2.0-litre four cylinder turbodiesel/nine speed automatic/all-wheel drive
- 180kW of power at 4200rpm/500Nm of torque from 1600-2400rpm
- 0-100km/h in 7.2 seconds (claimed)
- 6.9L/100km combined average. CO2 emissions are 169g/km. Fuel tank is 65 litres
- Maximum towing weight: 2700kg
- Warranty: Five years/unlimited km
- Standard: Nine airbags, stability control, AEB, blind spot monitoring, lane keeping, adaptive cruise control, rear cross traffic alert, 360 degree camera, head up display, adaptive LED headlights, navigation, digital radio, Apple CarPlay, Android Auto, digital instruments, voice control, fake leather upholstery, power tailgate, 20-inch alloys
- Redbook future values: 3yr: 54%; 5yr: 43%

STARS ★★★★★

- Safety ★★★★★
- Performance ★★★★★
- Handling ★★★★★
- Quality and reliability ★★★★★
- Comfort and refinement ★★★★★
- Value for money ★★★★★
- Overall ★★★★★



compare with ...

Audi Q7, BMW X7, Land Rover Discovery, Volkswagen Touareg

MERCEDES-BENZ GLS FROM \$148,900



With its third generation GLS, Mercedes has turned luxury up a notch – and the vehicle has grown in every dimension to behemoth proportions. It now has one of the largest cabins and cargo holds in the class.

Prices start at \$148,900 for the 270kW/500Nm 3.0-litre straight six turbopetrol GLS 450. The 243kW/700Nm 3.0-litre straight six turbodiesel GLS 400d, tested here, is \$155,800.

The 450kW 4.0-litre twin-turbo V8/mild hybrid GLS63AMG is \$255,700, while the Maybach GLS600 luxu bomber, tuned for 410kW, is \$358,300.

The first thing you notice when you open the door is the massive widescreen display that stretches across more than half the dash.

Two 12.3-inch high-resolution screens side-by-side make it feel like you're in a cockpit not a car.

The model we tested was equipped with a full panorama sunroof, LED mood lighting (with a choice 64 colours) in the doors, dash and centre console, and five-zone air-conditioning.

Proving it is moving with the times, Mercedes has embraced the smaller yet faster USB-C charge ports throughout the vehicle. In fact there are more charging ports than there are seats.

All three rows of seats have ample space for heads, shoulders, knees and toes.

The third row of seats can be independently raised or stowed at the press of a button.

On the move, the Mercedes GLS does a decent job of disguising its massive proportions (it's more than two metres wide, not including side mirrors) and hefty 2.5-tonne weight.

The steering is light and easy, and the suspension feels like it's running on a bed of air – because it is.

The GLS 400d has air suspension as standard; the car tested also had optional Active Body Control (\$5010), which uses a camera to scan the road surface to give the suspension a head-start on what it can expect and how it should respond.

The all-new in-line six-cylinder 3.0-litre turbo diesel engine is formidable, and with 700Nm of torque matched to a nine-speed auto makes light work of moving the GLS' considerable mass.

Mercedes claims a 0 to 100kmh time of 6.3 seconds, which is approaching hot hatch territory. We didn't verify this number but it feels on the money, remarkable for the size and weight of the car.

We didn't get to run the tank dry to test the fuel economy claim but the official figure of 7.7L/100km is fantasy if you're mostly running around town.

Based on our freeway driving you could come close to achieving this figure on the open road, in part thanks to the nine-speed automatic. That said, anecdotal evidence suggests this transmission has had reliability issues.

With a 90-litre tank, a range of more than 1000km is possible on the highway.

Tyre noise was noticeable on coarse chip surfaces (the trade-

off for having such wide rubber on the road) but it was eerily silent on smooth pavement.

An optional Off Road Engineering package, at \$3500, adds a low range transfer case, underbody protection and off road drive mode software. Add a set of off road tyres and you're away. A towbar is \$1900.

Overall, the Mercedes GLS is impressive. By co-incidence I had driven a BMW X7 and Audi Q7 either side of this test.

The Benz is quieter than the BMW but the lighter and smaller Audi felt more nimble. All three are worthy of making the shortlist if you need to move seven people in absolute comfort and luxury.

By Joshua Dowling

THINGS WE LIKE

- ✓ Luxurious interior
- ✓ Roomy in all three rows of seats plus space for luggage
- ✓ Powerful engine
- ✓ Optional Active Body Control suspension feels like you're riding on air
- ✓ Optional off road pack gives it some bush chops

THINGS YOU MIGHT NOT LIKE

- ✗ It's a big, ponderous thing in traffic
- ✗ Collapsible spare tyre
- ✗ Tight car parks require patience and precision

SPEX

- Made in the USA
- 3.0-litre six-cylinder turbodiesel/nine-speed automatic/all-wheel drive
- 243kW of power at 3600rpm/700Nm of torque from 1200-3000rpm
- 0-100km/h in 6.3 seconds (claimed)
- 6.7L/100km highway; 9.3L/100km highway; CO2 emissions are 202gkm; fuel tank is 90 litres
- Max towing weight: 3500kg
- Warranty: Five years/unlimited kilometres
- Standard: Nine airbags, stability control, autonomous emergency braking, lane keeping, 360-degree camera, speed sign recognition, blind zone warning, rear cross-traffic alert, digital instruments, MBUX voice control, Apple CarPlay, Android Auto, navigation, wireless phone charging, leather upholstery, four zone air, power tailgate, 21 inch alloys
- Redbook future values: 3yr: 62%; 5yr: 46%

STARS ★★★★★

- Safety **Not yet tested**
- Performance ★★★★★
- Handling ★★★★★
- Quality and reliability ★★★★★
- Comfort and refinement ★★★★★
- Value for money ★★★★★
- Overall** ★★★★★



compare with ...

Audi Q7, Bentley Bentayga, BMW X7, Lexus LX, Maserati Levante, Range Rover



It has an MG badge, so even though it's a mid-sized SUV, it should be on the sporty side, right? Guess again.

Now owned by Chinese-State giant SAIC Motor, the MG badge is just that: a badge.

There's no pukka Brit sports car DNA in the HS - not a shred - but MG's current owners admit as much and believe the HS (which replaces the GS) is worth your attention on its gear-for-the-money equation rather than its driving experience.

And when it comes to that value story, well, the MG makes a pretty convincing case.

The range kicks off with the 119kW/250Nm 1.5-litre four cylinder turbopetrol/seven-speed dual clutch auto/front wheel drive Core at \$28,990. Vibe is \$29,990, Excite is \$32,990 and Essence is \$36,990.

Excite X, with a 168kW/360Nm 2.0-litre turbopetrol four/six-speed dual clutch auto/all-wheel drivetrain, is \$35,990; Essence X is \$40,990.

Vibe includes a 10.1-inch touch-screen, keyless entry and

start, air-vents and a pair of USB ports in the back seat and daytime running lights.

Pony up for the Excite and you're into gear such as an electric tailgate, 18-inch alloys, ambient cabin lighting, navigation, LED headlights and dual-zone climate control.

Crucially, though, the safety package that comes standard on even the base-model is up there with the best of its competitors.

Called MG Pilot, the system uses a series of radar sensors and cameras to endow the car with a full suite of driver assist tech.

This includes active cruise-control, three-stage lane-keep assist, intelligent cruise-assist, blind-spot monitoring, rear cross-traffic warning, door-open warning, active headlight dipping, speed-assist with traffic sign recognition, and forward collision warning which can also detect pedestrians at speeds of up to 64km/h.

MG also claims the HS is the only vehicle in its class to

feature traffic jam assist, and claims it's smart enough to follow the car in front around an 'unseen' obstacle.

It's all contained within a classy, high-end cabin that obviously borrows from Europe's best.

At seven years and unlimited kilometres, MG's warranty matches Kia's market leading coverage.

However the actual driving experience is MG's biggest issue, especially compared with a bunch of pretty capable, comfortable rivals.

MG's 1.5-litre turbocharged four-cylinder makes 119kW of power, and while it doesn't struggle, neither does it inspire. It doesn't mind a drink around town either, and its preference is premium unleaded.

It gets thrashy and noisy beyond about 4000rpm, a trait made more obvious by the otherwise low interior noise levels.

The seven-speed dual-clutch transmission also fails utterly to

shift with the clarity we've come to expect from this technology.

Shifts are slurred and manual downshifts, in particular, are a long time coming once you've prodded the paddle shifter.

The steering is lifeless and while the ride is okay for the most part, there is some small-bump patter and bigger undulations have the suspension reaching for the end of its travel.

Equipment is one thing, but when you also factor in the lacklustre driving experience, a requirement for 95-octane fuel and as yet unproven reliability, the MG really comes back to the field as a drive and as a deal.

Ford's Escape, Subaru's Forester, the Skoda Karoq and VW Tiguan might cost a little more, but they're much better on the road.

By Dave Morley

THINGS WE LIKE

- ✓ Low interior noise levels
- ✓ High-end cabin finish.
- ✓ Sharp pricing
- ✓ Full safety package
- ✓ Great warranty

THINGS YOU MIGHT NOT LIKE

- ✗ Engine coarseness above 4000rpm
- ✗ Runs on premium
- ✗ Slow transmission
- ✗ Lifeless steering
- ✗ Fussy ride on bumpy roads
- ✗ Reliability and durability yet to be proven

SPEX (Excite 1.5)

- Made in China
- 1.5-litre four cylinder turbopetrol/seven-speed dual clutch automatic/front-wheel drive
- 119kW of power at 5600rpm/250Nm of torque from 1700-4400rpm
- 0-100km/h N/A
- 6.2L/100km highway; 9.2L/100km city; 95 octane premium; CO2 emissions are 170g/km; fuel tank is 55 litres
- Warranty: Seven years/unlimited km
- Standard: Six airbags, stability control, autonomous emergency braking, blind spot monitoring, rear cross traffic alert, adaptive cruise control, lane keep assist, speed sign recognition, 18-inch alloy wheels, automatic headlights, navigation, digital radio, Apple CarPlay, Android Auto, heated front seats, dual zone air, power tailgate
- Redbook future values: 3yr: 45%; 5yr: 36%

STARS ★★★★★

- Safety ★★★★★
- Performance ★★★★★
- Handling ★★★★★
- Quality and reliability ★★★★★
- Comfort and refinement ★★★★★
- Value for money ★★★★★
- Overall** ★★★★★



compare with ...

Ford Escape, Nissan X-Trail, Skoda Karoq, Subaru Forester, Toyota RAV4, VW Tiguan

MG ZS EV FROM \$43,990



The mid-size MG ZS EV is Australia's cheapest electric car by some margin, at \$43,990 drive-away.

This undercuts the Hyundai Ioniq, priced at \$48,970 plus on-road cost, and the Nissan Leaf, at \$49,990 plus on-road costs.

However, it's worth noting petrol-free technology still comes at a premium. The ZS EV is double the cost of the cheapest petrol-powered version, which starts at \$21,990 drive-away.

That said, it comes well equipped with a full length sunroof, the latest driver assist safety tech and a practical and comfortable cabin, with decent sized door pockets and a generously proportioned centre console with a sliding lid for added convenience.

The back seat has a USB connector, two Isofix child restraint locators and three top tether

points, so you can fit an old-school kid seat in the middle position. No vents are provided. The boot is quite small by class standards.

Warranty is five years. Other MG models have seven-year coverage, so it's unclear why MG offers less on this one. The battery pack has an eight year/160,000km warranty.

The test car had a few gremlins. Apple Car Play worked intermittently on some trips, and perfectly on others.

There was also a glitch with the starter battery (not the main battery pack that drives the car), which became a bit stubborn and wouldn't start the car even when the battery was full. A software update addressed the issue.

Servicing costs quoted are, oddly, no cheaper than a petrol car, despite no need for lubricants, filters or spark plugs. Servicing averages \$320 per year for the first five years.

On the road, the MG ZS EV drives with the same ease and relative zippiness as other small SUVs. EVs can be very quick. This one is not. It has about the same pace as a Toyota Corolla, which is fine for everyday driving.

It is powered by a 44.5kWh liquid-cooled lithium-ion battery pack and the electric motor has a claimed output of 105kW/353Nm, delivered to the front wheels.

MG claims a maximum range of 263km. This is likely achievable in city driving, but like all EVs it will be considerably reduced on a highway run.

During my time with the car I never let the battery have less than 100km of driving range remaining, which apparently is how most people drive electric vehicles. Top them up early and often, just like a mobile phone, so you're never left in the lurch.

MG claims that on a fast DC charger the battery can be

boosted to 80 per cent capacity in 45 minutes. From dead empty and when recharged on a household power socket, however, it could take up to 20 hours to top up.

The MG ZS EV is inoffensive to drive. Ride comfort is OK, though the ZS gets more upset than usual by big bumps. Decent grip from Michelin tyres makes up in part for mediocre suspension and overassisted steering.

It's sharp price will put the MG on the list for many buyers, but it's worth noting that some of the tech isn't proven.

If you want greater peace of mind in the brave new world of EVs, you may want to consider the slightly dearer models from Nissan and Hyundai.

It's also worth noting that new EVs are likely to get a lot more plentiful, and cheaper, in the next few years, which will have an adverse effect on MG trade-in values.

By Joshua Dowling

THINGS WE LIKE

- ✓ The most affordable EV yet
- ✓ Well equipped with convenience and safety features
- ✓ Plenty of range in city driving
- ✓ Adequate performance
- ✓ Spacious, comfortable cabin

THINGS YOU MIGHT NOT LIKE

- ✗ A few gremlins in the test car
- ✗ Why the short warranty and high servicing costs?
- ✗ No spare
- ✗ Weak resale values
- ✗ Small boot
- ✗ EVs will get a lot cheaper in the next few years.

SPEX

- Made in China
- 44.5kWh battery/synchronous electric motor/single-speed automatic/front wheel drive
- 105kW of power/353Nm of torque
- 0-100km/h in 8.2 seconds (claimed)
- 18.6kWh/100km; claimed maximum range 263km
- Warranty: Five years/unlimited km; eight years/160,000km on battery
- Standard: Six airbags, stability control, AEB, adaptive cruise, speed sign recognition, blind spot monitoring, rear cross traffic alert, sunroof, faux-leather upholstery, navigation, Apple Car Play, Android Auto, 17-inch alloys
- Redbook future values: 3yr: 38%; 5yr: 28%

STARS ★★★★★

- Safety ★★★★★
- Performance ★★★★★
- Handling ★★★★★
- Quality and reliability ★★★★★
- Comfort and refinement ★★★★★
- Value for money ★★★★★
- Overall** ★★★★★



compare with ...

Hyundai Ioniq, Nissan Leaf



Mini hiked starting prices by more than \$5000 at the beginning of the year.

The Mini Cooper range now starts at \$35,150 for the three door six-speed manual or seven-speed dual clutch automatic.

Cooper S is \$45,100, also with a choice of manual or automatic transmissions.

You get more boot and rear seat space in the longer, taller Mini five-door, which adds \$1500 to Cooper and Cooper S prices.

The John Cooper Works hatch is \$53,700 with manual or eight-speed automatic transmissions.

Cooper convertible starts at \$43,200. Cooper S is \$51,100 and the John Cooper Works is \$59,250.

Cooper runs BMW's 1.5-litre three-cylinder turbocharged engine with 100kW of power and 220Nm of torque.

A 141kW/300Nm 2.0-litre four-cylinder turbopetrol powers the Cooper S and, with 170kW/320Nm, the John Cooper Works.

A 225kW/405Nm variant, as used in the BMW M135i, is

fitted to the John Cooper Works GP model.

The base model Cooper's 1.5-litre turbopetrol triple is flexible, frugal, refined and particularly strong through the mid-range.

The seven speed DCT transmission works smoothly and efficiently.

Mini makes much of its "go kart handling", but the same Cooper five door model, tested in 2015 with optional adaptive suspension and stickier Continental tyres, walked the Mini walk much more convincingly.

The current model, tested with less adhesive Hankook tyres and standard suspension, pushed its front end harder in corners, exhibited more body roll and lacked the clarity of feedback and steering precision of its predecessor. Mini used to be one of the best handling small cars. Not now.

A mid 2019 update rectified Mini's appalling lack of driver

assist safety tech, but it's still underdone. Many cars around the \$25K pricepoint now have more comprehensive specification.

Lane keep assist and blind spot monitoring, standard in many \$30,000 hatchbacks, are still missing.

Infotainment is BMW's iDrive, with digital radio, navigation, traffic information, voice control and Apple CarPlay.

The Mini Connected app lets you play besties with your car by phone if you're in boring company.

Mini's interior still has a wow factor like no other, if only because it's so different to everything else, with a complete indifference to ergonomic efficiency and logical thought.

The driver's seat could use angle adjustment for the flat cushion, but is otherwise supportive, and tall drivers aren't cramped for legroom.

Back seat passengers do it tough, though, and boot space is also extremely tight.

That won't dissuade buyers of the Mini. Despite its many idiosyncrasies and compromises, reliability issues and ambitious pricing, it inspires great affection in some. And a comparable degree of loathing in others.

An updated Mini is due by the end of 2021.

THINGS WE LIKE

- ✓ A retro design that works
- ✓ 21st-century engines with strong performance and outstanding efficiency, plus a refined DCT
- ✓ Surprisingly comfortable ride

THINGS YOU MIGHT NOT LIKE

- ✗ Minimal driver assist safety tech
- ✗ Space-saver spare or aerosol can – useless
- ✗ Dash layout still a dog's breakfast
- ✗ Overpriced
- ✗ Squeaks, rattles and other potential sources of grief

SPEX (Cooper)

- 1.5-litre three-cylinder turbopetrol/seven-speed DCT/ front-wheel drive
- 100kW of power from 4500-6500rpm/220Nm of torque from 1480-4200rpm
- 0-100km/h in 8.1 seconds (claimed)
- 4.9L/100km highway; 6.3L/100km city/95 octane premium/CO₂ emissions are 123g/km
- Warranty: Three years/unlimited kilometres
- Standard: Six airbags, stability control, electronic differential lock, Bluetooth, smartphone connectivity, navigation, 16-inch alloy wheels, rear camera
- Redbook future values: 3yr 50%; 5yr: 40%

STARS ★★★★★

- Safety ★★★★★ ANCAP
- Performance ★★★★★
- Handling ★★★★★
- Quality and reliability ★★★★★
- Comfort and refinement ★★★★★
- Value for money ★★★★★
- Overall** ★★★★★



compare with ...

Audi A1, BMW 1/2 Series, Fiat 500, Toyota Yaris, VW Polo

MINI ELECTRIC FROM \$59,900



Mini's first production EV – the Mini Electric First Edition, a three door hatch in Cooper S specification – comes to Australia with a truly staggering pricetag of \$59,900 drive away. That's about \$13,000 more than the 2.0-litre turbo petrol-powered Cooper S.

Mini Electric inherits drivetrain componentry from parent BMW's EV, the i3. This includes the 135kW electric motor, which drives the front wheels rather than the rears as in the i3.

The 32.6 kWh battery pack is good for a claimed 233km. Mini warrants the battery for eight years and claims a recharging time of 35 minutes (to 80 percent) from a 50kW public DC fast charger.

Plugged into an 11kW wall-mounted charger in your garage (\$2595, plus installation) it takes two and a half hours to get to 80

percent. Using the supplied cable and a household power point will take 10 hours or more.

Inside, there's little to distinguish the Electric apart from A digital instrument tablet on the steering column, immediately behind the wheel (where the petrol-powered Cooper's analogue dial assembly lives) bright yellow trim highlights and a few EV drivetrain-specific control switches.

Materials, fit and finish quality is fine, the sports seats are luxurious and supportive and the Electric's cabin feels like money – as it should, given the price. Back seat and boot space are uncompromised in the EV -- there's still precious little of either.

Mini owners continue to be short changed on driver assist safety tech. Lane keep assist, high speed AEB, rear cross traffic alert and adaptive cruise are all missing.

Mini claims to have imbued the Electric with the same nippy, go kart-style performance and dynamics as the rest of the range. That's true, and as far as EVs go, the Mini is one of the more expressive, engaging options out there.

Firmer suspension effectively controls this extra mass, and with precise, direct steering the Electric goes around corners like a Mini should. It's great fun to drive.

It goes, too, with urgent, immediate go forward when you put your foot down, thanks to the electric motor's hefty 270Nm of torque being available from the moment it begins to spin. The 0-100km/h trip takes a claimed 7.3 seconds. It feels quicker. Rolling acceleration is similarly strong and the Mini overtakes effortlessly from any speed.

Range is effectively maximised by a two-setting

regenerative braking function. Select "high energy recovery" and the electric motor generates serious retardation (and charge) when you lift your right foot. It's pretty abrupt, but once you get used to it you rarely need to use the left pedal at all.

I picked up the Electric with the instruments showing 140km of range remaining, and the battery at 94 percent charge. After a 104km drive around Melbourne, including about 25km of freeway, I returned the car with a claimed 46 percent of battery and 78km of range remaining. The regenerative braking function had actually added extra charge and range.

So around town you should have no problem getting 200km-plus from the battery. As with any EV, though, highway driving will suck volts a rapid rate and, based on other EV tests, you can expect a safe maximum open road range of about 150km in the Mini. Road trips will be highly problematic. Don't wander too far from home.

THINGS WE LIKE

- ✓ Fun to drive, like a real Mini
- ✓ Works beautifully around town, where range isn't an issue
- ✓ Stylish, high quality interior
- ✓ Cheap running costs
- ✓ Comfortable and quiet

THINGS YOU MIGHT NOT LIKE

- ✗ Overpriced
- ✗ Lacks the range for long distance trips
- ✗ No back seat or boot space
- ✗ Don't run out of battery charge out on the road
- ✗ Short warranty
- ✗ Weak resale values

SPEX

- Made in England
- Electric motor/32.6kWh battery/single speed CVT/front-wheel drive
- 135kW of power/270Nm of torque
- 0-100km/h in 7.3 seconds (claimed)
- Warranty: Three years/unlimited km
- Standard: Six airbags, stability control, forward collision warning, low speed autonomous emergency braking, Harman Kardon audio, heated front seats, leather, Apple CarPlay (but no Android Auto), navigation, digital radio, voice control, adaptive LED headlights, head-up display, semi-automatic parallel parking, wireless phone charging, 17-inch alloys
- Redbook future values: 3yr: 44%; 5yr: 34%

STARS ★★★★★

- Safety
Not yet tested
- Performance
★★★★★
- Handling
★★★★★
- Quality and reliability
★★★★★
- Comfort and refinement
★★★★★
- Value for money
★★★☆☆
- Overall**
★★★★★



compare with ...

BMW i3, Nissan Leaf



Mini's SUV range, powered by BMW drivetrains, opens with the 1.5-litre three-cylinder turbopetrol/seven-speed dual clutch automatic/front-wheel-drive Countryman, priced at \$44,500. The 2.0-litre turbopetrol Cooper S is \$52,900.

The all-wheel drive John Cooper Works Pure model, the performance variant with a 225kW 2.0-litre turbopetrol engine, costs \$61,915 with an eight-speed automatic. With adaptive suspension, 19-inch alloys and a bit of extra bling, the fully loaded John Cooper Works Countryman is \$67,818.

A plug-in hybrid Cooper S E model, priced at \$60,900, claims an electric-only range of 60km or so, but based on our test of the previous model you should take that claim with a grain of salt. It also has an all-wheel drivetrain.

The original 2011 Countryman was the first family-size Mini. It won new customers and retained owners who otherwise would have had to desert the brand during their breeding years.

With Countryman II, Mini's aim was simple: more of the same. Despite the growth spurt, the five-door's overall proportions are very similar. Inside, the changes are more obvious.

The 40/20/40 split rear seat is pretty spacious. Larger rear doors make accessing it easier, too. And the cargo compartment has grown by 100 litres to a quite useful 450 litres.

Countryman's technical essentials are familiar. Mini is owned by the BMW Group, and the SUV's engines, transmissions, suspension, steering, brakes and more are shared with small models from the Bavarian brand. It's most closely related to the X1 and is manufactured in the same factory in the Netherlands.

BMW's 1.5-litre turbo-triple is a natural fit with the seven-speed transmission.

Top end performance is flat, even in Sport mode, but its 220Nm of torque kicks in from 1480rpm and persists to 4200rpm, so tractability and

responsiveness at low and midrange revs are outstanding, as is fuel efficiency. It will do 5-5.5L/100km on the highway and sevens in town.

It's not quite as smooth as a four, though, especially at low revs, while the auto stop/start is slow and clunky when it fires the engine.

As an SUV variant, Countryman gets more compliant suspension than other Minis and on any surface the ride is smooth, quiet and comfortable.

Although Countryman feels tall and bulky compared with the Mini hatch, and it's certainly no go kart, it does handle with security and confidence on rough roads at speed.

You face the unique retro-look Mini dash, with a big, round central infotainment screen where the 1959 original's speedo used to live; the modern version (still analogue) is in a small instrument binnacle attached to the steering column.

There's plenty of front seat space, clear vision around the

car, a heavily-bolstered seat with clumsy manual backrest adjustment and a shortage of covered storage.

A firm, elevated rear bench has reasonable legroom, an adjustable backrest, a couple of USBs and vents, so it's a great space for kids.

The Countryman is expensive for its size, and you should also be aware of Mini's less than exemplary quality and reliability record. You're also short changed for driver assist safety tech.

Autonomous emergency braking, for example works only at low speed and there's no blind spot monitoring or rear cross traffic alert.

That said, its increased size makes the new Countryman a much more practical, comfortable SUV, while, as always with Mini, it's a fun thing to drive.

By John Carey

THINGS WE LIKE

- ✓ Roominess and practicality
- ✓ Strong, fuel-efficient suite of BMW engines
- ✓ Tidy, engaging handling
- ✓ Effective all-wheel-drive system

THINGS YOU MIGHT NOT LIKE

- ✗ Try-hard retro design, especially inside
- ✗ Firm ride
- ✗ Pricy for a small SUV
- ✗ Minis can be temperamental

SPEX (Cooper S)

- Made in the Netherlands
- 2.0-litre four-cylinder turbopetrol/eight-speed automatic/front-wheel drive
- 141kW of power from 5000-6000rpm/280Nm of torque from 1350-4600rpm
- 0-100km/h in 7.4 seconds
- 5.9L/100km highway; 8.1L/100km city; 95 octane premium; CO₂ emissions are 153g/km
- Fuel tank 51 litres
- Warranty: Three years/unlimited kilometres
- Standard: Six airbags, stability control, parking sensors, automatic parking, camera, radar cruise, forward collision warning, low speed AEB, power tailgate, swivelling LED headlights, Bluetooth, navigation, digital radio, voice control, 18-inch alloy wheels
- Redbook future values: 3yr: 52%; 5yr: 42%

STARS ★★★★★

- Safety ★★★★★ ANCAP
- Performance ★★★★★
- Handling ★★★★★
- Quality and reliability ★★★★★
- Comfort and refinement ★★★★★
- Value for money ★★★★★
- Overall** ★★★★★



compare with ...

Audi Q2, BMW X1, Jaguar E Pace, Mazda CX3, Mercedes GLA, Subaru XV, Toyota C-HR

MITSUBISHI ASX FROM \$23,990



The base ASX 110kW 2.0-litre petrol/five-speed manual front-wheel-drive ES is \$23,990. With a continuously variable automatic (CVT) transmission it's \$26,240, while in MR specification, with CVT as standard, it's \$27,990. LS, also with CVT, is \$28,490.

A 123kW 2.4-litre petrol engine powers the \$30,990 GSR and the top spec Exceed, at \$33,490.

Mitsubishi dropped all-wheel drive and the 2.2-litre turbodiesel variants in 2019.

We haven't driven the 2.0-litre petrol engine in the ASX -- we tested the 2.2-litre turbodiesel in 2017 -- but we have in Peugeot's 3008, ASX's twin under the skin, where it was gutless, noisy, thirsty and as slow as a week of Tuesdays.

Given that it's more like a car than an SUV in its stance, weight and suspension layout, you would expect the ASX to be a decent handler but it's not quite as secure or confident at speed as it should be.

It's not as composed or as comfortable as a Kia Seltos, Mazda CX-3, Subaru XV or Toyota C-HR.

Autonomous emergency braking, blind spot monitoring, lane departure warning and rear cross traffic alert add \$1500 to ES with CVT.

The ASX interior was recently updated with richer materials and an Outlander-style layout. Permanently illuminated instruments are easy to read,

day or night, thanks to their bright white displays. There's a similarly legible information display between them and the wands have a chunky, high-quality feel in operation.

Easy-to-use audio and three-knob air-conditioning controls on the centre of the dash are complemented by wheel-mounted switches for audio/Bluetooth (which also has voice activation) and cruise control.

Digital radio is standard. You can drive your iPod from the steering wheel and there's also a touch screen for audio and information functions.

Tall drivers can get comfortable in the ASX and there's plenty of adjustment for the steering wheel.

At the price, Exceed specification is loaded. A seven-inch touchscreen, navigation, glass roof, automatic headlights, rain sensing wipers and heated front seats with leather facings are included.

The firm driver's seat is rather small and unsupportive for larger people and the side bolstering is completely ineffective. Rear-seat legroom is on par with a similarly sized hatchback -- OK for most adult but squeeze for tall folks.

Two child-restraint anchors are fitted to the outboard positions on the 60/40 split-fold rear seat back. Two Isofix mounts are also provided.

There's not a lot of boot space but the rear seat backs flip down for an extended floor of nearly 1.6 metres.

The ASX is old, tired and there are better petrol alternatives around among compact SUVs.

That said, Mitsubishi regularly advertises the base ASX ES at rock-bottom drive away no more to pay prices, so if you're just after cheap, honest transport it will do the job.

THINGS WE LIKE

- ✓ Cheap drive away deals
- ✓ Exceed is loaded with standard features
- ✓ Reliable and a long warranty
- ✓ Easy to drive and park in town

THINGS YOU MIGHT NOT LIKE

- ✗ Dynamics are only average
- ✗ Seats aren't particularly comfortable or supportive
- ✗ 2.0 petrol is gutless

SPEX (ES CVT)

- Made in Japan
- 2.0-litre four-cylinder/CVT/front-wheel drive
- 110kW of power at 6000rpm/197Nm of torque at 4200rpm
- 0-100km/h: N/A
- 6.4L/100km highway; 9.5L/100km city; 91 octane, CO₂ emissions are 176g/km; fuel tank is 63 litres
- Warranty: Five years/100,000km
- Max towing weight: 1300kg
- Standard: Seven airbags, stability control, automatic air, digital radio, USB input, Bluetooth, rear parking sensors, rear camera, tinted glass, roof rails and 18-inch alloy wheels
- Redbook future values: 3yr: 51%; 5yr: 41%

STARS ★★★★★

- Safety ★★★★★ ANCAP
- Green Vehicle Guide ★★★★★
- Performance ★★★★★
- Handling ★★★★★
- Quality and reliability ★★★★★
- Comfort and refinement ★★★★★
- Value for money ★★★★★
- Overall** ★★★★★



compare with ...

Honda HRV, Kia Seltos, Mazda CX-3, Subaru XV, Suzuki Vitara, Toyota C-HR, VW T-Cross



MITSUBISHI ECLIPSE CROSS FROM \$30,290



The Eclipse Cross slots into Mitsubishi's SUV portfolio between the compact ASX and midsize Outlander.

Powered by a 1.5-litre four cylinder turbopetrol/continuously variable transmission (CVT), the range opens with the front-wheel drive ES at \$30,290. LS is \$32,590, or \$35,090 with all-wheel drive. Aspire front-wheel drive is \$34,990.

We're testing the mid-spec Exceed, at \$38,290; it's also available with all-wheel drive, at \$40,790.

Exceed specification covers most of what a family needs and wants in a wagon; it also adds bonus luxe, such as a double-sized sunroof, heated, leather-faced, power-adjustable front seats and dual-zone air.

Fake carbon and high-gloss black plastic, framed by sweeping silver trim, adorn a twin cockpit-style dash with conventional instruments. Eclipse is made in Japan, so fit and finish are excellent.

Infotainment includes an eight-inch touchscreen. Apple CarPlay and Android Auto

connectivity, plus digital radio, are also standard, but there's no navigation on any model bar the top spec Exceed.

Rugged in town, the ride jolts on sharp bumps and concrete joints, which generate excessive thump and bump. It improves at highway speeds, but the oversprung Eclipse lacks the compliance and comfort expected in a family wagon.

You perch on a flat, short cushion, with good upper-body support from a properly contoured, well-bolstered backrest. The wheel could use more reach adjustment.

A strut in the middle of the tailgate window doesn't seriously impede vision; big side mirrors, parking sensors and 360/180-degree, plus kerbside, camera views allow you to clearly see all around the car.

A firm, supportive rear bench has 200mm of travel, plus adjustable backrest angle, so legroom is generous, though the tapered roofline will test headroom for tall passengers. The absence of vents, and a clumsy middle seatbelt

configuration, reduces Eclipse's kid-carrier appeal; on the credit side, access is easy and kids will like the high seating position.

The designer-driven coupe-style rear end looks sharp, but seriously compromises boot space. Most rivals have more. In 60/40 split-fold extended mode, the floor isn't flat, either.

Exceed ticks all the safety boxes, with a head-up display, automatic emergency braking, adaptive cruise, lane departure warning, blind spot monitoring and rear cross traffic alert.

The 1.5-litre turbo is laggy at low revs and, from rest, the go pedal needs a serious poke to get a response.

Once the CVT wakes up and engages meaningfully with the engine, midrange performance is strong and the pedal is more responsive.

It cruises easily and quietly on the highway, returning 7-8L/100km on regular unleaded, which isn't spectacularly frugal.

Around town, despite the absence of auto stop/start,

you can achieve single figures, though in Normal mode — where respectable performance lies — consumption can increase to 10-12L/100km.

The CVT also has paddles, which mimic an eight-speed automatic.

Sloppy handling is characterised by exaggerated body roll in corners, deep, early understeer and less-than-disciplined roadholding, typical of oversprung/underdamped suspension. The steering itself is rubbery and vague -- though Mitsubishi claims to have improved it on the 2021 update -- while the brakes are only adequate.

Eclipse doesn't drive as good as it looks. It's got the family-friendly feature list, infotainment and blue chip safety, but on the road it feels like yesterday's SUV compared with the Kia Seltos, VW's Tiguan, Subaru Forester and the Ford Escape.

THINGS WE LIKE

- ✓ Loaded with safety features
- ✓ Generous occupant space
- ✓ Long warranty
- ✓ Turbo runs on regular unleaded
- ✓ Made-in-Japan quality

THINGS YOU MIGHT NOT LIKE

- ✗ Turbolag and CVT make for sluggish response from rest
- ✗ A bit thirsty
- ✗ Feels like a barge in corners
- ✗ Harsh ride
- ✗ Infotainment voice control can be hit and miss
- ✗ Small boot

SPEX (Exceed fwd)

- Made in Japan
- 1.5-litre four-cylinder turbopetrol/CVT/front-wheel drive
- 110kW of power at 5500rpm/250Nm of torque from 2000-3500rpm
- 0-100km/h N/A
- 6.2L/100km highway; 9.2L/100km city; regular unleaded; CO2 emissions are 165g/km. Fuel tank is 63 litres
- Warranty: Five years/100,000km
- Standard: Seven airbags, stability control, automatic emergency braking, blind spot monitoring, rear cross traffic alert, lane departure warning, surround cameras, parking sensors, seven-inch touchscreen, Bluetooth, voice control, digital radio, Apple CarPlay, Android Auto, leather-faced heated front seats, dual sunroof, 18-inch alloys.
- Redbook future values: 3yr: 53%; 5yr: 42%

STARS ★★★★★

- Safety ★★★★★ ANCAP
- Performance ★★★★★
- Handling ★★★★★
- Quality and reliability ★★★★★
- Comfort and refinement ★★★★★
- Value for money ★★★★★
- Overall** ★★★★★



compare with ...

Ford Escape, Hyundai Tucson, Kia Seltos, Mazda CX-5, Skoda Kamiq, Subaru Forester, VW Tiguan



Nissan is turning over a new Leaf. The second generation of the world's best-selling electric car is now available in Australia. With sharper looks, stronger performance and, most important of all, increased driving range, the popular plug-in hatchback is selling better than ever around the world.

In Norway, for example, the Nissan has been topping the nation's new-car sales charts since going on sale there in February 2018.

After spending quality time with a new Leaf in and around Oslo, is that it's a pretty persuasive EV. The new model has a 40kWh lithium-ion battery pack beneath the floor of its cabin, an increase of 10kWh over the 2012 original.

This is enough for a reliable real-world 200-plus km driving

range. According to the new and more realistic WLTP energy-consumption test, the Nissan's driving range is 270 km. Careful, efficiency-minded drivers should get close to this figure.

Beneath the flip up cover in the Nissan's nose are two plugs. One is for charging the battery using a 6.6kW AC wallbox. This will take 7 hours 30 minutes to fully recharge a completely empty new Leaf battery. The other plug is for connecting with 50kW DC fast chargers. These can 80 percent recharge an empty Leaf battery in around 40 minutes. They're common in Norway, almost unknown in Australia.

Leaf's battery powers a 110kW electric motor, 30kW more than the old model. It drives the front wheels through a simple

single-speed transmission. Acceleration is prompt and peppy. It's completely smooth and silent, too.

The Nissan's driver-selectable e-Pedal mode increases the strength of the car's regenerative electric braking, so that releasing the accelerator will bring the Leaf to a smooth halt. It makes driving in stop-start city traffic very easy.

On motorways and country roads the Leaf steers neatly, handles tidily and isn't too bothered by bumps.

Inside is ample room for four adults. A large centre tunnel limits the usefulness of the rear-seat's middle position. The cargo compartment, around 400 litres, is large.

Safety features includes 360 degree camera coverage

with moving object detection, adaptive cruise, autonomous emergency braking, blind spot monitoring and lane keeping.

The edgier exterior design of the new Leaf aims for broader appeal than the dumpy design of the original, and succeeds. But the interior, though spacious, easy to use, and well equipped (at least in top-grade Tekna form) fails to create a perception of elevated quality.

The Leaf's major problem in Australia, though, is that doesn't look like value against Hyundai's Ioniq, which starts at \$48,970 for the Elite Fastback and has a 38kWh battery that's claimed to be able to deliver up to 311km of range when driving around town. The Hyundai also has a premium quality interior with more standard equipment.

By John Carey

THINGS WE LIKE

- ✓ Smooth and quiet
- ✓ Peppy performance
- ✓ Interior space
- ✓ Driving range
- ✓ You'll never have to go to a servo again

THINGS YOU MIGHT NOT LIKE

- ✗ Interior materials, fit and finish quality isn't great
- ✗ More costly than fossil-fuel equivalents
- ✗ Lack of fast DC fast-charging in Australia (for now)
- ✗ 250km or so is still a pretty limited range

SPEX

- Made in Japan
- 40kWh lithium ion battery/electric motor/single speed transmission/front wheel drive
- 110kW of power from 3283-9795rpm/320Nm of torque from 0-3283rpm
- 0-100km/h in 7.9 seconds (claimed)
- Electricity consumption: 206Wh/km; CO2 emissions: zero, if charged from renewable power
- Warranty: Five years/unlimited km
- Standard: Six airbags, stability control, lane keep assist, autonomous emergency braking, blind spot monitoring, rear cross traffic alert, automatic headlights, 7-inch infotainment screen, Bluetooth, navigation, voice control, digital radio, Apple CarPlay, Android Auto.
- Redbook future values: 3yr: 43%; 5yr: 31%

STARS ★★★★★

- Safety ★★★★★ (EuroNCAP)
- Green Vehicle Guide ★★★★★
- Performance ★★★★★
- Handling ★★★★★
- Quality and reliability ★★★★★
- Comfort and refinement ★★★★★
- Value for money ★★★★★
- Overall** ★★★★★



compare with ...

Hyundai Ioniq, MG ZS



Nissan's Juke is a compact SUV, close in size to the class best seller, Mitsubishi's ASX.

All variants are powered by a 1.0-litre three-cylinder turbopetrol engine with just 85kW of power – most rivals have 100kW or more.

It's matched to a seven-speed dual clutch automatic transmission and front-wheel drive. There are no all-wheel drive models, so it's fair to say that the Juke has no off-bitumen pretensions whatsoever.

Prices start at \$27,990 for the ST; ST+ is \$30,740, ST-L (tested here) is \$33,940 and Ti is \$36,490.

Juke is certainly one of the more stylish SUVs out there, with a rakish profile and the obligatory huge alloy wheels that suggest it's a lot sportier than it actually is.

A bulging, bloated, plastic wrapped dash that's trying hard to do an imitation of a Mercedes layout lacks the quality, elegance and design cred to pull it off. Minimal covered storage, just one each 12 volt and USB sockets and no wireless phone charging are other demerits.

Infotainment includes an eight-inch screen mounted atop the dash, with Apple CarPlay/Android Auto; grades above ST add navigation and digital radio; Ti adds Bose sound. Voice control works for phone and audio but not navigation.

Safety is well taken care of even at base ST level, with all the essential driver assist tech as standard, plus automatic LED headlights and speed sign recognition.

Adaptive cruise and 360 degree camera coverage are added to ST-L and Ti.

The ST-L's luxurious, supportive driver's seat is one of the best around, and the driving position is more sporty car than shopping trolley SUV.

A firm, flat rear bench has reasonable legroom, but high window sills and shallow glass may make it a bit claustrophobic for young kids. There's one USB outlet, but no 12 volt or vents.

Boot space is pretty good too, with a deep well, a couple of bag hooks and an extended, stepped floor.

Performance from the 1.0-litre is better than its humble numbers suggest. It's not quick – in fact it doesn't so much accelerate as gather speed gracefully – but it's perky enough off the line as it moves through the lower gears, possessed of strong midrange pulling power that makes it work particularly well in town, and capable of cruising easily in the high gears at 100km/h.

Expect around 6-8L/100km in most driving conditions. Auto stop/start is fitted and premium is recommended.

Occasional low frequency vibration is characteristic of three-cylinder engines, but it's not too intrusive. It's also quiet, with the main source of noise on the highway being excessive tyre roar that permeates the cabin.

The seven-speed works smoothly and unobtrusively. Paddles are provided if you want to shift gears yourself, but I didn't feel the need to use them.

Although Juke feels quite big and bulky from the driver's seat, it's one of the better handlers in the class, thanks to its European origins. Suspension is tuned for a nice compromise between comfort and control, the steering has decent heft and feedback, the ride is firm yet compliant – surprisingly so given the 225/45 19 inch wheel tyre combination on the ST-L – and the brakes are fine.

Juke's closest rivals are Toyota's similarly style-driven CH-R, VW's T-Cross, the Honda HRV and Subaru's XV. It's not quite a front runner – that would be the Toyota and Subaru – but if you're shopping this class it's worth a test drive.

THINGS WE LIKE

- ✓ Tractable, refined 1.0-litre/seven-speed drivetrain
- ✓ Tidy handling, tactile steering and a comfortable ride
- ✓ Reasonable rear seat and boot space
- ✓ Well equipped with safety tech
- ✓ Comfortable, supportive driver's seat in ST-L

THINGS YOU MIGHT NOT LIKE

- ✗ Ugly, uncoordinated dash
- ✗ Not enough covered storage or connecting sockets
- ✗ No wireless phone charging
- ✗ Space saver spare

SPEX (ST-L)

- Made in the UK
- 1.0-litre three-cylinder turbopetrol/seven-speed dual clutch auto/front-wheel drive
- 85kW of power at 5250rpm/180Nm of torque at 2400rpm
- 0-100km/h N/A
- 5.2L/100km highway; 6.8L/100km city; 95 octane premium; CO2 emissions are 136gkm; fuel tank is 46 litres
- Standard: Six airbags, stability control, AEB, blind spot monitoring, rear cross traffic alert, lane keep assist, adaptive cruise, 360 degree camera, navigation, voice recognition, cloth/leather upholstery, heated front seats, parking sensors, automatic LED headlights, 19-inch alloys.
- Redbook future values: 3yr: 49%; 5yr: 39%



STARS ★★★★★

- Safety ★★★★★
- Performance ★★★★★
- Handling ★★★★★
- Quality and reliability ★★★★★
- Comfort and refinement ★★★★★
- Value for money ★★★★★
- Overall** ★★★★★

compare with ...

Ford Puma, Honda HRV, Kia Stonic, Skoda Kamiq, Subaru XV, Toyota CH-R, VW T-Cross

NISSAN X-TRAIL FROM \$30,665



The base Nissan X-Trail ST, at \$30,665, is front-wheel drive and uses a 106kW 2.0-litre four-cylinder petrol engine with a six-speed manual.

The \$32,665 ST gains the gutsy 126kW 2.5-litre unit that has served the series since its 2001 inception, with a continuously variable transmission (CVT, or Xtronic in Nissan-speak) a combination that also powers the rest of the petrol engined X-Trail range..

An all-wheel-drive (AWD) ST is \$34,665, while the mid-spec ST-L Xtronic 2WD is \$38,525. AWD bumps that to \$40,525.

Finally there's the flagship \$45,965 Ti Xtronic AWD.

Seven-seater choices are limited to the ST Xtronic 2WD at \$34,265 and the \$40,125 ST-L.

The 130kW/380Nm 2.0-litre turbodiesel X-Trail AWD TS Xtronic is \$37,465.

Since the vast majority of sales are for the 2.5-litre Xtronic, that's the one we're concentrating on. Proven for over a dozen years as a robust and reliable engine in the two previous X-Trails, this 126kW/226Nm four-cylinder petrol unit still manages to deliver

competitive performance and sufficient refinement — most of the time. Much is owed to the Xtronic CVT, which combines extraordinary smoothness with the appreciably rapid acceleration response you'd expect of a conventional torque-converter automatic.

While precious little steering feedback means you won't mistake the X-Trail for a BMW, the helm imparts a sense of weight, linearity and control. At higher speeds, the chassis feels agile yet planted, especially driving through sweeping bends.

When the turns get tighter, though, there's no escaping the X-Trail's high centre of gravity, with lots of body lean and plenty of extra steering effort required. Strong brakes are a bonus, as is the supple ride on the standard 17-inch wheel and tyre package. However, the Ti's 19-inch setup — though more surefooted — makes the X-Trail feel a tad too firm over some bumps, while they can transfer quite a bit more road noise inside the cabin.

The cabin also features efficient ventilation, VW-style clear instrumentation (with a digital auxiliary speedo at last,

as well as a comprehensive trip-computer display), plenty of storage options and simple, intuitive controls that help with finding a perfect driving position.

Infotainment includes digital radio and voice recognition.

Automatic emergency braking is standard, as is forward collision warning. ST-L adds rear cross traffic alert, while Ti/TL add radar cruise, lane keeping and blind spot monitoring.

The elevated and comfortable rear seat, which works for people of all ages and sizes. Not only does each of the 40:20:40 backrests recline by a few degrees, they also slide forward individually as desired — great for parents who need to be within arm's reach of their children sitting behind.

The rear seat features a pair of ISOFIX seat anchors, backed up by backrest-sited child-seat tether hooks.

Access to the third row (where fitted) in seven-seater models is easy, however the 50:50 split-fold bench is strictly for smaller kids only.

In five-seaters, the large boot features a "Divide-'N-Hide" configurable multi-level

arrangement; with a pair of luggage dividers, it allows for varying ways to store different things without them touching or falling over.

A plastic-lined wet storage area is beneath the carpeted cargo-area floor. The Ti has a power tailgate.

The previous X-Trail was one of the most versatile, family-friendly wagons around.

There are better similarly-sized five-seaters out there now, notably Toyota RAV4, the Honda CRV and Subaru Forester, but if you're after a seven-seater at a rock-bottom price, add the X-Trail to your test-drive list, along with Mitsubishi's Outlander.

By Byron Mathioudakis

THINGS WE LIKE

- ✓ CVT's responsiveness and efficiency
- ✓ Reverse camera standard
- ✓ Spacious, refined cabin
- ✓ Seven-seat availability
- ✓ Class-leading rear-seat and load-area versatility

THINGS YOU MIGHT NOT LIKE

- ✗ No manual transmission with the bigger 2.5 engine
- ✗ Firm ride on Ti's 18-inch wheel/tyre package
- ✗ Nissan's three years warranty is off the pace
- ✗ Some road-noise intrusion
- ✗ Steering could still use more feedback and feel

SPEX (ST AWD)

- Made in Japan
- 2.5L four-cylinder petrol/CVT/all-wheel drive
- 126kW of power at 6000rpm/226Nm of torque at 4400rpm
- 0-100km/h in N/A
- 6.6L/100km highway; 11.3L/100km city; 91 octane; CO₂ emissions are 192g/km
- Warranty: Five years/unlimited km
- Standard: Six airbags, stability control, hill start assist, rear camera, digital radio, coice control, Apple CarPlay, Android Auto, USB connectivity, 17-inch alloy wheels. ST-L adds navigation, surround-view monitor, leather, heated front seats, dual-zone air, roof rails, 18-inch alloys and rear tinted glass. Ti adds lane-departure warning, blind-spot monitoring, power tailgate, sunroof and 19-inch alloys
- Redbook future values: 3yr: 57%; 5yr: 40%

STARS ★★★★★

- Safety ★★★★★ ANCAP
- Green Vehicle Guide ★★★★★
- Performance ★★★★★
- Handling ★★★★★
- Quality and reliability ★★★★★
- Comfort and refinement ★★★★★
- Value for money ★★★★★
- Overall** ★★★★★



compare with ...

Honda CRV, Hyundai Santa Fe, Kia Sorento, Mitsubishi Outlander, Subaru Forester, Skoda Kodiaq, Toyota RAV4, VW Tiguan



NISSAN QASHQAI FROM \$28,290



Just why Nissan chose to name its small SUV after a group of nomadic tribes from Iran is anybody's guess. The Qashqai traditionally use donkeys to get around. Presumably that's not the connection Nissan was trying to make...

All models run a naturally-aspirated 2.0-litre petrol engine, with a humble 106kW of power and 200Nm of torque, put to the road via six-speed manual or continuously variable (CVT) transmissions.

Qashqai has no off road pretensions, so the entire range is front wheel drive.

Pricing opens at \$28,290 for the base ST manual. CVT adds \$2000; it's standard on the \$32,290 ST+, the \$34,300 ST-L, tested here, the \$35,900 Midnight Edition and the \$38,790 bells and whistles Ti.

In addition to ST's keyless entry and starting, fast glass on all windows (with opening and closing via the remote as well) and parking sensors, ST-L adds 18-inch-alloys, heated, folding side mirrors, roof rails, a seven-inch touchscreen and heated, power adjustable front seats with cloth/leather facings.

Apple CarPlay/Android Auto and digital radio are standard; models above ST also include navigation with map upgrades for five years.

Low speed autonomous emergency braking and lane departure warning are standard; ST+ adds pedestrian detection, rain sensing wipers, auto headlights, rear cross traffic alert and blind spot monitoring. ST-L adds surround cameras, including 360 degrees overhead view and rear object detection, plus automatic parking.

Fit, finish and materials quality are excellent, and sound quality from the standard audio is pretty good too.

You're cocooned in a stylish, sporty, twin cockpit layout, though seated quite high. ST-L's driver's seat is firm and supportive and the driving position is adjustable for all physiques. Rear seat legroom is sufficient for most adults, and it's easy to get in and out, but no vents are provided.

Nissan claims that bumps are smoothed out by the selective application of braking and

engine torque to the relevant wheels, a technology it calls "Intelligent Ride Control."

That's not the reality. The suspension is too stiff, the front end in particular jolts the body on bumps and potholes, and the ride in town is often harsh. Compliance improves with speed, but Qashqai's suspension tune is too punishing for its people moving role -- pointlessly so given its limited abilities.

Nissan has been doing CVTs for a long time and it shows in the way the transmission hooks up crisply and efficiently on a light throttle, so responsiveness from rest and low speeds is surprisingly brisk, making Qashqai a good thing in the daily traffic grind.

There's no auto stop/start, so fuel consumption, though typically 10-11L/100km, can reach 12.5L/100km in traffic.

When you want big grunt and go, well, it ain't there, though the transmission tries hard to find it by switching to faux conventional auto mode, with stepped shifts. In cruise mode

at 100km/h, Qashqai is quiet and frugal, returning 6-6.5L/100km, on regular unleaded.

Although Qashqai feels sorta kinda sporty, notably in the suspension's firmness, it doesn't inspire confidence at speed. Roadholding on choppy surfaces, especially at the front, feels tenuous at times.

The electric power steering has two adjustable settings: numb and completely dead.

Nissan claims "Active Return Control" adds to steering precision, and "Intelligent Trace Control" provides "more confidence and dynamic feel without interfering with the driving experience." Are we really supposed to take this nonsense seriously?

The Qashqai is stylish and spacious, but, it's also a strangely dysfunctional combination of modest performance, mediocre dynamics and a punishing ride.

The all-new, third generation Qashqai is due by the end of 2021. Hopefully it's worth the wait.

THINGS WE LIKE

- ✓ Sleek exterior styling
- ✓ Classy, inviting interior too
- ✓ Good reliability and reasonable running costs
- ✓ Comfortable seats and good rear seat and boot space

THINGS YOU MIGHT NOT LIKE

- ✗ Overpriced
- ✗ Petrol engine needs more oomph
- ✗ Short warranty
- ✗ Hard ride
- ✗ Dead steering

SPEX (ST-L)

- Made in England
- 2.0-litre four-cylinder petrol/six-speed CVT/front-wheel drive
- 106kW of power at 6000rpm/200Nm of torque at 4400rpm
- 0-100km/h N/A
- 6.0L/100km highway; 10.7L/100km city; 91 octane; CO₂ emissions are 178g/km
- Warranty: Five years/unlimited kilometres
- Standard: Stability control, six airbags, surround cameras, automatic emergency braking, lane departure warning, Bluetooth, navigation, 18-inch alloys, heated front seats
- Redbook future values: 3yr: 48%; 5yr: 37%



STARS ★★☆☆☆

- Safety ★★★★★ ANCAP
- Performance ★★☆☆☆
- Handling ★★☆☆☆
- Quality and reliability ★★☆☆☆
- Comfort and refinement ★★☆☆☆
- Value for money ★★☆☆☆
- Overall** ★★☆☆☆

compare with ...

Ford Escape, Hyundai Kona, Honda HRV, Kia Seltos, Mazda CX-30, Subaru XV, Toyota C-HR, VW Tiguan

PEUGEOT 508 FROM \$57,490



France leads the world in fashion, cosmetics, couture, cuisine and wine. So why not in luxury automobiles?

Enter Peugeot. The carmaker reckons it's high-time everybody knows the era of bland, bourgeois sedans is over with its latest, eye-catching 508.

Peugeot's second-generation midsize to wear that moniker is visibly shorter and lower (as well as substantially lighter) than its dullard predecessor, for a sportier, sleeker look. To that end, it also adopts a fastback silhouette, frameless windows, provocative LED lighting and a handy liftback.

Priced from \$57,490, the 508 GT Fastback is steeper than rivals such as the Volkswagen Passat, but an all-in specification makes up for that. Along with the usual safety tech such as autonomous emergency braking (AEB), lane keeping and full-stop/go adaptive cruise, buyers score lovely Nappa leather, powered, heated and massaging front seats, surround-view camera, automatic parking, premium audio, electronic instrumentation,

wireless smartphone charging, 18-inch alloys and a gesture-actuated tailgate. A pretty wagon adds another \$2000.

A similarly bold riposte against boredom marks the 508's modernist cabin, which pleases with quality materials, attractive textures and an upmarket ambience, where inviting French luxury abounds. The minimalist dash does demand some familiarisation, especially with the high-sited dials, a low-set wheel and myriad configuration varieties. You also need to get used to fingering and swiping a multitude of sundry screens accessing different multimedia and vehicle systems. But once mastered, the ergonomics are sound, backed up by light and easy controls, sumptuously comfortable seating, abundant front room, ample ventilation and sufficient storage.

On the flip side, some practicality is sacrificed at the altar of style – namely restricted rear entry/exit access due to the liftback's sloping roofline, which also means

limited headroom for taller folk and hampered vision out. Though shallow, at least the luggage area is usefully long and wide.

Meanwhile, behind the 508's glitzy grille is a feisty 1.6-litre four-cylinder turbo developed with BMW, driving the front wheels via a slick eight-speed automatic courtesy of Toyota.

Whether in Normal, Comfort or Eco modes, initial acceleration is immediate and lag free, with speed building strongly yet smoothly right up to the red line; in Sport, lower ratios are held longer for forceful performance, though the transmission's tendency to hang on to a gear can get tiresome around town. The paddle shifters are useful here.

Solidifying the GT image is quick and eager steering, providing crisp handling response as well as welcome feedback; turn up the wick and the 508's cornering poise and confidence is reminiscent of Peugeots of old. We're talking golden-era 405s. Sharing baby brother 308's accomplished EMP2

architecture, and enhanced with adaptive dampers, the result is a calm, quiet and cossetting ride as required, or a firmer set-up in Sport mode offering terrific agility and control. Our only real dynamic grumble concerns some occasional coarse-bitumen road-noise intrusion -- just like most of the German premium sedans the Peugeot sets out to conquer, as it turns out. You should also note that Redbook's predicted trade in values for the 508 are very weak.

Luxurious, athletic, affordable and alluring, the 508 GT possesses all the right stuff for the marque to join the premium big league. Take one for a drive before you sign up for an Audi, BMW or Mercedes.

By Byron Mathioudakis

THINGS WE LIKE

- ✓ Beautiful styling
- ✓ Premium cabin presentation
- ✓ Comfortable seating
- ✓ Strong performance with low fuel consumption
- ✓ Long list of standard features
- ✓ Confident steering and handling

THINGS YOU MIGHT NOT LIKE

- ✗ Peugeot has reliability baggage
- ✗ Poor side/rear vision
- ✗ Back seat access and headroom hampered by low roof
- ✗ Weak resale values
- ✗ Some road-noise intrusion on coarse bitumen

SPEX

- Made in France
- 1.6-litre four-cylinder turbopetrol/eight-speed auto/front-wheel drive
- 165kW of power at 5500rpm/300Nm of torque at 2750rpm
- 0-100km in 8.1 seconds (claimed)
- 5.1L/100km highway, 8.3L/100km city; 95 octane premium; CO2 emissions are 142g/km
- Warranty: Five years/unlimited kilometres
- Standard: Six airbags, stability control, AEB, adaptive cruise with stop/go, lane keep assist, traffic sign recognition, auto high beam, blind-spot monitor, automatic parking, surround-view camera, LED headlights, adaptive suspension, Nappa leather upholstery, wireless phone charging, dual-zone air, navigation, digital radio, Apple CarPlay/Android Auto, 18-inch alloys, space-saver spare
- Redbook future values: 3yr: 39%; 5yr: 24%

STARS ★★★★★

- Safety ★★★★★ Euro NCAP
- Performance ★★★★★
- Handling ★★★★★
- Quality and reliability ★★★★★
- Comfort and refinement ★★★★★
- Value for money ★★★★★
- Overall** ★★★★★



compare with ...

Alfa Giulia, Audi A4, BMW 3 Series, Mercedes C-Class, Skoda Superb, VW Passat, Volvo S60/V60



Most car reviewers head for the driver's seat when a new model arrives.

With the seven-seat Peugeot 5008 GT, however, you're best to start your test drive at the tailgate.

You might be wowed by the dealer opening the rear hatch with a deft swing of their foot near a sensor hidden under the bumper.

Each of the back two seats can be removed in about 15 seconds, creating a large, deep load area or, if you play with the Meccano-like plastic support planks, a flat cargo space with a cubby underneath.

Adding to its flexibility, each of the three seats in the second row can slide forward or back, or be folded flat individually, enabling you to find the right balance between carrying kids and cargo.

The final flourish: each of the three seats in the second row also has ISOFIX child restraint mounting points, making it one of the few SUVs that can

fit three child restraint seats across one row.

As a parent, this is about as exciting as cars get. And you've not even left the showroom.

The widescreen digital dash will keep parents and kids amused as they switch between screens; it's best to practise toggling through the menus before you join the traffic, though.

The central touchscreen looks great but, to be frank, it's an ergonomic disaster. Whoever designed and tested this system did so while they were sitting at a desk, not trying to operate a motor vehicle.

Most touchscreen tasks take several annoying steps, so you must take your eyes off the road for far too long.

A 360-degree camera is standard, but Peugeot has cut corners by fitting either low-quality cameras or low-quality screens — or both — because the picture is not very good, especially at night.

There are two models in the range, with two engines.

5008 GT, priced at \$51,990, is powered by a 121kW/240Nm 1.6-litre turbo four-cylinder petrol engine, matched to a six-speed auto and front-wheel drive.

A 133kW/400Nm 2.0-litre turbodiesel/eight-speed auto GT is \$59,990.

Standard equipment includes fake leather/Alcantara upholstery, a power-operated tailgate and the full range of driver assist safety tech.

The 1.6-litre turbopetrol engine is underpowered for a vehicle of this size, but it's reasonably tractable, significantly cheaper than the diesel and relatively fuel efficient. The diesel really only makes sense for those doing a lot of highway driving.

Perversely, though, it's matched to a noisier 19-inch wheel and tyre combination, which also makes you feel the bumps more than you do in the

petrol-powered variants on 18s.

Peugeot's signature small steering wheel is an advantage in tight city streets but can feel too direct on a winding back road, especially given the size and weight of the car.

It will feel good on a test drive around the block, but try to find a stretch of freeway and/or a winding road to make sure you can live with the directness of the small steering wheel.

The Peugeot 5008 deserves a look but, while you're daring to be different, be sure to sample a Mazda CX-8, Škoda Kodiaq, VW Tiguan Allspace or Kia Sorento, all of which have sharper prices, better performance, more competitive running costs, superior reliability and resale values.

By Joshua Dowling

THINGS WE LIKE

- ✓ Spacious, versatile cabin
- ✓ An A-grade kid carrier
- ✓ Punchy, efficient engines
- ✓ Strong safety credentials
- ✓ Clever removable rear seats

THINGS YOU MIGHT NOT LIKE

- ✗ It's expensive
- ✗ Peugeot's reliability record isn't great
- ✗ Weak resale values
- ✗ Central touchscreen is difficult to navigate
- ✗ Some interior and exterior trim on test cars didn't align
- ✗ No spare tyre in the diesel

SPEX (GT petrol)

- Made in France
- 1.6-litre four-cylinder turbopetrol/six-speed automatic/front-wheel drive
- 121kW of power at 6000rpm/240Nm of torque at 1400rpm
- 0-100km/h in 10.5 seconds (claimed)
- 5.3L/100km highway; 9.8L/100km city; premium unleaded; CO2 emissions are 156g/km; fuel tank is 56 litres
- Warranty: Five years/unlimited kilometres
- Standard: Six airbags, stability control, automatic emergency braking, adaptive cruise, lane departure warning, 360-degree camera, parking sensors, automatic parking, dual-zone air, rear window sunblinds, Bluetooth, digital radio, wireless smartphone charging, navigation, 19-inch alloys
- Redbook future values: 3yr: 48%; 5yr: 35%

STARS ★★★★★

- Safety ★★★★★ Euro NCAP
- Performance ★★★★★
- Handling ★★★★★
- Quality and reliability ★★★★★
- Comfort and refinement ★★★★★
- Value for money ★★★★★
- Overall** ★★★★★



compare with ...

Kia Sorento, Mazda CX-9, Škoda Kodiaq, VW Tiguan Allspace

PORSCHE TAYCAN FROM \$190,400



There is perhaps no other car company on the planet with as much to lose in the global shift to electric powertrains as Porsche.

Let's not beat around the bush here. The German powerhouse has been responsible for some of the finest petrol-powered performance cars the world has ever seen. There's nothing Porsche doesn't know about squeezing speed out of a conventional engine, and it's been able to charge handsomely to deliver the products of that knowledge.

But that was before EVs came along, dropping the cost of performance as though they were buying it in bulk from Costco. Now you can buy a Tesla Model 3 for less than \$100,000 and find yourself screaming to 100km/h in a startling 3.4 seconds. That's faster than a \$264,600 Porsche 911 Carrera S.

Eyebrow-peeling acceleration has never been so cheap, and

so for Porsche to really make its mark in the electric world, it needed to produce more than just straight-line speed.

Enter, then, the all-new Porsche Taycan. Late to the EV party, sure. But it's also made one hell of an entrance.

There are three Taycan options on offer so far: the 4S (offered in Performance and Performance Plus guises), the Turbo and the Turbo S, and all are built using the VW Group's 800-volt architecture, instead of a 400-volt system. The idea here wasn't to make the Taycan any faster (although it's plenty fast) but to produce what Porsche refers to as "repeatability".

Or to put it another way, the ability to unleash the Taycan's full performance potential again, and again, and again, without suffering battery fade or needing to give the car a break to recover.

Taycan prices kick off at \$190,400 for the 4S. The

Turbo is \$268,500 and the Turbo S is \$338,500.

The use of the word Turbo is a pure marketing ploy. No turbocharging is involved, obviously.

Let's focus on the Turbo S here, because unleashing performance is its specialty.

Its 93.4kWh battery will deliver a claimed range of up to 412km, and because its set up for 270kW DC fast charging, it can go from five to 80 per cent charged in around 22 minutes, provided you have access to a charger. You can also plug it in at home, with Porsche saying it will take around nine hours to recharge using an (optional) 11kW AC wall mounted charger in your garage.

There are two electric motors, one housed at each axle, producing a combined 460kW. Porsche's "but wait, there's more" moment comes when you engage launch control, which unlocks

even more power (560kW and 1050Nm) for a 2.5 second blast.

That's enough to push the 2.3-tonne Taycan to 100km/h in a scarcely believable 2.8 seconds, from zero to 160km/h in 6.3 seconds, or from a standing start to 200km/h in 9.8 seconds. And still it climbs. We hit 267km/h on a German autobahn and the Taycan still felt a long, long way from breaking into a sweat.

At speed the Taycan can feel heavy, but it also feels supremely composed and confidence inspiring. Sure, you can't help but notice there are no gears to change yourself, or any exhaust to listen to, and you can be left feeling a little detached from the experience, as if you're strapped into a very realistic racing game.

But make no mistake, the Turbo S is the most compete, most driver-focused electric vehicle we've ever encountered.

By Andrew Chesterton

THINGS WE LIKE

- ✓ Endless flow of power
- ✓ Insane acceleration
- ✓ How's the serenity?
- ✓ A true electric driver's car
- ✓ Three-chamber air suspension ensures a sublime ride

THINGS YOU MIGHT NOT LIKE

- ✗ Expensive and weak resale values
- ✗ Not as engaging as a conventional Porsche
- ✗ Not the prettiest Porsche silhouette, either
- ✗ Good luck finding a fast charging station when you need one

SPEX (Turbo S)

- Made in Germany
- Dual electric motors/93.4kWh lithium-ion battery/two-speed automatic/all-wheel drive
- 560kW/1050Nm
- 0-100km/h in 2.8 seconds (claimed)
- Claimed maximum range 388-412km
- Warranty: Three years/unlimited km
- Standard: Six airbags, stability control, adaptive cruise, lane keeping, surround view cameras, digital instruments, navigation, Apple CarPlay, voice control, Porsche Connect, four zone air, leather upholstery, power adjustable sports seats, GT sports steering wheel, Bose sound, matrix LED headlights, carbon ceramic brakes, 21 inch alloy wheels
- Redbook future values: 3yr: 47%; 5yr: 32%

STARS ★★★★★

- Safety ★★★★★ EuroNCAP
- Performance ★★★★★
- Handling ★★★★★
- Quality and reliability ★★★★★
- Comfort and refinement ★★★★★
- Value for money ★★★★★
- Overall** ★★★★★



compare with ...

Tesla Model S



PORSCHE 718 BOXSTER FROM \$115,900



The 718 moniker is used by Porsche to tie the Boxster and Cayman to the famous four-cylinder 718 racers of the late 1950s–early 1960s.

Nervous that the current Boxster roadster and its Cayman coupe sibling, launched in 2017, would meet a less-than-glowing reception due to the change from the much-loved naturally aspirated six-cylinder engines to turbocharged four-cylinder power, it resurrected the 718 badge to demonstrate that the four-cylinder models are genuine performance, pedigreed Porsches.

It's a change that Porsche would probably have preferred not to make, but ever more restrictive EU emissions regulations forced its hand.

Boxster 718, priced at \$115,900, runs a 220kW 2.0-litre four-cylinder turbo engine. Boxster S, at \$138,300, has a 257kW 2.5-litre engine. These outputs are 26kW greater than the previous six-cylinder engines. A six-speed

manual is standard and a seven-speed PDK adds \$2690 to the base model and \$5090 to the S.

A 4.0-litre naturally-aspirated six cylinder/six-speed manual GTS is \$174,800.

The highly desirable Spyder, with the 4.0-litre tuned for 309kW/420Nm, is \$196,800.

The 2.5-litre engine in the Boxster S has its pros and cons compared with the old 3.4-litre naturally-aspirated six.

It's a much more tractable engine in the lower midrange, producing a massive 420Nm of torque from just 1900rpm. It pulls hard and handsome from 2000–7200rpm so you're typically running a gear, or two, higher. It's also a lot quieter in cruise mode, making it a much more relaxing, pleasant and comfortable touring car.

And at the top end, pedal to the metal, it really flies, clocking a claimed 4.2 seconds for the 0–100km/h trip in the PDK

versions tested — 0.6 seconds quicker than the previous model.

Downsides? Porsche has tried to make its force-fed four sound like a big engine with a deep, angry, growly note at low revs, but it just sounds fake and overdone.

It changes at high revs to a loud pneumatic hissing noise that's also pretty awful compared with the howling, mechanical hymn of the six.

And it just doesn't have that immediate, proportionate response to the pedal that a naturally aspirated performance engine does.

This is particularly noticeable in traffic, where throttle response and gear selection are also less smooth and seamless than previously. It improves if you use Sport mode, where PDK isn't as fixated on getting to seventh gear as quickly as possible to minimise fuel consumption.

In other respects, the 718 is a good thing made better.

On a tight, winding road, the new Boxster is superb, with even sharper steering and sportier dynamics. Four-piston front brakes lifted from the 911 further improve stopping power while optional PASM adaptive suspension (\$2710) permits a reasonably compliant, comfortable ride.

The interior features Porsche's usual comfortable, supportive seat, a swish new infotainment system with a larger touchscreen and voice control, a wheel-mounted switch for drivetrain/suspension adjustment (with a button that primes the engine with revs for 20 seconds in anticipation of your need to overtake) and useful-sized storage compartments at either end.

The numbers say that the 2.5-litre four-cylinder turbo 718 Boxster S is a better car, but the previous model's 3.4-litre atmo six is sorely missed.

THINGS WE LIKE

- ✓ Brilliant dynamics
- ✓ Comfortable ride on PASM
- ✓ Quiet in cruise mode
- ✓ Wide spread of usable performance
- ✓ Good fuel efficiency
- ✓ Reasonable storage for a convertible

THINGS YOU MIGHT NOT LIKE

- ✗ Makes ugly noises
- ✗ Jerky and hesitant drivetrain in traffic
- ✗ Vibration off idle
- ✗ Lacks the responsiveness of a naturally aspirated engine
- ✗ Voice control doesn't speak Australian
- ✗ \$1090 for Apple CarPlay? Gouge.

SPEX (S WITH PDK)

- Made in Germany
- 2.5-litre four-cylinder turbopetrol/seven-speed PDK/rear-wheel drive
- 257kW of power at 6500rpm; 420Nm of torque from 1900–4500rpm
- 6.0L/100km highway; 9.5L/100km city; 98 octane premium; CO₂ emissions are 167g/km
- Warranty: Three years/unlimited kilometres
- Standard: Stability control, four airbags, leather upholstery, alarm, parking sensors, Bluetooth, digital radio, voice control, navigation, heated, power adjustable seats, 19-inch alloys
- Redbook future values: 3yr: 62%; 5yr: 49%

STARS ★★★★★

- Safety **Not yet tested**
- Performance ★★★★★
- Handling ★★★★★
- Quality and reliability ★★★★★
- Comfort and refinement ★★★★★
- Value for money ★★★★★
- Overall** ★★★★★



compare with ...

Audi TTS, BMW M240i, BMW Z4, Jaguar F-Type

PORSCHE CAYMAN FROM \$113,100



The Porsche 718 Cayman repeated the success of its predecessors by scooping World Performance Car of the Year in 2017, marking a trio of wins since it became the hardtop companion to the Boxster in 2005.

It was thoroughly deserved and came despite — or perhaps because of — new drivelines that changed the car's character, with the previous 2.7-litre and 3.4-litre six-cylinder naturally aspirated engines replaced by turbocharged boxer four-cylinders of 2.0-litres and 2.5-litres.

The fours share DNA with the turbo 3.0-litre sixes now in the 911 and bring both more power (18kW for each) and efficiency gains of up to 13 per cent.

The Cayman's previous slight power advantage over the Boxster disappears with the 718 and the coupe becomes the entry model for the first time, with the 220kW 2.0-litre and six-speed manual for \$113,100.

No-one who enjoys three-pedal driving will be disappointed with this delightful manual, although the seven-speed dual-clutch PDK transmission delivers quicker acceleration and, thanks to its better fuel economy (and hence lower luxury car tax), becomes a bargain option on the base car, adding \$2443. As before, this automatic is one of the best around, complementing the driver with seemingly intuitive shifts.

The 257kW 2.5 in the Cayman S starts at \$135,500 for the manual with the auto adding \$5090. It has a more sophisticated turbocharger, twin tailpipes, thicker front brakes and 19-inch alloys instead of 18s.

A 294kW 4.0-litre naturally-aspirated six/six-speed manual GT4 is \$172,000.

GT4, with the 4.0-litre tuned for 309kW/420Nm is \$206,600.

With these engines, Cayman steps up in performance with all bar the base 2.0-litre manual capable of sub-5.0 second sprints to 100km/h. The S with PDK and the Sports Chrono optional performance pack (\$4670) hits the ton in just 4.2 seconds — that's as fast as a 911 Carrera costing at least \$70k more.

They feel quick, too, with forced induction moving the torque peaks thousands of revs lower, to just 1900rpm. That makes Cayman relaxed around town and blisteringly responsive when you demand everything from it.

Porsche has reworked the chassis for the 718 to minimise pitch and roll and the result is a car that feels rock solid on the road and capable of intense cornering speeds.

Its damping and composure is first rate and feeds straight into unmatched seat-of-the-pants

engagement for the driver. Few cars are as easy to drive fast and yet still rewarding. It turns in sweetly and hangs on with balance and precision.

Optional active suspension lowers the car 10mm and makes it even more effective while improving already impressive ride quality.

As with the Boxster, a big lift in cabin presentation as well as better equipment levels help its case. One slight advantage of the Cayman is additional luggage space inside. Downsides include the lack of a wiper for the rear glass and a thrummy quality to the engine sound when cruising.

Some will miss the creamy swirl and seductive sounds of the six-cylinder units, too.

The fours are different, but as lively and vocal in their own ways. With the 718, Cayman reinforces its claim to being the benchmark driver's coupe.

By Phil King

THINGS WE LIKE

- ✓ Accelerates as fast as a 911
- ✓ The 4.0-litre six is a beautiful thing too
- ✓ Top drawer handling from balanced chassis
- ✓ Strong resale values
- ✓ Much-improved cabin

THINGS YOU MIGHT NOT LIKE

- ✗ No spare tyre
- ✗ Options quickly bump the price
- ✗ Thrummy engine noise when cruising
- ✗ No rear wiper

SPEX (2.5S PDK)

- Made in Germany
- 2.5-litre horizontally-opposed four-cylinder turbopetrol/seven-speed dual-clutch automatic/rear-wheel drive
- 257kW of power at 6500rpm/420Nm of torque from 1900–4500rpm
- 0–100km/h in 4.4 seconds (claimed)
- 6.1 L/100km highway; 9.6L/100km city; 98 octane premium; CO₂ emissions are 169g/km
- Warranty: Three years/unlimited km
- Standard: Four airbags, stability control, 19-inch alloys, bi-xenon headlights, power sports seats, partial leather upholstery and trim, parking sensors, tyre pressure monitoring, touch control screen with navigation, Bluetooth and digital radio
- Redbook future values: 3yr: 62%; 5yr: 49%

STARS ★★★★★

- Safety **Not yet tested**
- Performance ★★★★★
- Handling ★★★★★
- Quality and reliability ★★★★★
- Comfort and refinement ★★★★★
- Value for money ★★★★★
- Overall** ★★★★★



compare with ...

Audi TT RS, BMW M2, Toyota Supra



PORSCHE 911 CARRERA FROM \$236,300



Eight generations since its introduction in 1964, the 911 moves even further down the road of luxurious grand touring and away from its raw, racy origins.

Carrera coupe, with a 283kW/450Nm 3.0-litre turbo six, costs \$236,300 with the eight-speed PDK.

Carrera cabriolet is \$258,200.

Carrera S Coupe, priced from \$274,600, or Cabriolet, from \$296,500, naturally ups the ante on performance with an additional 22kW/30Nm. Carrera S now achieves a sub-4.0 second time to 100km/h, so it's a genuine supercar.

The 4 Targa is \$275,400; 4S is \$313,700.

All-wheel drive Carrera 4 coupe is \$253,300 and 4S is \$291,800. Cabriolet variants are \$275,400/\$313,700.

The Turbo coupe is \$396,500; the cabrio is \$417,500. The Turbo S, with a 478kW twin turbo 3.8-litre six and all-wheel drive, costs \$473,500 for the coupe and \$494,500 for the cabriolet.

Mixed-size wheels for the first time (20-inch on fronts, 21-inch

on rears) help put power down in rear-drive cars although all-wheel drive S variants still have the edge off-the-line. The dual-clutch gearbox gains a ratio (now eight) with maximum speed of more than 300km/h achieved in sixth.

The glorious tunes made by naturally-aspirated 911 engines have been lost with turbocharging, but this unit does mean business and sounds fine when you ask for its best.

Thanks to the extra drag and weight of the roof, cabriolets are marginally slower than Coupes but there's plenty of responsive pace, the gearbox is telepathic, and control weights precise.

The steering remains a highlight even in the electrically-assisted era.

Active suspension is part of the deal and although chassis balance is not a given with this rear-engine layout, it has been programmed into the car.

There's no sense of pendulous weight behind the rear axle.

Every body movement is finely damped and calibrated.

So it points predictably and somehow retains the pleasing nuances you expect in a 911 – albeit under a blanket of civility.

The cabin benefits from a substantial rise in design flair, with a glossy and technical flavour like the Panamera.

It's quiet inside, the seats are excellent and ride quality very good, partly thanks to extra body rigidity. Even the Cabriolet feels extremely solid while its new roof is a masterclass in fabric origami. It does compromise rear vision and add weight (70kg) compared to the Coupe but even roof down you'll be almost as snug thanks to a power-operated wind deflector.

The exterior revises lights and other details, and all 911s get the wide-haunch shape which used to be reserved for all-wheel drive variants.

Porsche says the bonnet is inspired by 1970s G Series 911s, but in every other respect this is a very different car.

Some purists might not like it, but the current range of turbocharged 911s are just as devastating and delightful on the right piece of road as their illustrious predecessors.

By Phil King

THINGS WE LIKE

- ✓ Smooth, responsive flat six
- ✓ Excellent traction
- ✓ Nuanced, engaging handling
- ✓ Upgraded cabin materials
- ✓ Great resale values

THINGS YOU MIGHT NOT LIKE

- ✗ Rawness of earlier 911s now long gone
- ✗ Retractable door handles tricky
- ✗ Cabriolet's rear "hump" spoils its lines
- ✗ Adaptive cruise is optional

SPEX (S Coupe)

- Made in Germany
- 3.0-litre twin-turbocharged flat-six/eight-speed dual clutch automatic/rear or all-wheel drive
- 331kW of power at 6500rpm/530Nm of torque from 2300-5000rpm
- 0-100km/h in 3.6 seconds [4S Coupe] to 3.9s [S Cabriolet]
- 7.2L/100km highway; 13.4L/100km city; 98 octane premium; CO2 emissions are 216g/km [Coupe]
- Warranty: Three years/unlimited km
- Standard: Four airbags, stability control, alarm, autonomous emergency braking, parking assistance, parking sensors, lane change assist, blind spot monitoring, LED head and tail-lights, heated seats, leather trim, DAB, Apple CarPlay connectivity
- Redbook future values: 3yr: 65%; 5yr: 59%

STARS ★★★★★

- Safety **Not yet tested**
- Performance ★★★★★
- Handling ★★★★★
- Quality and reliability ★★★★★
- Comfort and refinement ★★★★★
- Value for money ★★★★★
- Overall** ★★★★★



compare with ...

Aston Martin Vantage, Ferrari Portofino, Jaguar F-Type, Lamborghini Huracan, McLaren 570

PORSCHE MACAN FROM \$84,300



Porsche's Macan range opens with the 185kW/370Nm 2.0-litre turbopetrol base model at \$84,300. The 260kW/480Nm 3.0-litre V6 twin-turbopetrol Macan S is \$100,800. The 280kW/520Nm 2.9-litre twin-turbo GTS is \$112,300 and the 324kW/550Nm 2.9-litre twin-turbo Macan Turbo is \$145,200.

All variants are fitted with Porsche's exceptionally slick-shifting seven-speed dual-clutch PDK transmission, permanent all-wheel drive and Off-Road electronic drive modes.

In the aftermath of Dieselgate, Porsche has become a no diesel outfit, so the previous Macan 3.0-litre V6 turbodiesel was dropped from the range in 2019.

The Macan is more expensive than Audi's Q5 (with which it shares around 30 per cent of its components), BMW's X3 or the Range Rover Evoque. But even a cursory glance at its specifications suggests that Porsche offers

segment-leading performance, though Alfa Romeo's lovely Stelvio is also a joy to drive.

Porsche's self-penned "sports car of the (mid-sized) SUV segment" claim is backed up by healthy numbers. For the 0-100km/h sprint, they are 5.1 seconds (S) and a scintillating 4.5 seconds (Turbo) when equipped with the optional Sport Chrono pack, with launch control and more aggressive drivetrain mapping.

That's still half a second shy of Alfa's (possibly optimistic) claim for its Stelvio QV.

The PDK transmissions perform beautifully and are intuitively mated to any of the available engines.

The Turbo certainly feels very quick, but the margin of pace between the all-alloy petrol V6s isn't as wide as one might expect. Both versions are easily capable of antisocial public road velocity with little provocation,

and a pace few owners might harness on a regular basis.

Dynamically, nothing will hang on to the Macan Turbo's tyre tracks when the bitumen begins to twist and turn. A closer handling match-up would be Macan S against Audi SQ5. Both share a similar pricepoint and familial DNA. However the Macan feels nothing like an Audi and everything like a Porsche.

There are really no dynamic lowlights. The steering — a real Porsche specialty — is inspired. Grip? Incredible in Turbo, robust in either S, though there comes a point, well beyond where most owners will dare, that Macan's hefty mass — 1880-1925kg, depending on the variant — overcomes its manic roadholding and superb poise.

Braking? Porsche does some of the best in the biz. And while six-piston monobloc front anchors might seem excessive for a family-moving device, the

power of such engineering is duly noticed at a quick clip.

But does it work as an SUV? Ride comfort-wise, absolutely. Macan strikes an impressive ride/handling balance.

Inside, all the key Porsche hallmarks are included: an excellent seating position, the stacked centre console switches, centrally located tachometer, polished alloy and soft-touch surfaces in all the right places. There's nothing built-to-price about the touchy-feely experience, though infotainment and driver assist safety tech are off the pace, as is usual for Porsche.

Porsche clearly favoured form — namely the exterior shape and proportions of Macan — over functional boot space, but the boot is still quite useable by its segment's standards.

Macan is in a class of its own as a sports SUV. It's resale values are also higher than any other vehicle on the market.

THINGS WE LIKE

- ✓ Proper Porsche vibe
- ✓ Class-leading performance
- ✓ Superb ride/handling balance
- ✓ Great resale values
- ✓ Classy interior

THINGS YOU MIGHT NOT LIKE

- ✗ Pricey, but you get what you pay for
- ✗ Dated, clunky infotainment
- ✗ Lacking a comprehensive driver assist safety specification
- ✗ The usual expensive Porsche options

SPEX (Macan S)

- Made in Germany
- 3.0-litre V6 turbo/seven-speed PDK/ all-wheel drive
- 260kW of power from 5400-6400rpm/480Nm of torque from 1360-4800rpm
- 0-100km/h in 5.3 seconds
- 8.5L/100km highway; 11.7L/100km city; 98 octane premium; CO₂ emissions are 223g/km.
- Warranty: Three years/unlimited kilometres
- Standard: Eight airbags, stability control, automatic air-conditioning, front and rear parking sensors, reversing camera, rain-sensing wipers, roof rails, alarm, navigation, 20-inch alloys, tinted rear windows, leather, USB input, 40GB hard disc storage, bi-xenon headlights, tyre pressure monitoring, power tailgate
- Redbook future values: 3yr: 70%; 5yr: 60%

STARS ★★★★★

- Safety ★★★★★
- Green Vehicle Guide ★★★★★
- Performance ★★★★★
- Handling ★★★★★
- Quality and reliability ★★★★★
- Comfort and refinement ★★★★★
- Value for money ★★★★★
- Overall** ★★★★★



compare with ...

Alfa Stelvio, Audi Q5, BMW X3/X4, Jaguar F-Pace, Mercedes GLC



PORSCHE CAYENNE FROM \$121,300



Porsche's Cayenne — the third generation, launched in mid-2018 — starts at \$121,300. The base model runs a 250kW/450Nm 3.0-litre turbopetrol V6, with an eight-speed auto and permanent all-wheel drive, in high range only.

A 340kW/700Nm plug-in hybrid Cayenne, priced at \$141,200, is intended to appeal to cashed-up fuel-misers.

Cayenne S, from \$161,500, is powered by a 324kW/550Nm 2.9-litre twin-turbo V6 petrol engine.

Cayenne GTS, priced from \$192,500, runs a twin-turbo 4.0-litre V8 with 338kW of power. This rises to 404kW/770Nm in the Cayenne Turbo, at \$246,000.

The plug-in Turbo S E-Hybrid, with 500kW/900Nm, is \$292,200.

Cayenne coupe is available in the same model grades, starting at \$133,700 for the S and topping out at \$297,900 for the Hybrid.

Only partial automatic emergency braking is standard

on Cayenne, although it can detect pedestrians and cyclists. Radar cruise control and a more advanced AEB system that will bring the vehicle to a complete stop is a \$3790 option.

Lane keeping assistance that steers the car within marked lines is a \$1390 option.

Notable safety omissions include rear cross-traffic alert and speed sign recognition.

Considering radar cruise control and lane keeping assistance are standard on a \$26,000 Kia Cerato sedan and rear cross traffic alert is fitted to most newly introduced SUVs priced from less than \$50,000, it's a bit rich for these features not to be standard on a six-figure Porsche.

Wireless phone charging is also conspicuous by its absence. Apple CarPlay, digital radio and navigation can be accessed via the high-resolution 12.3-inch touchscreen, but Android Auto is not available.

A new sliding and tilting back seat has increased both boot space and rear legroom, but for now there's no prospect of a seven-seat version.

The base Cayenne V6 with standard suspension and optional 21-inch wheels and low-profile tyres is a touch jittery and noisy on back roads. It would be quieter and more comfortable on the standard 19-inch wheel and tyre package.

That said, it steers with incredible precision and the body barely leans in corners.

It also has enough oomph to warrant the Porsche badge. Able to complete 0 to 100km/h dash in just 6.1 seconds (on our timing equipment, 0.1 better than Porsche's claim), it's faster than most hot hatches.

Surprisingly, the single-turbo V6 kicks in at lower revs than the twin-turbo V6 in the Cayenne S, giving it slightly better responsiveness when overtaking.

Cayenne S lacks aural character but with an as-tested acceleration time of 5.1 seconds (0.2 slower than claimed), it's marginally quicker than the original Cayenne Turbo V8.

Equipped with "three chamber" air suspension standard, the Cayenne S and Turbo iron out bumps better than the base model.

The Turbo is mind-bogglingly quick: faster than Porsche's claim of 4.1 seconds in the 0 to 100km/h dash. We repeatedly stopped the clocks in just 3.8 seconds — in both directions on the same stretch of tarmac to account for changes in the road and weather — using precision timing equipment. The best number was actually 3.78 seconds — astounding for a 2.2-tonne SUV.

By Joshua Dowling

THINGS WE LIKE

- ✓ Impressive performance across all models
- ✓ Upmarket interior
- ✓ Roomy cabin and boot
- ✓ Sharp handling and precise steering for a big SUV
- ✓ High resale values

THINGS YOU MIGHT NOT LIKE

- ✗ Suspension a bit jittery on back roads when equipped with larger wheels and low-profile tyres
- ✗ Missing a long list of tech and safety features standard on SUVs that cost less than \$50,000
- ✗ Price is up there, even by luxury standards

SPEX (S)

- Made in Slovakia
- 2.9-litre twin-turbo V6 petrol/eight-speed automatic/all-wheel drive
- 324kW of power at 5700-6600rpm; 550Nm of torque from 1800-5500rpm
- 0-100km/h in 5.2 seconds (claimed)
- 8.4L/100km highway; 11.8L/100km city; 98 octane premium; CO2 emissions are 213gkm; fuel tank is 90 litres
- Max towing weight: 3500kg
- Warranty: Three years/unlimited km
- Standard: Ten airbags, stability control, partial automatic emergency braking, blind spot monitoring, parking sensors, 360-degree camera, tyre pressure monitoring, 20-inch alloys, turning LED headlights, Bluetooth, Apple CarPlay, navigation, voice control, digital radio, 4 x USB sockets, heated front seats, partial leather upholstery, power tailgate
- Redbook future values: 3yr: 59%; 5yr: 44%

STARS ★★★★★

- Safety **Not yet tested**
- Performance ★★★★★
- Handling ★★★★★
- Quality and reliability ★★★★★
- Comfort and refinement ★★★★★
- Value for money ★★★★★
- Overall** ★★★★★



compare with ...

Audi Q8, BMW X5, Maserati Levante, Mercedes GLE



In the distant future, automotive historians will look back at the original Evoque as a turning point for social-climbing small SUVs.

Endorsed by Victoria Beckham, the petite premium Brit has become the darling of the *Goop!* generation, with its hotly-received looks influencing subsequent Range Rovers since.

That's why the second generation looks almost identical, yet is all-new bar some powertrains. Slightly larger in every dimension, the 2020 Evoque brandishes a complete platform overhaul as well as a glitzy interior redesign, resulting in more rear-seat room. The boot's bigger too.

The Evoque lineup has been trimmed for 2021 and is now down to four variants.

A 2.0-litre turbopetrol powers the base 147kW/320Nm P200 R-Dynamic S, priced at \$67,415.

It's chipped for 184kW/365Nm in the \$74,973 P250 R-Dynamic SE and \$79,662 R-Dynamic HSE.

There's now just one turbodiesel, a 150kW/430Nm 2.0-litre four with mild hybrid assistance, in the \$76,685 R-Dynamic D200 SE.

Drive goes to all four wheels in high range only via a nine-speed automatic transmission.

The diesel's 48-volt mild-hybrid tech features a belt-driven generator and lithium-ion battery that leverages regenerative braking charging to boost low-speed acceleration, while enhancing economy with engine stop/start functionality.

Off the bitumen, the fresh Terrain Response 2 system can automatically select modes like gravel, mud, sand and snow as required.

Approach angles rise, departure angles fall, while ground clearance (212mm) and wading depth (600mm) increase.

All three model grades include autonomous emergency braking, lane-keep assist and traffic sign recognition, as well as twin touchscreens and digital instruments. Some familiarity is required to obtain the most from this set-up, but it all works well enough.

Configurable 'Pivi' touchscreen infotainment is also standard, enhancing an obviously more spacious cabin that looks and feels richer than ever, backed up by an excellent driving position, firm but supportive seating, thoughtful storage solutions and an

impressive degree of isolation from the outside world.

Driver-assist safety tech such as blind-spot monitoring and rear cross-traffic alert is now standard. 'Clear Sight Ground View' projection of the terrain directly ahead and below (as if the bonnet is invisible) on to the rear view mirror for safer progress, plus rear-view mirror tele screen broadcasting what's directly behind (for dramatically clearer views in any environment or time of day) and adaptive dampers are optional.

While commendably muted, smooth and economical, the lower-powered diesel is leisurely off the line, until its prodigious, electric-assisted torque kicks in for more rapid responses.

The sweet-spinning petrol engines, meanwhile, are substantially livelier at lower speeds, though conversely don't quite have the sheer muscle of their diesel sibling when overtaking, though they are ultimately faster.

Over twisty turns, the petrol-powered models also offer an edge, with their lighter front end and more precise handling, though all Evoques

enjoy tenacious grip. The tautly-sprung R-Dynamic suspension, now standard, gives the littlest Rangie displays nearly car-like cornering agility, but beware that the suspension can feel too stiff over rougher roads. Spend the extra cash on adaptive dampers.

Overall, then, the 2020 Evoque is more of the same in a quieter, roomier and more tech-heavy package.

Now, Evoque offers an even greater breadth of abilities commensurate with the brand's glamorous reputation – whether uptown or down some dirt track.

Just remember, even for a luxury small SUV, this social climber doesn't come cheap.

By Byron Mathioudakis

THINGS WE LIKE

- ✓ Iconic Evoque styling
- ✓ Surprising off-road capability
- ✓ R-Dynamic chassis
- ✓ Comfy, supportive seats
- ✓ Muscular performance
- ✓ Strong resale values

THINGS YOU MIGHT NOT LIKE

- ✗ Mild hybrid diesel is sluggish initially
- ✗ Limited side and rear vision due to shallow glass areas
- ✗ Stiff ride on bigger wheels without adaptive damper option
- ✗ Short warranty

SPEX (P250)

- Made in England
- 2.0-litre four-cylinder turbopetrol/nine-speed automatic/all-wheel drive
- 184kW of power at 5500rpm/365Nm of torque at 1300-4500rpm
- 0-100km in 7.5 seconds (claimed)
- 6.6L/100km highway, 10.2L/100km city; 95 octane; CO2 emissions are 184g/km. Fuel tank is 67 litres
- Warranty: Three years/100,000 kilometres
- Max towing capacity is 1800kg (2000kg diesel)
- Standard: Six airbags, stability control, pedestrian airbag and deployable bonnet, AEB, cruise control with speed limiter, engine stop/start, lane keep assist, traffic sign recognition, blind spot monitoring, rear cross traffic alert, surround cameras, parking sensors, LED headlights, dual-zone air, navigation, WiFi hotspot, Apple CarPlay/Android Auto, part-leather upholstery, 20-inch alloys, space-saver spare
- Redbook future values: 3yr: 61%; 5yr: 49%

STARS ★★★★★

- Safety ★★★★★ EuroNCAP
- Performance ★★★★★
- Handling ★★★★★
- Quality and reliability ★★★★★
- Comfort and refinement ★★★★★
- Value for money ★★★★★
- Overall** ★★★★★



compare with ...

- Audi Q3, BMW X2, Lexus UX, Mercedes-Benz GLA, Volvo XC40, VW Tiguan and T-Roc



If BMW'S X6 initiated the sports-luxury coupe SUV thing, then Land Rover is attempting to take the concept to new ground-breaking levels — literally — with the go-anywhere Velar.

Squeezed between the compact Evoque and more family-focused Sport, this is only the fourth model line in nearly half a century of Range Rovers, and shares most of its underpinnings with the Jaguar F-Pace. That means aluminium-intensive monocoque construction.

Unlike the Jaguar, however, there's proper off-road tech in the Velar, including Terrain Response multi-mode chassis configuration to help traverse more challenging environments, and a rear-locking differential.

The variant choices are bewildering, beginning with the P250 Standard AWD from \$81,647, and stretching to the \$176,048 SV Autobiography Dynamic Edition AWD.

Between them are S, SE, HSE and R Dynamic model grades. Seven engine options are on offer and they all drive all four wheels,

in high range only, via a slick-shifting eight-speed automatic.

In the four-cylinder petrol corner are the P250 and P300, powered by a box-fresh 2.0-litre unit in single-turbo 184kW/365Nm and twin-turbo 221kW/400Nm guises respectively. While no slouches, both engines require a determined right foot and plenty of revs to really start moving. Six seconds to 100km/h for the more powerful version is possible.

More urge required? Try the 280kW/450Nm 3.0-litre supercharged V6, the heart of the P380 flagship and the one that really reels in the horizon.

If low fuel consumption is a priority, Range Rover obliges with yet another pair of 2.0-litre turbodiesels, the single-turbo D180 (132kW/430Nm) and twin-turbo D240 (177kW/500Nm).

The slower of the two still returns respectable acceleration (0-100km/h in 8.9 seconds) and can average an official 5.4 litres per 100km. Refinement in both is outstanding.

All the vehicles we tested featured optional air suspension, which does a fine job soaking up bumps (and noises), but you'd never call this Range Rover a driver's car.

The steering, while agreeably agile and reactive, is too devoid of feeling and there's no escaping that lardy, lofty feel of a two-tonne SUV.

Riding in the Velar is quite the otherworldly experience, not least because it features a trio of sizeable screens, set within a dash that is strikingly futuristic in its clean, near-button-less presentation.

Touch and swipe tech highlights the cutting-edge design priority of the Velar's beautiful fascia.

However, fit and finish isn't quite up to Range Rover standards if you dig a little deeper inside that plush interior. There is ample room for five adults and a fair amount of luggage capacity too.

Please note that the difference between models in terms of equipment and ambience. Niceties like perforated leather,

premium audio, an all-digital interactive driver display, matrix LED headlights, heated and cooled seats, adaptive cruise control, panoramic sunroofs and wheel arch-filling 22-inch alloys cost extra in the lower-spec models.

Arriving shortly is the 2021 Velar update, with the base P250 retained, priced at \$87,000, and new mild hybrid P400 294kW 3.0-litre straight six turbopetrol and P200 150kW 2.0-litre four cylinder turbodiesel drivetrains, priced respectively from \$117,000 and \$96,000. These replace the current D180/240/300 and P300/380/550 variants in a five model lineup, down from 50 at launch in 2017.

By Byron Mathioudakis

THINGS WE LIKE

- ✓ Striking design inside and out
- ✓ Commanding driving position
- ✓ Strong engine performance
- ✓ True off-road capability
- ✓ Supple ride on optional air suspension
- ✓ Advanced multimedia system

THINGS YOU MIGHT NOT LIKE

- ✗ Stingy equipment levels in Standard variant
- ✗ Expensive options
- ✗ Land Rover's reputation for unreliability
- ✗ Some cheap plastic trim
- ✗ Very high prices in the upper-model range
- ✗ Top-heavy handling feel

SPEX (D240)

- Made in England
- 2.0-litre four-cylinder turbodiesel/eight-speed auto/four-wheel drive
- 177kW of power at 4000rpm/500Nm of torque at 1500rpm
- 0-100km in 7.3 seconds (claimed)
- 5.1L/100km highway, 7.2L/100km city; diesel; CO² emissions are 154g/km
- Warranty: Three years/100,000km
- The fuel tank holds 60 litres
- Maximum towing weight is 2500kg
- Standard: Six airbags, stability control, autonomous emergency braking, lane departure warning, reversing camera, rear parking assist, trailer stability assist, hill-start and descent control, tyre pressure monitoring, gesture-controlled powered tailgate, LED headlights, keyless entry, Bluetooth, navigation, voice control, 18-inch alloy wheels
- Redbook future values: 3yr: 55%; 5yr: 43%

STARS ★★★★★

- Safety ★★★★★
- Performance ★★★★★
- Handling ★★★★★
- Quality and reliability ★★★★★
- Comfort and refinement ★★★★★
- Value for money ★★★★★
- Overall** ★★★★★



compare with ...

Alfa Stelvio, Audi Q5, BMW X3/X4, Jaguar F-Pace, Mercedes GLC, Porsche Macan, Volvo XC60

RENAULT MEGANE RS FROM \$53,990



The fight in the dog, it's said, counts for more than the dog in the fight. While the engine under the bonnet of the 2021 Renault Megane RS Trophy is smaller than before, it's a very forty four...

Its central exhaust pipes bark when the RS's double-clutch transmission snaps to a higher gear as the tachometer needle swings towards the red zone.

The upshift drops engine revs into the best part of the turbocharged 1.8-litre engine's boost zone. Then the rush of acceleration resumes.

Power and torque maxima of 221kW and 400Nm put the Megane RS well in the action in this very competitive \$45,000-\$55,000 hot-hatch pack.

There's smoothness to go with the Renault Sport engine's strength.

Induction noise is artificially enhanced, but it's subtly done and sounds natural. The engine is polite at low revs and the full-strength turbo thrust that arrives at around 2500rpm flows

unabated all the way to the 7000rpm cut-out.

The Megane RS Trophy with a six-speed manual costs \$53,990. The six-speed double clutch version is \$56,990.

While the engine is exactly what brand fans will expect from Renault Sport, everything else about the new Megane RS is a departure from the formula that earned the badge a stellar reputation in Australia, its third-biggest global market.

There are five doors instead of three and, for the first time, the option of a double-clutch automatic transmission.

Although these changes are certain to greatly broaden the Megane RS's appeal, they don't diminish its street cred.

Renault Sport executives insisted on being able to make changes to the exterior of the basic Megane to create the RS, so it wears different, wider bodywork.

The increases, 60mm over the front wheels and 45mm at the rear

axle, add muscle to the shape.

Specific bumpers, big wheels, wide rubber and slightly lower suspension further enhance the effect.

More important alterations, from a driver's perspective, are hidden.

The new RS has its own version of the 4Control electric rear-steer system featured in the less powerful and now discontinued Megane GT, plus a mechanical limited slip differential and specially developed shock absorbers.

They feature inbuilt hydraulic bump stops, a technology borrowed from rally cars.

These, together with Renault Sport's small but expert alterations to front suspension geometry, make the Megane RS an exceptionally agile and comfortable hot hatch.

The suspension absorbs the baddest of bumps without audible complaint, yet rails around corners. Responses to

even small steering inputs are brilliantly prompt and precise, thanks in part to the car's rear-steer technology. Another bonus of 4Control is a decently tight turning circle. Brembo brakes are standard, as are 19-inch alloy wheels.

Flaws are few. There's wind noise at motorway speeds and tyre noise rises significantly on coarse chip surfaces.

The double-clutch version occasionally dithers over which gear to pick and its column-mounted shift paddles are too short to be truly useful.

Rear seat room isn't best in class. And though the interior features larger instrument and infotainment displays for 2021, plus fine sports front seats, a leather- and Alcantara-wrapped steering wheel and other decorative touches, it lacks the glamour of the exterior.

By John Carey

THINGS WE LIKE

- ✓ Renault Sport always does a great hot hatch
- ✓ Muscular performance
- ✓ One of the best handlers in the class
- ✓ Smooth, precise manual gearbox

THINGS YOU MIGHT NOT LIKE

- ✗ B-grade interior quality
- ✗ Double-clutch gearbox can dither
- ✗ Wind and tyre noise levels can be high
- ✗ Pricey

SPEX (RS Sport)

- Made in Spain
- 1.8-litre turbopetrol four-cylinder/six-speed manual/front-wheel drive
- 221kW of power at 6000rpm/400Nm of torque from 3200-4800rpm
- 0-100km/h in 5.7 seconds (claimed)
- 6.7L/100km highway; 10.9L/100km city; 98 premium; CO2 emissions are 187g/km
- Warranty: Five years/unlimited km
- Standard: Six airbags, stability control, sports seats, 19-inch alloys, LED headlights, head-up display, adaptive cruise control, autonomous emergency braking, blind spot monitoring, camera, hands-free parking, Brembo brakes, 9.3-inch touchscreen, digital radio, Bose audio
- Redbook future values: 3yr: 46%; 5yr: 31%

STARS ★★★★★

- Safety ★★★★★ Euro NCAP
- Performance ★★★★★
- Handling ★★★★★
- Quality and reliability ★★★★★
- Comfort and refinement ★★★★★
- Value for money ★★★★★
- Overall** ★★★★★



compare with ...

Alfa Romeo Giulietta, Ford Focus ST, Honda Civic Type R, Hyundai i30N, Subaru WRX, VW Golf GTi/R

RENAULT KOLEOS FROM \$32,990



French car maker Renault is vying for the hearts and wallets of SUV-obsessed Australia with the stylish, spacious, keenly priced second-generation Koleos.

Kicking things off is the Life 4x2 (for front-wheel drive) from \$32,990, with a camera, rear parking sensors, autonomous emergency braking and lane departure warning, as well as unexpected items such as automatic air, automatic high beam LED headlights and wipers and tyre-pressure monitoring.

Next up is the Zen (yes, they're serious ...) CVT 4x2 from \$36,790, with blind spot monitoring, 360 degree parking sensors, heated front seats (electric adjustability for the driver), keyless entry/start, walk-away self-locking, navigation and 18-inch alloys.

Intens 4x2 at \$43,290 and Intens 4x4, from \$45,790, include automatic headlights and automatic parking, leather and massage driver's seat.

Rivals such as the Mazda CX-5, VW Tiguan, Ford Escape and Subaru Forester offer

superior safety specification, especially at base-model level.

The latest Koleos is one of the most spacious SUVs in its class, offering comfy high-set seating — ground clearance is a lofty 213mm, affording excellent all-round views — and impressive rear-seat legroom.

Modern, clear instruments, ample ventilation, heaps of storage, and a sizeable luggage area (from 458 litres to 1690 litres with the back seats folded) further press home the Renault's family-friendly nature.

Except for the initially confusing touchscreen interface and indicator stalk placed on the left side, there is nothing here to scare away new-to-Renault prospectors.

Apple CarPlay and Android Auto are standard, along with stand alone voice control and two USB sockets.

Conversely, there is nothing French beyond the badge, since the Koleos is basically a rebbed Nissan X-Trail made in South Korea. So if you're a happy Clio

or Megane owner desiring the European SUV experience (as offered by the Skoda Karoq, VW Tiguan and Ford Escape) you might be a little bit disappointed.

Petrol versions are powered by a 126kW/226Nm 2.5-litre four-cylinder petrol engine used in the Nissan X-Trail for yonks. In fact, along with the Nissan Qashqai, they share the same basic architecture — down to the sophisticated multi-link rear suspension.

Driven in bestselling Zen 4x2 guise, the Koleos is an easy, simple and unassuming performer. The CVT automatic is tuned to make the most of the Japanese powertrain, providing lively off-the-line performance and a steady stream of acceleration response as required.

Press harder on the throttle, though, and the 2.5 becomes noticeably vocal, and yet there isn't the expected amount of power available at speed.

And while the steering is light enough to make parking easy, it lacks sufficient weight and feel to

ever engage keener enthusiasts. There is no joy at all to be had with this car's handling.

Worse still, the suspension and 18-inch alloy wheels combo is just too bumpy and loud on anything other than smooth roads; again, this is at odds with the brand's usual supple ride.

Ultimately, then, the MkII Koleos is a mixed bag: proven mechanicals clothed in an attractive, spacious body, but with sub-par performance, ride and refinement. VW's Tiguan, the Skoda Karoq and the Ford Escape are much better — and 100 per cent genuine — Euro SUVs.

By Byron Mathioudakis

THINGS WE LIKE

- ✓ Striking design
- ✓ Roomy interior
- ✓ Generous warranty
- ✓ Very easy to drive
- ✓ Comfortable seats

THINGS YOU MIGHT NOT LIKE

- ✗ Sluggish performance
- ✗ Weak resale values
- ✗ Firm ride on 18-inch wheels
- ✗ Light and lifeless steering
- ✗ Complicated central screen functionality
- ✗ No high-tech driver assist safety tech availability on base model

SPEX (Zen 4x2)

- Made in South Korea
- 2.5-litre four-cylinder petrol/CVT/ front-wheel drive
- 126kW of power at 6000rpm/226Nm of torque at 4400rpm
- 0-100km in 9.5 seconds (claimed)
- 6.7L/100km highway, 10.4L/100km city; 91 octane; CO₂ emissions are 188g/km
- Warranty: Five years/unlimited kilometres
- Fuel tank is 60 litres
- Max towing capacity 2000kg
- Standard: Six airbags, stability control, cruise control with speed limiter, Hill Start Assist, camera, rear parking sensors, automatic air, automatic headlights, rain-sensing wipers, 7.0-inch multimedia screen, Bluetooth phone and audio streaming, AUX ports, two USB ports, leather-wrapped steering wheel, fog lights, LED daytime running lights, 19-inch alloys, tyre-pressure monitoring, full-size spare wheel
- Warranty: Five years/unlimited kilometres
- Redbook future values: 3yr: 42%; 5yr: 24%

STARS ★★★★★

- Safety ★★★★★
- Performance ★★★★★
- Handling ★★★★★
- Quality and reliability ★★★★★
- Comfort and refinement ★★★★★
- Value for money ★★★★★
- Overall** ★★★★★



compare with ...

Honda CRV, Nissan XTrail, Skoda Karoq, Subaru Forester, Toyota RAV4, Volkswagen Tiguan

SKODA SCALA FROM \$26,990



Psst. Wanna buy a cheap VW Golf? This is it: the Skoda Scala.

Let me explain. Skoda is owned by VW and Skoda cars are basically VWs with bespoke bodywork.

The Scala is a reskinned VW Golf. It starts at \$26,990 driveaway for the 110TSi with a 110kW/250Nm 1.5-litre turbopetrol/six-speed manual. The seven-speed dual clutch version is \$28,990 drive away.

The 2021 VW Golf, arriving as we went to press, starts at \$33,490 drive away for the manual. It runs a carryover 1.4-litre engine that's actually older than the Scala's 1.5, but has the same 110kW/250Nm outputs. An eight speed auto replaces the seven-speed twin clutch in the new Golf. It starts at \$35,990 drive away.

The new Golf also has more standard features, including independent rear suspension (the Skoda has a torsion beam), but even so, the \$6500-\$7000 saving on the base model Skoda is a pretty attractive deal,

because it drives...you guessed it...just like a Golf.

The Skoda isn't exactly poverty pack in specification, either, with digital instruments, 18-inch alloys, a power tailgate, wireless phone charging, seven airbags, lane keep assist and adaptive cruise standard on the base model.

Monte Carlo, at \$33,990 driveaway, adds lowered suspension with adjustable dampers, dual zone air, LED headlights and sports seats. Launch Edition, at \$35,990 drive away, also includes leather/suede upholstery, heated front seats, navigation, wireless Apple CarPlay and Android Auto connectivity and automatic park assist.

Only Launch Edition has blind spot monitoring and rear cross traffic alert; if you want them on the base model you have to cough up an extra \$4300 on the Driver Support option pack.

Skoda is on a roll in Australia and it's easy to see why when

you drive the Scala. VW's 1.5-litre is a superb engine, with strong, tractable, responsive performance that belies its small capacity, and great fuel economy, albeit on premium unleaded. Expect 4-5L/100km on the highway and 7-9L/100km in town.

The seven-speed dual clutch shifts in a crisp, timely fashion once under way, but its characteristic hesitation from rest, plus high servicing costs and questionable durability, are probably why VW has now ditched it for a conventional torque convertor auto in the new Golf.

Adaptive suspension in the Launch Edition tested allows you to dial up Normal or Sport modes. The ride is generally compliant and comfortable, but low profile tyres don't like sharp bumps at suburban speeds.

It sits on the road just like a Golf, with complete authority and calm. In normal mode the steering is overassisted; Sport adds feel and precision.



Launch Edition's sports seats are firm and supportive, and tall drivers enjoy plenty of legroom. The VW-style dash and instruments are clear, informative and easy to navigate. Storage includes a big glovebox, small centre console bin and phone tray. Two Type A USBs are provided.

The firm rear bench has enough legroom for most adults, easy access, air vents and two Type A USBs. Three child restraint anchors and two Isofix anchors are provided.

Skoda does a great boot, with several nets provided for securing a load and a reversible rubber/fabric mat. Scala's bespoke body yields greater load capacity than the Golf: 467 litres compared with 380 litre for the VW.

The pick of the Scala range is the base 110TSi, which at under \$30,000 drive away offers great value for money. Think of it as a Golf with a \$6500-\$7000 discount.

THINGS WE LIKE

- ✓ A Golf with a big discount
- ✓ Strong performance and great economy from the 1.5-litre
- ✓ Spacious, comfortable cabin
- ✓ Excellent handling
- ✓ Large, practical boot

THINGS YOU MIGHT NOT LIKE

- ✗ Seven-speed auto hesitates from rest and has had reliability issues
- ✗ Low profile tyres don't like bumps at town speeds
- ✗ Blind spot monitoring and rear cross traffic alert should be standard

SPEX (110TSi auto)

- Made in the Czech Republic
- 1.5-litre four cylinder turbopetrol/seven-speed twin clutch automatic/front-wheel drive
- 110kW of power at 6000rpm; 250Nm of torque from 1500-3500rpm
- 0-100km/h in 8.3 seconds (claimed)
- 4.8L/100km highway; 6.8L/100km city; 95 octane premium; CO2 emissions are 127g/km
- Warranty: Five years/unlimited km
- Standard: Seven airbags, stability control, AEB, lane keep assist, adaptive cruise, digital instruments, eight-inch touchscreen, Apple CarPlay, Android Auto, wireless phone charging, power tailgate, 18-inch alloys, space saver spare.
- Redbook future values: 3yr: 48%; 5yr: 35%

STARS ★★★★★

- Safety ★★★★★ ANCAP
- Performance ★★★★★
- Handling ★★★★★
- Quality and reliability ★★★★★
- Comfort and refinement ★★★★★
- Value for money ★★★★★
- Overall** ★★★★★

compare with ...

Ford Focus, Honda Civic, Mazda 3, Subaru Impreza, Toyota Corolla



SKODA SUPERB FROM \$60,390



There are three models in the Skoda Superb range, which is available with sedan and wagon body styles.

The Sportline 206TSi 2.0-litre turbopetrol sedan, with all-wheel drive, is \$60,390. The wagon is priced at \$62,090.

In Sportline, VW's 2.0-litre produces 206kW of power and 350Nm of torque. A six-speed automated manual DSG transmission is standard.

The Superb Scout 200TSi wagon is priced at \$61,990. It's a faux SUV, with raised, adaptive suspension for more ground clearance, and the 2.0-litre turbopetrol, chipped for 200kW/350Nm, driving all four wheels via a seven-speed DSG.

The Scout engine uses a petrol particulate filter, so filling up with regular 91 octane is an absolute no-no, as it will damage the filter.

Other variants can take the occasional tank of 91, though 95/98 is recommended.

The Scout has an unsealed surface traction control mode on the Drive selection menu, 15mm greater ground clearance and extra underbody protection.

So it's by no means an adventurer, but it will work nicely on dirt roads.

A luxu list of standard equipment includes heated front and rear seats, leather/Alcantara upholstery, VW's premium all digital "Virtual Cockpit" dash/predictive infotainment system with voice control and navigation, wireless phone charging, Canton audio (plus a cd player for the Luddites), LED matrix headlights, and three zone air.

You sit on rather than in the wide, firm driver's seat, and while the customisable digital instruments and predictive infotainment take some learning, once mastered they're informative, intuitive and easy to read at a glance.

Voice control works well, so eyes off the road time is minimal.

There's limo-like legroom in the back, a firm, elevated bench and enough width for three adults.

Adaptive suspension delivers a smooth, comfortable ride in

Comfort and Normal modes; Sport is firmer, but still acceptably compliant and plenty of travel allows it to easily cope with rough roads at speed.

Superb wagon is a big family freighter, and typical of Skoda is a wish list of intelligent, practical touches that make life easy, safe and enjoyable for parents and kids, such as rear side window sunblinds; four bag hooks, a removable torch, three nets and a multi-position load cover in the boot; a powered tailgate; chilled centre console and glovebox; a rear seat tablet/phone holder, rubbish bag holder in the driver's door bin and even a broly in each front door.

It has a bigger boot than all but a few monster-sized SUVs. The power tailgate can be operated by swiping your foot under the rear bumper.

The 2.0-litre force fed four has no problem shifting the Scout's relatively light (by SUV standards) 1638kg.

There's a moment of turbolag from low revs, amplified when moving off from rest by the DSG's characteristic hesitation, but your right foot does adapt to these characteristics.

Sport mode ups the willing factor and responsiveness. A claimed 0-100km/h time of 5.7 seconds is quick.

It's frugal, too, easily able to achieve single figures around town.

Light weight, all-wheel drive, adaptive suspension and precise steering give the Scout agility, balance and roadholding more akin to a premium luxury wagon than an SUV. It's also luxuriously comfortable, with a smooth, well-controlled ride.

In Sport mode it will hold its own with any luxury wagon and offers a level of driving enjoyment well beyond mere transport and most SUVs. Highly recommended.

THINGS WE LIKE

- ✓ Great value for money
- ✓ Refined, fuel-efficient 2.0
- ✓ Excellent dynamics and a comfortable ride
- ✓ Well equipped and safe
- ✓ more passenger and cargo space than most large SUVs
- ✓ \$1700 prepaid for five years/75,000km of scheduled servicing

THINGS YOU MIGHT NOT LIKE

- ✗ Resale values are a bit soft
- ✗ VW Group quality and reliability issues
- ✗ Must use 95 or 98 premium. No ifs or buts.

SPEX (Scout)

- Made in the Czech Republic
- 2.0-litre four-cylinder turbopetrol/seven-speed DSG/all-wheel drive
- 200kW of power at 6500rpm/350Nm of torque from 2000-5400rpm
- 0-100km/h in 5.7 seconds (claimed)
- 6.0L/100km highway; 9.0L/100km city; 95 octane premium unleaded; CO₂ emissions are 161g/km
- Warranty: Five years/unlimited kilometres
- Standard: Stability control, nine airbags, AEB, adaptive cruise, blind spot monitoring, Apple CarPlay, Android Auto, navigation, voice control, tri-zone air, heated front seats, parking sensors, 19-inch alloy wheels, Alcantara/leather upholstery
- Redbook future values: 3yr: 48%; 5yr: 30%

STARS ★★★★★

- Safety ★★★★★ EuroNCAP
- Performance ★★★★★
- Handling ★★★★★
- Quality and reliability ★★★★★
- Comfort and refinement ★★★★★
- Value for money ★★★★★
- Overall** ★★★★★



compare with ...

Audi A6 Allroad, Peugeot 508/5008, Subaru Outback, VW Passat

SKODA KAMIQ FROM \$27,990



Skoda's Kamiq shares familial DNA and hardware with VW's T-Cross and T-Roc. However as is usually the case with Skoda, it has enough points of difference to make it more than just a badge-engineering exercise.

We're testing the base model 85TSi Kamiq, priced at \$29,990. It runs the same 85kW 1.0-litre three cylinder turbopetrol/seven-speed dual clutch automatic/front-wheel drivetrain as the T-Cross and Polo hatchback.

You can have the six-speed manual for \$2000 less.

If you want more power, the 110TSi Monte Carlo, with a 110kW 1.5-litre turbopetrol four/seven speed DCT, is \$36,990 drive away.

Size-wise, Kamiq's wheelbase – the critical measure that determines interior space -- is longer than both T-Cross and T-Roc and closer to the next size up Tiguan. So rear seat legroom and boot capacity are at the expansive end of the class.

You won't find a \$30K drive away rival with more luxe or tech than the base Kamiq. Adaptive cruise, VW's "Virtual

Cockpit" customisable digital instruments, slick, hi-res touchscreen infotainment, wireless phone charging, dual zone air, keyless entry and starting, a power tailgate and 18-inch alloys are standard; clever, practical Skoda touches include a removable torch, double-sided floor mat and load restraining nets in the boot, a broly in the driver's door and ticket holder on the windscreen.

Tall drivers can get comfortable without restricting rear seat legroom for passengers. Two Type C USB sockets, vents and storage pockets/door bins are also provided in the back.

Stand alone voice control and navigation are missing; you can use both functions in your phone via another two Type C USB connectors on the dash. The control layout is stylish, efficient and intuitive, apart from clumsy, complicated touch screen adjustment for some air

conditioning functions and weak AM reception that's also plagued by electrical interference.

Kamiq's ride is tolerable though quite firm in town; compliance improves at speed and the suspension works particularly well on rough country roads.

VW's 1.0-litre turbo triple is the little engine that could. It has amazing grunt for its size and does the business willingly and efficiently in town, albeit with an occasional case of the yips due to a slightly tardy automatic stop/start fire up and the seven-speed's characteristic momentary hesitation when moving off from rest.

The seven-speed keeps it in the broad midrange sweet spot with crisp, timely shifts. The 0-100km/h trip takes a claimed 10 seconds, which tells you that when the triple's torque is exhausted, there ain't much power to take up the fight.

That said, it cruises easily at 100km/h where it's also

remarkably smooth and quiet for a small SUV.

It's also frugal, averaging mid fours on the highway and single figures in town. Premium is recommended.

Kamiq's longer wheelbase, firmer suspension and grippier Goodyear tyres give it a sportier, more planted attitude in corners than the T-Cross, with the only whinge of note being overassisted steering at highway speeds.

It's certainly one of the front-running handlers in this class. The once canyon-like gap in dynamic ability between small SUVs and hatchbacks is shrinking fast, and Kamiq is a prime example.

The 85TSi Kamiq's \$29,990 drive away value proposition is a standout in this crowded class. It's a Goldilocks price/size/specification package, and one of the better drives. Highly recommended.

THINGS WE LIKE

- ✓ The best value in the class
- ✓ Frugal, tractable, refined 1.0-litre turbo triple
- ✓ Lots of interior space
- ✓ Loaded with equipment at this price
- ✓ Excellent ride/handling compromise

THINGS YOU MIGHT NOT LIKE

- ✗ Transmission can hesitate when moving off from rest
- ✗ It ain't quick, either
- ✗ Blind spot monitoring not standard
- ✗ Overly complex air conditioning controls
- ✗ Scratchy AM reception

SPEX

- Made in the Czech Republic
- 1.0-litre three-cylinder turbopetrol/ seven-speed DCT/front-wheel drive
- 85kW of power at 5000rpm/200Nm of torque from 2000-3500rpm
- 0-100km/h in 10 seconds (claimed)
- 4.5L/100km highway; 5.8L/100km city; 95 octane premium; CO2 emissions are 113gkm
- Warranty: Five years/unlimited km
- Standard: Seven airbags, stability control, autonomous emergency braking, adaptive cruise, lane assist, tyre pressure monitoring, digital instruments, touchscreen infotainment, Apple CarPlay, Android Auto, 4 x USB sockets, wireless phone charging, dual zone air, keyless entry and starting, power tailgate, 18-inch alloys.
- Redbook future values: 3yr: 57%; 5yr: 45%

STARS ★★★★★

- Safety ★★★★★
- Performance ★★★★★
- Handling ★★★★★
- Quality and reliability ★★★★★
- Comfort and refinement ★★★★★
- Value for money ★★★★★
- Overall** ★★★★★



compare with ...

Honda HRV, Hyundai Kona, Kia Seltos, Mazda CX30, Subaru XV, Toyota C-HR, VW T-Roc



SKODA KAROQ FROM \$35,490



Czech brand Skoda's Karoq mid-size SUV shares its structure, and most hardware, with parent company VW's Tiguan.

Karoq is priced at \$35,490 for the 110kW/250Nm 1.4-litre turbopetrol four-cylinder/eight-speed automatic/front-wheel-drive 110TSI. That's \$4200 less than the base VW Tiguan, with the same engine and a six-speed transmission.

The 140TSi Sportline, at \$41,290, runs a 140kW/320Nm 2.0-litre turbopetrol/seven-speed DSG/all-wheel drivetrain.

The VW Group's 1.4-litre turbopetrol has been around for a while now and continues to be used in Australia because of our high sulphur content fuel.

VW has newer engines available in Europe, with lower emissions and better economy, but they're designed to run on much cleaner fuel than ours.

Still, the 1.4 is a pretty handy, frugal device that works nicely in the Karoq.

Eight ratios and a relatively light 1353kg mass gives the Skoda

respectable acceleration -- 8.8 seconds from rest to 100km/h is a bit quicker than class average.

Inside, Karoq is more spacious than it looks. Like any VW, it comfortably accommodates a tall driver.

The back seat is where the Karoq differs.

Split 40/20/40, each section can be tumble folded, or easily unclipped from the floor and removed, so you can have a two-three- four- or five-seat layout, as you prefer.

Legroom is adjusted in a 60/40 split and is fine for adults. Backrest angles are also individually adjustable.

Available load space ranges from 479 litres with all seats in use and maximum rear legroom, up to a small van-like 1810 litres with all seats removed.

Other neat touches that justify Skoda's "Simply Clever" brand slogan include lots of handy storage, tablet holders, vents and a 12-volt socket for the back

seat, an umbrella under the front passenger seat and, in the boot, three nets, an LED torch, 12-volt outlet, four adjustable bag hooks (on tracks), an adjustable, Velcro-backed panel for securing smaller objects and a double-sided floor mat.

Seven airbags, autonomous emergency braking, rear obstacle detection and braking, adaptive cruise and fatigue alert are standard, so Karoq isn't far off Mazda's CX5 and Subaru's Forester for safety spec at the circa \$30K price point, though the Mazda and Subaru do offer more. Karoq has several quite pricey options packs that combine safety technology and frilly stuff, a pretty cynical approach that forces you to pay more for safety tech than you should.

The 1.4 is a smooth, torquey, willing little engine, with stronger performance and better low-down pulling power than its naturally aspirated rivals.

The eight-speed automatic

recently replaced the seven-speed dual clutch transmission in the 110TSi, and it should eliminate the seven-speed's initial hesitation when moving off from rest.

Karoq handles safely and securely, but it doesn't feel quite as solid or comfortable at speed as the Volkswagen Tiguan.

Rough roads induce a little body flex and the ride on optional 18-inch wheels is lumpy and fussy. Tactile, precise steering, complemented by light weight and firm suspension, makes Karoq quite an agile, enjoyable little SUV.

Again, though, Tiguan feels just a smidgin tighter and more finessed overall.

That said, Karoq is a nicely priced kid carrier, with stronger performance than the asthmatic atmo fours in most rivals, class-leading safety at the price and a genius interior.

THINGS WE LIKE

- ✓ Good value
- ✓ A great kid carrier, with a versatile, practical interior
- ✓ Punchy, economical 1.4-litre engine
- ✓ Long warranty
- ✓ Agile, enjoyable handling

THINGS YOU MIGHT NOT LIKE

- ✗ Ride is a bit lumpy on rough roads
- ✗ Cynical packaging of safety tech with bling at high prices
- ✗ Seven-speed DSG isn't particularly smooth or responsive in traffic
- ✗ VW Tiguan is a little more polished and poised

SPEX (DSG)

- Made in the Czech Republic
- 1.4-litre turbopetrol four-cylinder/seven-speed DSG/front-wheel drive
- 110kW of power at 5000rpm/250Nm of torque from 1500-3500rpm
- 0-100km/h in 8.6 seconds
- 5.2L/100km highway; 7.0L/100km city; 95 octane premium; CO2 emissions are 133g/km; fuel tank is 50 litres
- Warranty: Five years/unlimited km
- Max towing weight: 1500kg
- Standard: Seven airbags, stability control, AEB, adaptive cruise, rear obstacle detection and braking, eight-inch touchscreen, Bluetooth, Apple CarPlay/Android Auto connectivity, USB and SD slots, 17-inch alloys, dual-zone air, keyless entry and starting
- Redbook future values: 3yr: 53%; 5yr: 37%

STARS ★★★★★

- Safety ★★★★★
- Performance ★★★★★
- Handling ★★★★★
- Quality and reliability ★★★★★
- Comfort and refinement ★★★★★
- Value for money ★★★★★
- Overall** ★★★★★



compare with ...

Ford Escape, Hyundai Tucson, Mazda CX5, Mitsubishi Eclipse, Peugeot 3008, VW Tiguan

SKODA KODIAQ FROM \$46,390



Skoda's Kodiaq SUV is named after the largest carnivorous mammal on earth, the Kodiak bear, but as far as seven seaters go it's light, manoeuvrable and compact. More like a koala.

The 132 (as in kilowatts of power) TSi 2.0-litre turbopetrol, tested here, is priced at \$46,390.

When you're carrying kids around, you want a wagon that makes life easy and stress-free. The Kodiaq does just that with a power-operated rear tailgate, keyless entry and starting, a big boot that can be extended to almost 2m long with the 60/40-split middle seats folded flat, rear-window sunblinds, parking sensors, a rear camera with moving guidelines, electric safety locks for the back doors, and seat belt indicators for all positions.

You can never have too much storage, either, and Kodiaq has compartments all over the place, including two gloveboxes (one chilled) and a drawer under the driver's seat.

Then there's the genius stuff, which you don't know you want until you've got it.

How about an umbrella and a small rubbish bag holder in each front-door pocket, plastic protectors that pop out from the edge of each door when it's opened, preventing dings to adjacent cars, an LED torch in the boot, and two tablet holders for rear-seat passengers?

Infotainment includes a big, bright eight-inch touchscreen, Apple CarPlay and Android Auto, navigation, voice control that works, a USB port and two SD card slots.

You sit high, with clear vision in all directions, in a firm, comfortable seat.

The elevated middle row has adjustable legroom on each side and adjustable backrests too. Kids won't feel entombed and there's plenty of space for adults.

Two back seats fold up from the floor. They're fine for young kids, but very tight for teens and adults.

Folding and sliding the middle seat forward for access requires two hands and a bit of effort.

Sportline specification, with 20-inch alloys, Velvet Red paint, Alcantara leather sports seats and shift paddles, adds \$3900.

Our test car was fitted with the \$2900 Tech Pack option, which includes adaptive suspension.

On Comfort and Normal modes, the ride is supple, controlled and quiet.

Speaking of options, if you want the full safety worksburger, you need to tick the \$5200 Luxury Pack box (\$3700 on Sportline), which includes the Tech Pack. That's ridiculous.

It adds blind-spot monitoring, surround and bird's-eye-view cameras, lane keeping and rear cross traffic alert to the standard safety kit, which includes radar cruise, nine airbags and automatic emergency braking, though only from below 30km/h.

Kodiaq is one of the best drives in the class. Although

performance is solid rather than spectacular, its 2.0-litre turbopetrol engine is tuned to operate almost like a diesel, with deceptively strong shove available from low revs, using a light right foot. It works efficiently with the seven-speed transmission.

With a weight advantage of at least 200kg, plus all-wheel drive, precise steering and quality Pirelli tyres, Kodiaq feels much more agile, well balanced and car-like than larger seven-seater SUVs. It will also tackle a dirt road with confidence.

If you want more power and serious grunt, the 176kW/500Nm 2.0-litre turbodiesel/seven-speed DSG/all-wheel drive Kodiaq RS is priced at \$68,890.

THINGS WE LIKE

- ✓ Seven seats in a light, compact SUV
- ✓ Loaded with intelligent, family-friendly design
- ✓ Strong and safe
- ✓ Agile, confident handling and a comfortable ride
- ✓ Works well on a dirt road
- ✓ Refined, tractable performance
- ✓ Good value and long warranty

THINGS YOU MIGHT NOT LIKE

- ✗ The back seats aren't exactly spacious
- ✗ VW Group cars can be temperamental
- ✗ Expensive servicing

SPEX (132TSi)

- Made in the Czech Republic
- 2.0-litre four-cylinder turbopetrol/seven-speed automated manual/all-wheel drive
- 132kW of power from 3900-6000rpm/320Nm of torque from 1400-3950rpm
- 0-100km/h in 8.2 seconds (claimed)
- 6.6L/100km highway; 9.3L/100km city; 95 octane premium; CO₂ emissions are 176g/km. Fuel tank is 60 litres
- Warranty: Five years/unlimited kilometres
- Max towing weight 2000kg (80kg towball download)
- Standard: Nine airbags, stability control, automatic emergency braking, radar cruise, seven seats, camera, parking sensors, tyre pressure monitoring, Apple CarPlay, Android Auto, Bluetooth, voice control, navigation, leather/Alcantara seat facings, power tailgate, side-window blinds, dual-zone air, 19-inch alloys
- Redbook future values: 3yr: 56%; 5yr: 43%

STARS ★★★★★

- Safety ★★★★★
- Performance ★★★★★
- Handling ★★★★★
- Quality and reliability ★★★★★
- Comfort and refinement ★★★★★
- Value for money ★★★★★
- Overall** ★★★★★



compare with ...

Hyundai Santa Fe, Kia Sorento, Mazda CX9, Peugeot 5008, Toyota Kluger, VW Tiguan Allspace



SUBARU IMPREZA FROM \$24,190



Subaru's Impreza, available as a hatch or sedan, opens at \$24,190 for the 2.0i hatch. The 2.0iL is \$26,190, the Premium is \$28,790 and the 2.0iS, tested here, is \$31,490. Sedans are \$200 cheaper.

You have only to drive the Impreza for five minutes to realise that in the sophistication, strength and quality of its body and chassis engineering, it's up there at the front of the class with the VW Golf and Mazda3.

However, the dash is fussy and uncoordinated, with weird angles, random bulges and complex curves. Mazda, Toyota and VW do more stylish, efficient layouts

Subaru is trying for an edgy, techno-luxury effect, similar to Lexus, but it's trying too hard.

It's a difficult, distracting dash to navigate, too, with two display screens (including a small infotainment touchscreen), each with its own set of controls.

Subaru's voice control doesn't understand simple commands and on the test car was all but useless.

Tall adults can travel comfortably in the back seat, albeit without air vents. Boot space isn't particularly generous in the hatch.

You sit high, in a well-bolstered, heated, leather armchair, with plenty of adjustability.

Blind-spot monitoring, lane change assist and rear cross traffic alert with automatic braking are standard on 2.0i Premium and S.

Subaru's Eyesight system uses twin cameras to read the road ahead and includes automatic emergency braking and adaptive cruise on all variants.

Still, if you take the entire Impreza range it's far from being the class leader for driver assist safety tech.

That honour goes to the Toyota Corolla, which has the top spec Impreza's safety specification even in the base model. The Mazda 3 base model is also much better equipped than its Impreza counterpart.

Impreza's naturally aspirated 2.0-litre engine, matched with a standard CVT transmission, does the job but only just. Even by the humble standards of this class, the Subaru is pretty gutless, even in Sport mode.

CVT gets it off the line well enough, but the engine then dies, so you have to apply more right boot to keep the plot rolling, and at times you wonder if the acceleration you want is ever going to arrive. CVT doesn't help the cause either, being far too slow to respond.

The fact that you have to work the accelerator also means that Impreza is fairly thirsty in traffic. Even with auto stop/start, the test car recorded 9-11L/100km, on regular unleaded.

Overtaking isn't what you would call brisk, though, and cruise control also takes aeons to resume your set speed after an interruption. You can use the shift paddles to access a seven "ratio" shift map, but here the CVT is a slow learner, too.

Impreza's ride/handling compromise is a highlight. It feels almost like a French car in the way its suspension (independent at both ends) glides over poor surfaces, delivering a smooth, supple, quiet ride while maintaining disciplined control and secure road holding.

It's not a sporty drive, but Impreza can string a series of corners together in style, aided by light, precise steering, a low centre of gravity and all-wheel drive.

The Impreza has many things to like, but it's let down by a sluggish, thirsty drivetrain and below par driver assist safety tech on base models.

THINGS WE LIKE

- ✓ Sharp pricing and well equipped
- ✓ Spacious, comfortable cabin
- ✓ Class-leading safety specification, especially driver-assist tech
- ✓ Light, strong and well-balanced, with precise steering, agile, responsive handling and a smooth, quiet ride
- ✓ High resale values

THINGS YOU MIGHT NOT LIKE

- ✗ Below 4000rpm, the engine has got nothing
- ✗ Sluggish acceleration from any speed
- ✗ Thirsty in town
- ✗ Dim-witted, unresponsive CVT
- ✗ Too many screens and too many different ways to use them
- ✗ Voice control usually doesn't work
- ✗ Small boot

SPEX (2.0i S hatch)

- Made in Japan
- 2.0-litre, horizontally opposed four-cylinder petrol/CVT/all-wheel drive
- 115kW of power at 6000rpm/196Nm of torque at 4000rpm
- 0-100km/h in 10.1 seconds (claimed)
- 6.1L/100km highway; 9.1L/100km city; 91 octane; CO2 emissions are 163g/km
- Warranty: Five years/unlimited kilometres
- Standard: Seven airbags, stability control, all-wheel drive, Eyesight and Vision Assist safety systems, Data Dot identification, leather-faced seat upholstery, dual zone air, sunroof, keyless entry, 18-inch alloys, swivelling LED headlights, eight-inch touchscreen, navigation, Bluetooth, voice control, Apple CarPlay, Android Auto compatibility, tyre pressure monitoring, temporary spare
- Redbook future values: 3yr: 59%; 5yr: 46%

STARS ★★★★★

- Safety ★★★★★
- Performance ★★★★★
- Handling ★★★★★
- Quality and reliability ★★★★★
- Comfort and refinement ★★★★★
- Value for money ★★★★★
- Overall** ★★★★★



compare with ...

Ford Focus, Honda Civic, Hyundai i30, Mazda3, Toyota Corolla, VW Golf

SUBARU WRX FROM \$40,990



In 1994, Subaru came from the clouds with a compact, all-wheel-drive, turbocharged sedan, boasting (for its time) explosive acceleration (0–100km/h in 6.5 seconds) and brilliant, almost idiot-proof dynamics.

At the time, roadtesters everywhere said the Impreza WRX was the performance bargain of a lifetime. Yet the fourth-generation WRX, now minus the Impreza moniker, costs \$40,990. That's \$900 more than the original.

For the base six-speed manual sedan, the CVT transmission is a \$3000 option. For an extra \$6400–\$6600, Premium variants add a sunroof; leather; power adjustable, heated driver's seat; push-button start; navigation and Harman Kardon audio.

WRX STi, with a 221kW/407Nm 2.5-litre turbopetrol/six-speed manual, costs \$52,940, or

\$57,690 for the Premium. STi Spec R is \$59,440.

The base WRX runs a 197kW/350Nm, 2.0-litre direct-injection turbo four, horizontally opposed in the Subaru manner.

Outputs are up marginally on the 2.5-litre unit it replaced in late 2013, but thanks in part to an extra 179kg of kerb weight, the current WRX is seven-tenths of a second slower from 0–100 km/h (6.0 seconds vs 5.3 seconds for its predecessor).

A 2018 update included more fade resistant brake pads and a suspension recalibration, with stiffer springs, thicker anti-roll bars and firmer bushings.

There was also a sharper front end for 2018, swivelling LED headlights and LED foglights, rain sensing wipers, plus a 5.9-inch information display screen.

Automatic WRX variants are also fitted with Subaru's twin camera-based Eyesight safety system,

with adaptive cruise control and automatic emergency braking. WRX Premium adds Vision Assist, with blind spot monitoring, a front passenger side camera and rear cross traffic alert.

On the road, feel from the quick, electrically assisted steering is great, but there's also some rack shake and kickback in rough corners.

The stiff chassis delivers composure and control in cornering, while the WRX's signature rush of turbo power is there in abundance.

It's an old school power delivery, but Rex buyers love the drama such a torquy burst of acceleration brings.

The AWD system, with active torque vectoring, provides sure-footed drive out of tight corners and the standard 245/40 18 Dunlop SportMaxx RT rubber grips hard. A firm ride comes with the WRX territory but the

dynamic-response versus ride-comfort balance in this car is impressive, and it's much more comfortable than the STi.

The WRX has always been a fine handler up to about seven tenths, at which point, when presented with a series of tight corners, it lurched into excessive body roll and deep, severe understeer. The latter is still apparent in the current model but it occurs at eight-tenths now.

The brakes hold up better under hard use, but the STi's Brembo brake package, with six piston calipers up front, should be fitted to the base WRX as well.

Despite its imperfections and age, the Rex remains brilliant value for money.

It's about \$12,000 cheaper, for example, than VW's 180kW 2.0-litre Golf GTi and \$14,000 cheaper than the 228kW 2.0-litre Honda Civic Type R. When it comes to bang for your bucks, Rex's closest rival is Hyundai's excellent i30 N, at \$41,400.

By James Cleary

THINGS WE LIKE

- ✓ Tight, solid body
- ✓ Great value for money
- ✓ An easy and forgiving car to drive quickly
- ✓ Strong resale values
- ✓ That wonderful Rex turbo rush

THINGS YOU MIGHT NOT LIKE

- ✗ Clunky manual transmission shift
- ✗ Pronounced turbo lag
- ✗ Brakes still fade under pressure
- ✗ Uncoordinated dash and control layout

SPEX (WRX)

- Made in Japan
- 2.0-litre horizontally opposed four-cylinder turbopetrol/six-speed manual/all-wheel drive
- 197kW of power at 5600rpm/350Nm of torque at 2400–5200rpm
- 0–100km/h in 6.0 seconds (claimed)
- 7.2L/100km highway; 12.7L/100km city; 95 octane premium; CO₂ emissions are 213g/km
- Warranty: Five years/unlimited kilometres
- Standard: Seven airbags, stability control, Eyesight (in CVT equipped models only), rear camera, hill start assist, Bluetooth, USB, dual zone automatic air, 18-inch alloy wheels, Data Dot identification,
- Redbook future values: 3yr: 61%; 5yr: 48%

STARS ★★★★★

- Safety ★★★★★ ANCAP
- Green Vehicle Guide ★★★★★
- Performance ★★★★★
- Handling ★★★★★
- Quality and reliability ★★★★★
- Comfort and refinement ★★★★★
- Value for money ★★★★★
- Overall** ★★★★★



compare with ...

Honda Civic Type R, Hyundai i30N, Renault Megane RS, VW Golf GTi



SUBARU XV FROM \$29,690



Subaru's XV is the only compact SUV with all-wheel drive as standard, so it's as capable on a dirt road as it is on the bitumen. XV prices start at \$29,690 for the 2.0i. The 2.0i-L is \$31,990 and the Premium is \$34,590. The 2.0i S, tested here, is \$37,290 and the Hybrid L, also tested, is \$35,490 and Hybrid S is \$40,790.

Subaru persists in using two small screens to display the same infotainment and vehicle information that other car makers manage with one large screen, so as a layout the XV's dash is far from user-friendly.

That said, fit, finish and materials quality is excellent.

XV rides as comfortably and quietly as many larger wagons thanks to well-controlled, compliant, long-travel suspension and sensibly tall tyres on 18-inch wheels.

A firm, supportive back seat has plenty of legroom, but no

adjustable backrest, air vents or 12-volt outlet. The boot is small.

As the flagship models, XV S and Hybrid get Subaru's Eyesight camera-based system with front and side view monitors, adaptive cruise control that keeps you a safe distance from the car in front, automatic emergency braking and lane keep assist, automatic braking in reverse if it detects an object or person behind the car, plus rear-cross traffic alert and blind spot monitoring.

Toyota's C-HR has most of these safety features in the base model, whereas the base XV 2.0i has none.

Despite the addition of adjustable drive modes for 2021, Impreza is still a sedate performer. That said, its rivals are no rockets either, and like them XV is designed to work best

in everyday driving at moderate revs with a light right foot.

That it does, in a smooth, refined manner, but its continuously variable automatic — which works like a normal auto but without individual gears — can take quite a while to convert your desire for speed into the real thing, so the shift paddles can be useful.

The XV Hybrid offers stronger performance, but still there's quite a delay, similar to turbolag, between depressing the right foot and getting the extra kick from the electric motor.

Claimed fuel savings over the petrol models of 14 percent in town and seven percent overall aren't particularly impressive compared with Toyota's frugal, efficient C-HR and RAV4 hybrids. You also lose the spare wheel.

All-wheel drive adds extra grip and security in the wet and the

inside wheels are automatically braked in corners to help keep you on track.

XV's dynamics are arguably best in class, even with the Impreza's body raised by 90mm to deliver 220mm of ground clearance, sufficient to allow confident, easy progress on pretty rugged bush tracks.

Again, XV's ability here is hard to beat, with its X-Mode off-road system offering adjustable traction control and accelerator sensitivity for steep climbs, loose or slippery surfaces, plus effective automatic speed control that takes the terror out of steep descents.

The compact SUV class is now very competitive. Subaru's XV S, Skoda's Kamiq and Kia's Seltos are the pick of the class overall.

If you're not carrying kids, Toyota's smaller C-HR hybrid and the Volkswagen T-Cross are other contenders worth test driving.

THINGS WE LIKE

- ✓ The only compact SUV with all-wheel drive as standard
- ✓ Safe and solid
- ✓ Refined and comfortable
- ✓ Agile, enjoyable handling
- ✓ Good value across the range

THINGS YOU MIGHT NOT LIKE

- ✗ Tiny boot
- ✗ It ain't quick
- ✗ Driver assist safety tech not included on base models
- ✗ Complex, inefficient control layout
- ✗ Space saver spare

SPEX (2.0i S)

- 2.0-litre four-cylinder/CVT/all-wheel drive
- 115kW of power at 6000rpm/196Nm of torque at 4000rpm
- 0-100km/h N/A
- 6.0L/100km highway; 8.8L/100km city; 91 octane; CO₂ emissions are 159g/km; fuel tank is 63 litres
- Max towing weight: 1400kg
- Warranty: Five years/unlimited kilometres
- Standard: Seven airbags, stability control, camera, tyre-pressure monitoring, AEB, Apple CarPlay, Android Auto, voice control, 2 x 12 volt and 3 x USB outlets, navigation, heated front seats, leather, Data Dot identification, Eyesight, Vision Assist, 18-inch alloys, sunroof
- Redbook future values: 3yr: 56%; 5yr: 43%

STARS ★★★★★

- Safety ★★★★★
- Performance ★★★★★
- Handling ★★★★★
- Quality and reliability ★★★★★
- Comfort and refinement ★★★★★
- Value for money ★★★★★
- Overall** ★★★★★



compare with ...

Honda HRV, Hyundai Kona, Mazda CX3, Mitsubishi ASX, Suzuki Vitara, Toyota C-HR, VW T-Cross

SUBARU FORESTER FROM \$35,190



Subaru's fifth generation Forester is the biggest yet and a genuine family-sized SUV.

The 2020 range kicks off at \$35,190 for the 2.5i. The 2.5iL is \$37,440, the Premium is \$40,440, Sport is \$41,990 and the 2.5iS is \$43,490. All are powered by a 136kW/239Nm 2.5-litre four-cylinder petrol engine, in Subaru's signature boxer layout, with a CVT transmission and all-wheel drive.

Forester Hybrid L is \$40,490 and Hybrid S is \$46,490. Both use the same 2.0-litre petrol/electric all wheel drivetrain as the XV.

Forester's headline safety tech -- a hidden infrared LED camera in the dashboard that monitors eye movement and beeps when the driver isn't watching the road or is glancing at their phone -- is standard on 2.5iL and above.

On Premium and 2.5iS the same tiny camera uses facial recognition technology to match the position of the seats, side mirrors and air-conditioning settings for up to five individual drivers.

All Foresters also come with forward-facing twin cameras

that can detect cars, cyclists and pedestrians and slam on the brakes if the driver isn't paying attention. It can avoid a collision up to about 50km/h and mitigates crashes above that speed.

This "Eyesight" tech also knows when the car in front has moved ahead in traffic. If you're distracted, it beeps at you to get a wriggle on.

Other safety aids -- optional on most rivals -- such as blind zone warning, rear cross-traffic alert and tyre pressure monitors are standard.

Rear automatic emergency braking and a 360-degree camera are standard on 2.5iL and above.

Apple Car Play, Android Auto and digital radio are standard on all grades.

However, the 2.5i and 2.5iL only get a 6.5-inch touchscreen -- small by current standards -- whereas Premium and 2.5iS have 8-inch touchscreens and navigation.

There are more power points than there are seats: USB and 12V sockets under the

dash, 12V outlets in the centre console and cargo hold and, in a first for Forester, two USB ports for second-row seats, above the air vents.

From behind the wheel the Subaru has unrestricted, clear vision in all directions, a rarity as cars get sleeker designs with thicker front pillars.

It's also roomy for a car with a relatively compact footprint.

Headroom and legroom in the front and back are enormous; the boot is so wide it can accommodate a large golf bag across ways. A full-size spare is standard.

Although not the punchiest engine in the class, the 2.5-litre four-cylinder has adequate performance, delivered in a refined, responsive manner, largely thanks to a new continuously variable automatic (CVT) transmission. Fuel consumption is reasonable, and 91 octane is recommended.

Forester Hybrid isn't worth the extra \$3000 or so.

Its low power electric motor/ small capacity battery make little meaningful contribution without the petrol engine, but the add extra weight, so performance has actually gone backwards and fuel economy gains are minimal. You also lose the spare wheel.

Cornering grip is good due to sticky Bridgestone tyres and permanent all-wheel-drive. The suspension is a bit busy on backroads but the supple tyres takes the edge off the bumps.

Brake performance is ok, though it's worth noting the two cheaper models get smaller front discs to fit behind the 17-inch wheels. Models equipped with 18-inch wheels have more stopping power.

Overall, though, the 2021 Subaru Forester is a polished, sophisticated package in a class full of pretenders and faux-wheel-drives.

By Joshua Dowling

THINGS WE LIKE

- ✓ Spacious, stylish, comfortable cabin
- ✓ Class leading safety specification
- ✓ CVT extracts reasonable performance from the 2.5
- ✓ All wheel drive gives it more off bitumen ability than most SUVs
- ✓ Tidy handling and a comfortable ride
- ✓ High resale values

THINGS YOU MIGHT NOT LIKE

- ✗ Small infotainment screen on 2.5i and 2.5iL
- ✗ Slightly underdamped suspension

SPEX (2.5i)

- Made in Japan
- 2.5-litre four cylinder petrol/CVT/ all-wheel drive
- 136kW of power at 5800rpm/239Nm of torque at 4400rpm
- 0-100km/h in 9.1 seconds (claimed)
- 6.3L/100km highway; 9.3L/100km city; 91 octane; CO2 emissions are 168gkm
- Warranty: Five years/unlimited km
- Standard: Seven airbags, stability control, AEB, Eyesight, adaptive cruise, blind spot monitoring, 6.5-inch infotainment screen, Apple CarPlay, Android Auto, digital radio, Bluetooth, dual zone air, 17-inch alloys, Data Dot identification
- Redbook future values: 3yr: 62%; 5yr: 48%

STARS ★★★★★

- Safety ★★★★★ ANCAP
- Performance ★★★★★
- Handling ★★★★★
- Quality and reliability ★★★★★
- Comfort and refinement ★★★★★
- Value for money ★★★★★
- Overall** ★★★★★



compare with ...

Ford Escape, Honda CRV, Hyundai Tucson, Mazda CX5, Nissan XTrail, Toyota RAV4, VW Tiguan



SUBARU OUTBACK FROM \$39,990



Spoiler alert: the 2021 Subaru Outback drives with a level of refinement and composure not seen with this model before. More on that shortly.

There are three models in the line-up, all powered by a 138kW/245Nm, 2.5-litre four-cylinder "boxer" petrol engine matched to a CVT auto with eight "ratios" and all-wheel drive: Outback AWD, priced at \$39,990, Outback AWD Sport at \$44,490, and Outback AWD Touring at \$47,790.

Subaru's twin camera "Eye Sight" system is standard. It includes autonomous emergency braking, lane keeping and adaptive cruise control. Blind spot monitoring, a camera that monitors driver eye movement and rear cross-traffic alert are also standard.

An ANCAP safety rating was yet to be issued when this article was published, however it would be very surprising if the Outback failed to score the maximum five stars.

The cabin is kitted out with a large tablet-style central infotainment screen and the instrument cluster has a digital speed display, though the numerals are a bit too small.

Bi-LED headlights turn night into day on dark country roads, and automatically switch on if the wipers are activated for more than 10 seconds and the headlights are set to "auto".

The horizontally-opposed 2.5, with 90 percent new components for 2021, is still a touch underdone on power, however it is economical and refined.

Outback did the 0 to 100 km/h dash in 9.5 seconds on our timing equipment, which isn't quick.

This leisurely performance had us wondering how the engine and transmission might cope with Subaru's claimed 2000kg towing capacity, the highest so far on a Subaru Outback, and on par with larger rivals such as the Hyundai Santa Fe and Kia Sorento.

For now there are no plans to re-introduce a diesel, although a hybrid petrol could follow.

And there's no word on the possible local introduction of the turbo petrol engine option available in the US, but it would be a welcome addition.

The ride/handling compromise is superb, in part due to a light (1626-1661kg) and very tight body, and the Outback handles rough country roads at speed

with comfort and composure few other SUVs can match, but braking performance could have been a touch better.

Our test car pulled up in 39 metres, which is about the same distance as a double cab ute on all-terrain rubber. Given the overall sophistication of the Outback, we were expecting a shorter stopping distance.

The cabin has ample cubbies and storage pockets, and there are two USB charge ports for the front seats and another pair for the back seats. The cargo hold also gets a 12V socket.

Front and back seat occupants have plenty of room in all directions. This is the most spacious Outback to date. The cargo area is huge, and there's a full size spare wheel under the boot floor.

Outback's elevated stance helps provide a commanding view of the road ahead, and its 213mm ground clearance means you can cover more rugged terrain than most SUVs. Subaru's constant, variable split all wheel drive system gives the Outback great traction and secure roadholding on dirt roads and in wet conditions.

The 2021 Subaru Outback is seriously impressive. Loyal owners of previous models will feel right at home in this one.

Those new to the brand will wonder what they've been missing out on. Highly recommended.

By Joshua Dowling

THINGS WE LIKE

- ✓ Excellent value for money
- ✓ Lots of occupant and load space
- ✓ A great family car
- ✓ All wheel drive control and grip on all surfaces
- ✓ Comfortable ride and secure, confident handling
- ✓ Loaded with safety tech
- ✓ Very high resale values

THINGS YOU MIGHT NOT LIKE

- ✗ A bit more grunt wouldn't go astray
- ✗ 2000kg towing? Good luck with that.
- ✗ Short service intervals and expensive servicing
- ✗ Underbraked

SPEX (Outback AWD)

- Made in Japan
- 2.5-litre four cylinder petrol/CVT/all-wheel drive
- 138kW of power at 5800rpm/245Nm of torque from 3400-4600rpm
- 0-100km/h in 9.4 seconds
- 6.2L/100km highway; 9.3L/100km city; 91 octane; CO2 emissions are 168gkm; fuel tank is 63 litres
- Maximum towing weight: 2000kg
- Warranty: Five years/unlimited km
- Standard: Eight airbags, stability control, AEB, driver attention monitor, lane keeping, emergency steering, adaptive cruise control, speed sign recognition, blind spot monitoring, rear cross-traffic alert, reverse automatic braking, 11.6-inch infotainment screen, Apple CarPlay, Android Auto, voice control, dual zone air, 18-inch alloys.
- Redbook future values: 3yr: 70%; 5yr: 56%

STARS ★★★★★

- Safety **Not yet tested**
- Performance ★★★★★
- Handling ★★★★★
- Quality and reliability ★★★★★
- Comfort and refinement ★★★★★
- Value for money ★★★★★
- Overall** ★★★★★



compare with ...

Audi Q5, BMW X3, Hyundai Santa Fe, Lexus RX, Skoda Kodiaq, VW Passat Alltrack



Suzuki Swift prices start at \$20,490 drive away for the base 1.2-litre/five-speed manual GL Navigator. A CVT transmission adds \$1000.

Swift Sport, with a 103kW 1.4 litre turbo/six-speed manual, is \$29,990; a six-speed auto also adds \$2000.

The mid-spec GLX Turbo tested here, with a 1.0-litre three-cylinder turbocharged engine and a six-speed automatic, is \$26,790.

Ouch. That's a big ask for a small car. You can get into a next-size-up base-model Hyundai i30 or Toyota Corolla for that sort of money.

It won't be as well-equipped as the Suzuki, though, which has seven-inch touchscreen infotainment with navigation, voice control, an SD card slot, USB, Apple CarPlay and Android Auto connectivity.

Voice control works reasonably well for simple phone and audio manoeuvres but when I asked to

enter a navigation address, it told me that wasn't possible in this country. So you need to stop and do it manually on the screen.

Simple instrumentation in a cute, retro-sporty-look dash doesn't include a digital speedo. Covered storage is limited to the glovebox.

In GLX, you get a contoured, flat-bottom, leather-wrapped steering wheel and gearshift paddles. Material, fit and finish quality is excellent, as expected from one of the few small cars still made in Japan.

While low rooflines and coupe-style profiles are the current design fashion, Suzuki has kept the traditional box-on-wheels hatch shape for the new Swift so when you hop in, the high roof and upright windscreen give the cabin a lovely sense of space and light.

You sit high, with clear vision in all directions. Tall drivers can get comfortable and the seat is properly supportive.

Back-seat legroom is more generous than the knees-up squeeze common to this class and four adults can travel comfortably. The boot has a deep well and an extended stepped floor.

You feel the car fidgeting on rough city streets because the suspension is quite firm, but only big whacks jolt the cabin. On the open road, the Suzuki is reasonably comfortable, though choppy bitumen can cause some body and steering shake.

Safety specification in GLX includes forward collision warning, automatic emergency braking (from speeds up to 100km/h), speed limiter, radar cruise, lane departure warning, blind spot monitoring and rear cross traffic alert.

Collision warning is oversensitive in town, but radar cruise works well in freeway traffic and will hold a set speed.

Swift has a sporty, enjoyable character and decent handling, with strong grip, sharpish

though slightly vague steering and powerful brakes.

Suzuki's one-litre, three-cylinder turbopetrol engine has strong numbers for this class, surprising pulling power at low revs, a bit of a flat spot in the midrange and plenty of zip up top. It's quiet in cruise mode; under power, it makes pleasantly gruff and growly noises. The expected three-cylinder engine vibration is well-suppressed.

It doesn't really matter how or where you drive, you'll get 5-6L/100km, on premium unleaded.

The six-speed automatic heads straight for the high gears in Drive, which is fine, but Manual mode changes up too early and down too late, when it decides — so it's not really Manual mode at all.

Although it's comparably priced, Swift GLX isn't quite as polished as the class front runners: Mazda2, Toyota Yaris and VW Polo.

THINGS WE LIKE

- ✓ Fun to drive, with zippy performance and sporty handling
- ✓ Strong safety credentials
- ✓ Loaded with standard equipment
- ✓ Spacious, comfortable cabin

THINGS YOU MIGHT NOT LIKE

- ✗ Expensive, and very high servicing costs
- ✗ No voice control for navigation
- ✗ Manual mode isn't manual at all
- ✗ Ride can get a bit fidgety on rough roads
- ✗ Runs on premium

SPEX (GLX)

- Made in Japan
- 1.0-litre three-cylinder turbopetrol/six-speed automatic/front-wheel drive
- 82kW of power at 5500rpm/160Nm of torque from 1500-4000rpm
- 0-100km/h N/A
- 4.3L/100km highway; 6.6L/100km city; 95 premium; CO2 emissions are 119gkm
- Warranty: Five years/unlimited km
- Standard: Six airbags, stability control, rear camera, forward collision warning, automatic emergency braking, speed limiter, adaptive cruise, lane departure warning and weaving alert, Bluetooth, navigation, voice control, Apple CarPlay, Android Auto, leather-wrapped wheel, 16-inch alloys
- Redbook future values: 3yr: 59%; 5yr: 46%

STARS ★★★★★

- Safety ★★★★★
- Performance ★★★★★
- Handling ★★★★★
- Quality and reliability ★★★★★
- Comfort and refinement ★★★★★
- Value for money ★★★★★
- Overall** ★★★★★



compare with ...

Kia Rio, Honda Jazz, Mazda2, Toyota Yaris, VW Polo



SUZUKI VITARA FROM \$25,490



Suzuki's Vitara Series II is a simple, affordable SUV that works nicely as transport for a young family. Think of it as a spacious, practical alternative to a small hatch such as a Toyota Corolla and you get the idea.

Speaking of which, prices start at just \$25,490 for the Vitara, with a 1.6-litre petrol four, six-speed manual and front-wheel drive. A six-speed automatic (tested here) adds \$1500. At this price you get plenty of standard equipment, including navigation, automatic air, 17-inch alloy wheels, Bluetooth and seven airbags.

Vitara S Turbo, with a 103kW 1.4-litre turbopetrol/six-speed automatic, is \$32,490 with front-wheel drive or \$36,490 with all-wheel drive.

The base 1.6 produces pretty humble power and torque numbers, and overall performance is leisurely. But the Vitara is as light as a small hatch (1075kg) and the six-speed automatic suits the engine's long stroke characteristics, so in the

daily driving context the Suzuki's performance is adequate.

Shift paddles on the wheel allow you to control gearshift timing, which can be useful on long climbs to prevent hunting between ratios. Fuel efficiency is outstanding and the 1.6 runs on regular unleaded. The 1.6 is also acceptably smooth and quiet.

The Vitara's suspension is fairly soft, so ride comfort is excellent on most surfaces. Handling is benign and secure with no nasty surprises to speak of. In tight corners the Suzuki can feel a bit top heavy.

The steering is perhaps a touch too direct for a tall, short-wheelbase wagon and is also imprecise in the straight-ahead position at freeway speeds. The brakes are powerful, if rather on or off in light applications.

The front-wheel-drive Vitara has no off-road pretensions at

all. The all-wheel-drive S has switchable modes for different surfaces, a locking centre diff and hill descent control. But with only 185mm of clearance, well-made dirt roads are about as far off the bitumen as you would want to go.

Inside, the Suzuki is stylish, well finished and practical.

The driver sits on a firm, comfortable seat with little lateral support and faces a simple, functional dash, the highlight of which is a bright, well-organised touchscreen infotainment system that's a snap to use and includes a camera, voice recognition, Bluetooth, Apple CarPlay and Google Android Auto. There's no covered storage apart from the glovebox.

Only the turbo models get autonomous emergency braking, adaptive cruise, blind spot monitoring and rear cross traffic alert. They should be

standard in all model grades.

The back seat is great for kids, who sit high on a flat, firm bench with easy access via wide-opening doors. Legroom is adequate for most adults. The big load area (375 litres) is accessed via a light, roof-hinged tailgate and the low floor is very easy to load. It can be extended by folding either side of the 60/40-split rear seat back. There's a hard load cover, extra storage and a temporary spare under the floor, a 12-volt outlet and a handy bag hook.

Overall quality is fine and the Vitara feels tight and solid. The only jarring note is doors that close with a tinny clang rather than a reassuring thunk.

Servicing is required every six months or 10,000km, which will be inconvenient and expensive compared with the 12 months and 15,000–20,000km intervals now mandated for most cars.

It's a pity that you're short-changed on safety in the base model, otherwise it would be one of the better value small SUVs.

THINGS WE LIKE

- ✓ Great value for money
- ✓ Excellent fuel economy on regular unleaded
- ✓ Comfortable ride
- ✓ Spacious, practical interior
- ✓ Well equipped

THINGS YOU MIGHT NOT LIKE

- ✗ Leisurely acceleration
- ✗ No driver assist safety tech in base model
- ✗ Short service intervals
- ✗ Vague steering at straight ahead position

SPEX (base auto)

- Made in Hungary
- 1.6-litre four-cylinder petrol/six-speed automatic/front-wheel drive
- 86kW of power at 6000rpm/156Nm of torque at 4400rpm
- 0–100km/h in 12.5 seconds (claimed)
- 5.1L/100km highway; 7.5L/100km city; regular unleaded; CO₂ emissions are 139g/km
- Fuel tank capacity is 47 litres
- Max towing weight 1200kg
- Standard: Stability control, seven airbags, 17-inch alloy wheels, navigation, Bluetooth, Apple CarPlay, Google Android Auto, voice activation, camera, USB
- Redbook future values: 3yr: 58%; 5yr: 47%

STARS ★★★★★

- Safety ★★★★★ ANCAP
- Performance ★★★★★
- Handling ★★★★★
- Quality and reliability ANCAP ★★★★★
- Comfort and refinement ★★★★★
- Value for money ★★★★★
- Overall** ★★★★★



compare with ...

Honda HRV, Hyundai Kona, Mitsubishi ASX, Nissan Qashqai, Subaru XV, Toyota C-HR

TESLA MODEL 3 FROM \$66,900



The mid-size Tesla Model 3 EV starts from \$66,900 for the rear-drive Standard Range Plus, which claims a maximum 460km range between recharges and a perky 0 to 100kmh time of 5.6 seconds – quicker than a hot hatch.

Long Range and Performance variants are both all-wheel-drive, with two electric motors -- one to power the front wheels and another for the rears.

Long Range, priced at \$83,658, claims a maximum driving range of 620km, and a 0 to 100kmh time of 4.6 seconds.

Performance costs \$99,258, has a maximum driving range of 560km and a 0 to 100kmh time of 3.4 seconds, which is Porsche territory.

On our precision timing equipment we were able to almost match the 0 to 100kmh time of the base model (5.7 seconds, 0.1 second slower) but the best we could get out of the Performance in favourable conditions was 3.8 seconds.

Nevertheless, if the Model 3 doesn't dispel the myth that electric cars are slow, nothing will.

On the base Standard, with the smallest battery pack, it takes 26 minutes to charge to 80 per cent full at a Tesla public "supercharger" station, eight hours to full once you install a Tesla home charger, and more than 25 hours to full from a household power socket.

Tesla has its own dealer network rather than franchises, so you're dealing direct with the factory from start to finish. You can only order online or by visiting a Tesla store, and there is reportedly no haggling. Don't believe it – all car prices are negotiable, especially as you're turning around to walk out of the showroom.

The interior of all three versions of the Model 3 get the same simplistic, futuristic design, with a massive 15-inch touchscreen in the centre of the dash.

However, the base model misses out on digital radio, embedded music streaming, and there's no satellite image overlay on the navigation maps.

No Teslas get Apple Car Play, Android Auto or AM radio, either.

You'll need the Tune-In Radio app to stream AM on your smartphone.

The touchscreen controls everything from the height and reach adjustment of the steering wheel, the angle of the side mirrors, the direction of the air vents, and even to open and close the boot – front and back.

There's plenty of storage in the cabin and the key is a slim line smart card that uses near-field technology to unlock and start the car. You can also program your phone to use as a wireless key.

If the car ever develops a bug, just hold down both buttons on the steering wheel for five seconds to prompt a hard reset. It really is a computer on wheels.

Model 3 drives surprisingly well. The rear-drive Standard has only one electric motor and a slightly smaller battery, saving 200kg.

You can feel the difference in corners. It feels better balanced than the heavier, dual motor variants, less upset by bumps and the steering is more responsive.

Our real world test drive showed that the Standard's maximum range is closer to 340km than the 460km Tesla claims.

All electric car makers' claimed range numbers are invariably optimistic, by 25-40 percent depending upon speed and conditions, notably temperature.

By Joshua Dowling

THINGS WE LIKE

- ✓ Seriously quick
- ✓ Futuristic yet practical interior
- ✓ Massive central touchscreen
- ✓ Agile handling for an electric car
- ✓ Decent driving range on the dearest model

THINGS YOU MIGHT NOT LIKE

- ✗ Claimed range numbers are a myth
- ✗ No spare tyre. No inflator kit. No runflats. Get a flat, call a tow truck.
- ✗ No AM radio, Apple Car Play or Android Auto
- ✗ Poor panel fit and finish by current standards

SPEX (Standard)

- Made in the USA
- 55kWh lithium ion battery/single electric motor/reduction gear/rear wheel drive
- 175kW of power/375Nm of torque
- 0-100km/h in 5.7 seconds
- Claimed maximum range: 460km
- Warranty: Four years/80,000km; battery eight years/160,000km
- Standard: Seven airbags, stability control, autonomous emergency braking, blind spot monitoring, adaptive cruise control, lane keeping, 18 inch alloy wheels, fake leather upholstery, glass roof, LED headlights, 15-inch touchscreen, navigation with smart routing, digital radio, voice control, dual zone air
- Redbook future values: 3yr: 65%; 5yr: 50%

STARS ★★★★★

- Safety ★★★★★
- Performance ★★★★★
- Handling ★★★★★
- Quality and reliability ★★★★★
- Comfort and refinement ★★★★★
- Value for money ★★★★★
- Overall** ★★★★★



compare with ...

Audi A4, BMW 3, Merc C Class



TESLA MODEL S FROM \$133,175



American car company Tesla, headed by PayPal inventor and billionaire Elon Musk, believes there is a more sustainable way to transport four people in performance, luxury and style with the striking — and completely electric — Model S.

A low-slung four-door sedan with a tapered coupe roofline and large liftback, the Californian-built sports express is pitched as a green alternative to the Maserati Quattroporte, BMW Gran Coupe, Porsche Panamera and their ilk.

From \$133,175, the base Tesla Long Range can travel up to 632km and can hit 100km/h in just 4.3 seconds, Tesla claims.

It runs two motors at 193kW apiece and 660Nm of torque spread over both axles.

In the flagship Performance., priced at \$152,675, a reduced 613km range is compensated for by its upgraded 193kW-front and 375kW-rear motors, with torque totalling 967Nm. Upshot? 2.7 seconds to 100km/h in full power mode, aptly named Ludicrous, making this one

of the fastest-accelerating production cars on the planet.

Tesla is rolling out free fast-charging Supercharger outlets, with Sydney-Melbourne and Sydney-Brisbane routes now covered at several locations.

Be aware though that at highway speeds Tesla's claimed ranges are greatly reduced to a more realistic 300km-400km, and recharging at a Supercharger outlet can take up to an hour.

Cabin packaging is on the cosy side considering the S' large footprint, not helped by small apertures and a low roofline that can snag taller scalps. Once inside (via the ingenious protruding door handles) there is ample space for four adults to spread out.

The sheer theatre of the centralised 17-inch touchscreen dominates, operating like an oversized tablet and responsible for virtually everything pertaining to the Tesla's functionality.

Tesla was an early adopter of semi-autonomous driving technology. The Model S can in some situations steer and change

lanes by itself, and you can even park it using your smartphone to manoeuvre it into (or out of) the space from outside the car.

That said, it can be pretty erratic and unpredictable in self-drive mode, despite Tesla's claims to the contrary. Several Tesla drivers have been killed while using the car's so called self driving capability.

Tesla's claim that its cars "have the hardware needed for full self-driving capability" is disingenuous, because sophisticated software -- that doesn't yet exist -- will ultimately do the driving.

Small seats, poor storage, marginal rear vision and tiny sunvisors are also disappointments. The driving experience, though, is a revelation. Select Drive and gasp at the sheer force of acceleration and revel at the speed as it spirals star-wards with blurring ferocity. After momentary tail jiggling, the S settles immediately, sticking to the road with magnetic obsession and staying unflappable even when hurled hurriedly into corners.

Though crying out for more steering feedback, the expertly tuned chassis delivers unbelievable grip for a hunkered-down attitude reminiscent of a Scalextric race car. The ride quality and noise suppression are up with the best luxury limousines. And that is the underlying strength of the Model S.

Its underlying weakness is that the claimed ranges are hypothetical, and in the real world are likely to be much shorter. Range is affected by temperature, terrain and speed, so it will be different on every drive you take. And if you run out of juice, life gets extremely complicated.

Uncertainty about Tesla's viability is also a consideration when you're spending this amount of money. Elon Musk is an EV pioneer, no doubt, but his car company seems to lurch from one crisis to another.

By Byron Mathioudakis

THINGS WE LIKE

- ✓ Stunning performance
- ✓ An utterly quiet and refined grand tourer
- ✓ Space-age interior
- ✓ Limpet-like roadholding
- ✓ Zero tailpipe emissions

THINGS YOU MIGHT NOT LIKE

- ✗ Overpriced
- ✗ Small door openings and a low roof hinder cabin access
- ✗ Seats suitable for small people only
- ✗ Cabin storage is limited
- ✗ Claimed ranges and battery recharge times are optimistic and if the battery goes flat you have a major problem.

SPEX (Long Range)

- Made in the USA
- Two three-phase AC electric motors/100kWh lithium-ion battery/single-reduction gear/all-wheel drive
- 193kW of power/660Nm of torque
- 0-100km/h in 4.3 seconds (claimed)
- Warranty: Eight years/160,000km
- Standard: Six airbags, stability control, Autopilot, rear camera, lane-departure warning, parking sensors, Bi-Xenon headlights, daytime running lights, heated/electric front seats, climate control air-conditioning, 17-inch touchscreen, Bluetooth with wireless hotspot, voice recognition, 19-inch alloy wheels
- Redbook future values: 3yr: 55%; 5yr: 41%

STARS ★★★★★

- Safety ★★★★★ ANCAP
- Green Vehicle Guide ★★★★★
- Performance ★★★★★
- Handling ★★★★★
- Quality and reliability ★★★★★
- Comfort and refinement ★★★★★
- Value for money ★★★★★
- Overall** ★★★★★



compare with ...

Audi A7 Sportback, BMW Hybrid 745e, Maserati Quattroporte, Porsche Panamera 4E-Hybrid

TESLA MODEL X FROM \$157,874



Tesla's Model X Long Range is \$157,874 and the Performance, tested here, is \$177,374.

Model X is a big, heavy (2497kg), electric SUV with its styling signature a pair of vertically hinged rear doors — “Falcon Wing” doors in Tesla-speak. Five seats are standard; six and seven seat layouts are optional.

An aluminium frame holds the liquid-cooled lithium-ion battery pack — a 100kW/h unit — with an electric motor at each end providing all-wheel drive via a single-speed reduction gear. Suspension is conventional double wishbone front/multilink rear, with air springs permitting an adjustable ride height.

“Autopilot”, Tesla’s latest semi-autonomous driving system, is included, but don’t be fooled. You still have to drive the car. As for Tesla’s claimed “Full Self-Driving Capability”, Tesla’s disclaimer states that “functionality is dependent upon extensive software validation and regulatory approval, which may vary widely

by jurisdiction”. In other words, it doesn’t even exist yet.

Around town, especially in traffic, Autopilot’s Autosteer function is erratic, unreliable and occasionally scary.

The test car would not stay in its lane or negotiate corners in a predictable, safe manner.

On the highway, Autosteer activation was often blocked because the road markings, barriers and other reference points used by its cameras, radar and ultrasonic sensors were insufficient or indistinct, or the road was partly in shadow.

In full-power “Ludicrous” mode, the Model X is claimed to hit 100km/h from rest in an entirely believable 2.9 seconds, comparable with a Ferrari.

Even in normal mode, acceleration is immediate and effortless. And how’s the serenity? Sublime.

Model X is a taut, agile handler that will keep a Porsche Cayenne honest, and it rides

smoothly and comfortably, but there’s some body flex on bumpy roads and it’s underbraked. Tesla claims that Model X’s 100kW/h battery provides 553 kilometres of range, or up to 580km from the Long Range.

In any electric vehicle, range is dependent on several factors, particularly how you drive and ambient temperature.

In ideal autumn weather I never got close to 550km. On several long distance highway drives, the test car’s maximum achievable range was nearer to 350km, and a recharge took 40-50 minutes at one of Tesla’s supercharger stations, where free, unlimited charging is part of the Model X deal.

On a 10-amp household power point, it took 48 hours.

“Zero Emissions. Zero Compromises” motoring is the Model X promise, according to Tesla. The zero emissions claim only flies if you recharge from renewable sources.

The Green Vehicle Guide lists the Model X’s “fuel lifecycle” CO₂ emissions as 203 grams per kilometre — almost three times the tailpipe emissions generated by BMW’s X5 40e petrol/electric hybrid — if the electricity it uses is generated by burning fossil fuels.

“Model X is the SUV uncompromised,” proclaims Tesla. On the evidence of the test car’s misaligned panels, wide panel gaps, poorly fitted seals and trim, and general lack of attention to detail in fit and finish, I would argue that the Model X is seriously compromised.

In fact, by current standards, it’s not even production-ready. It drives beautifully, but too much of Model X’s reality does not correlate with Tesla’s spin.

Jaguar’s i-Pace and the Mercedes EQC are better buys. ■

THINGS WE LIKE

- ✓ Truly amazing performance
- ✓ One of the best ride/handling compromises in large SUVs
- ✓ Spacious and comfortable
- ✓ Incredibly quiet
- ✓ Zero emissions motoring if you recharged from renewable sources

THINGS YOU MIGHT NOT LIKE

- ✗ Substandard build quality
- ✗ Excessive body flex
- ✗ Limited recharging capability outside capital cities
- ✗ Self-driving technology doesn’t work
- ✗ Touchscreen is distracting and inefficient
- ✗ Overpriced
- ✗ Weak brakes

SPEX (Performance)

- Made in the USA
- Twin synchronous AC electric motors/100kW/h lithium-ion battery pack/single-speed automatic/all-wheel drive
- 397kW of power/967Nm of torque
- 0-100km/h in 3.1 seconds (claimed)
- 226Wh/km; fuel lifecycle CO₂ emissions are 212g/km
- Warranty: Four years/80,000km
- Max. towing weight 2250kg
- Standard: Eight airbags, stability control, blind spot monitoring, forward collision warning and mitigation, lane departure warning, tyre pressure monitoring, front and rear cameras, 20-inch alloy wheels, air suspension, LED headlights, Bluetooth, navigation, voice control, touchscreen infotainment, dual-zone air, heated front seats, power tailgate
- Redbook future values: 3yr: 58%; 5yr: 43%

STARS ★★☆☆☆

- Safety **Not yet tested**
- Performance ★★★★★
- Handling ★★★★★
- Quality and reliability ★★☆☆☆
- Comfort and refinement ★★★★★
- Value for money ★★☆☆☆
- Overall** ★★☆☆☆



compare with ...

Jaguar I-Pace, Mercedes EQC



TOYOTA SUPRA FROM \$87,126



Toyota's GR Supra has generated howls of outrage, mostly from people who spend way too much keyboard time offering opinions but in reality wouldn't know a decent car from a hole in the ground.

They seem to hate the idea that it's the product of a collaboration with BMW. What's the problem? Last time I looked, BMW was, y'know, fairly handy at go-fast machinery.

Supra is, for now, a two seater coupe only; its BMW counterpart, the Z4, is a convertible.

We're testing the GT, priced at \$87,126. That's sharp money for BMW's 285kW/500Nm 3.0-litre twin scroll turbo straight six/eight-speed automatic/rear wheel drivetrain, complemented by adaptive suspension dampers, Brembo brakes, BMW's electronic M rear diff lock that can distribute up to 100 percent of the drive across the back axle and 18-inch alloys with Michelin Pilot Super Sport tyres.

GTS, at \$97,126, adds bigger rear discs and 19 inch alloys – neither of which you need unless you're planning track days -- a head up display and upgraded audio.

Supra is set up by Toyota engineers as a sharper-edged performance piece than the Z4 convertible, however it's also designed to do the daily drive comfortably and efficiently. So you get leather-faced, heated sports seats, Toyota's elegant thin-rimmed, small diameter sports steering wheel, BMW's iDrive 6 infotainment, with navigation, voice control and digital radio – but no Apple CarPlay or Android Auto – wireless phone charging and dual zone air.

Long journeys are a pleasure in the Supra. In Normal mode, the ride is as controlled and absorbent on rough roads at speed as a pure Gran Turismo coupe; Sport is tolerably

compliant, though obviously firmer. Tyre noise isn't overly intrusive by sports car standards.

You're properly supported in the luxurious driver's seat, with adjustable cushion length, backrest side bolsters and plenty of legroom.

Climbing in or out of the car with dignity requires dexterity and practice, due to its low roofline.

BMW's force fed 3.0-litre straight six is one of the all-time great engines.

Its defining characteristics are the ridiculously effortless way it gathers pace through the midrange, surreal smoothness and, in this version, even greater responsiveness at the pedal, especially in Sport mode.

Toyota claims 4.1 seconds for the 0-100km/h trip. That may be a tad optimistic, but it's close enough and rolling acceleration, which is what really counts, is sensational.

Complemented by eight ratios, closely spaced in the lower half, this is one very quick car.

Supra is also finely balanced, with a short wheelbase, wide tracks and a claimed 50/50 front/rear weight distribution. Sticky Michelins help the cause, especially the wide (255/40) front tyres, which bite hard when you point the car into a bend. The M diff keeps the back end tidy under power on the way out.

Relatively trim at 1495kg, Supra's body is as tight as they come, as is the control exercised by the Toyota-tuned suspension. This permits extremely quick steering – again calibrated by Toyota -- with just 2.1 turns lock to lock, minus the numb, heavy characteristics that blight some BMWs.

Don't fall for the "it's just a rebadged BMW" myth. Supra is a brilliant joint effort from two blue chip automotive engineering outfits, great value and an absolute joy to drive.

THINGS WE LIKE

- ✓ Great value
- ✓ That BMW 3.0-litre straight six
- ✓ Agile, beautifully balanced handling
- ✓ Comfortable and refined
- ✓ Reasonably priced servicing
- ✓ Well equipped

THINGS YOU MIGHT NOT LIKE

- ✗ No spare, just a repair kit. Don't get a flat.
- ✗ Getting in and out is an effort
- ✗ Restricted rear vision
- ✗ Minimal cabin storage

SPEX (GT)

- Made in Austria
- 3.0-litre turbocharged six cylinder/eight-speed automatic/rear-wheel drive
- 285kW of power from 5800-6500rpm/500Nm of torque from 1800-5000rpm
- 0-100km/h in 4.1 seconds (claimed)
- 6.5L/100km highway; 9.9L/100km city; 95 octane premium; CO2 emissions are 177gkm
- Warranty: Five years/unlimited km
- Standard: Seven airbags, stability control, AEB, blind spot monitoring, adaptive cruise, lane keep assist, heated, leather-faced sports seats, navigation, voice control, digital radio, wireless phone charging, LED headlights, 18-inch alloy wheels, dual zone air
- Redbook future values: 3yr: 5%; 5yr: 42%

STARS ★★★★★

- Safety
- Not yet tested**
- Performance
- ★★★★☆
- Handling
- ★★★★☆
- Quality and reliability
- ★★★★☆
- Comfort and refinement
- ★★★★☆
- Value for money
- ★★★★☆
- Overall**
- ★★★★☆



compare with ...

Audi TTS, BMW M240i, Nissan 370Z, Porsche Cayman



While many so-called “new” models are often a facelift – or a new body on old underpinnings – the 2021 Toyota Yaris shares nothing with its predecessor and is new from the wheels up.

There is a choice of two new three-cylinder engines, one of which is paired to a hybrid powertrain.

The previous Yaris started at \$15,390 plus on road costs. This model is almost \$7000 more expensive.

The price rise is so dramatic, Toyota has suggested buyers on a budget consider one of its approved used cars if they can't afford a new Yaris.

There are three model grades: Ascent Sport (petrol only, manual or auto, from \$22,130), SX (petrol auto or hybrid, from \$27,020), and ZR (petrol auto or hybrid, from \$30,100). Hybrid tech adds \$1500 to each model.

All models come with eight airbags, including twin centre airbags (on the inboard cushion of

each front seat) to better protect occupants in a side impact crash.

Speed sign recognition, lane keeping assistance, autonomous emergency braking with intersection assistance, reverse camera, and automatic high beam are also standard.

Only the top ZR grade comes with blind zone warning and rear cross-traffic alert.

Yaris might be expensive to buy, but servicing is cheap. Service intervals are twelve months/15,000km, whichever comes first. The cost for routine maintenance is capped at \$170 for each of the first five visits.

The new Yaris has a bigger footprint for more sure-footed cornering and better comfort over bumps.

The cabin is still roomy – for a city hatchback – but the base model Ascent Sport is conspicuously impoverished, with a basic instrument cluster rather than the three digital screens in the SX and ZR grades.

The 1.5-litre three-cylinder petrol engine has an output of 88kW/145Nm. Paired with a CVT automatic it has a claimed fuel consumption average of 4.9L/100km.

The hybrid has a revised version of the 1.5-litre three-cylinder petrol engine paired to an electric motor and battery pack, for a combined output of 85kW/141Nm.

On test the hybrid briefly dipped to as low as 2.8L/100km in stop-start traffic, but over a 700km test drive averaged 4.3L/100km.

On a 300km test drive in mostly inter-urban conditions, the petrol-only Toyota Yaris automatic returned an average of 5.2L/100km.

Refinement of both engine variants was impressive. The trademark three-cylinder thrum was muted and there was little to no vibration.

The steering is well weighted and the suspension is supple over bumps. There is road roar on coarse-chip roads at

highway speeds but otherwise the Yaris has acceptable levels of noise and refinement. That said, a VW Polo would be quieter and more supple.

Performance between the two Yaris engine options is similar, but surprisingly the hybrid is perkier than the petrol model.

Emergency braking performance was disappointing due in part, we suspect, to low friction tyres designed to save fuel, and also because it uses drum brakes at the rear. Despite the Yaris being a light and nimble car, it has almost the same braking distance as a two-tonne four-wheel-drive ute.

The Toyota Yaris has evolved from a cheap and cheerful first or last car for many buyers, into a city hatch with European flair and an eye-watering price tag. It may have found its mojo, but it also may lose buyers at this price.

By Joshua Dowling

THINGS WE LIKE

- ✓ Brings new levels of safety and refinement to the city-car class
- ✓ Genuinely impressive real-world fuel economy and low emissions
- ✓ Both drivetrains deliver acceptable performance
- ✓ Cheap servicing
- ✓ Toyota quality and reliability

THINGS YOU MIGHT NOT LIKE

- ✗ Despite the significant advancements, the price is a big ask.
- ✗ For Toyota Corolla money, why not buy a Toyota Corolla?
- ✗ Underbraked
- ✗ Minimal EV only capability

SPEX (SX hybrid)

- Made in Japan
- 1.5-litre three cylinder petrol-electric hybrid/CVT/front-wheel drive
- 85kW of power (combined system output)
- 0-100km/h in 9.5 seconds
- 3.6L/100km highway; 2.8L/100km city; 91 octane regular; CO2 emissions are 76g/km
- Warranty: Five years/unlimited km
- Standard: Eight airbags, stability control, autonomous emergency braking, adaptive cruise, lane keep assist, speed sign recognition, navigation, voice control, Apple CarPlay, Android Auto, digital radio, live traffic updates, digital instruments, 15-inch alloys
- Redbook future values: 3yr: 61%; 5yr: 46%

STARS ★★★★★

- Safety ★★★★★
- Performance ★★★★★
- Handling ★★★★★
- Quality and reliability ★★★★★
- Comfort and refinement ★★★★★
- Value for money ★★★★★
- Overall** ★★★★★



compare with ...

Honda Jazz, Kia Rio, Mazda2, Suzuki Swift, VW Polo



Toyota's Yaris GR is powered by a turbocharged 1.6-litre three-cylinder engine – with 200kW and 370Nm it's the most powerful three-cylinder in the world – matched to a six-speed manual and all-wheel-drive. An automatic is not available.

It's Toyota's first turbo all-wheel-drive performance car in 20 years, since the iconic Celica GT Four.

This car might wear the Yaris badge but it has nothing in common with Toyota's new generation city hatchback.

Its two-door body has a unique, more raked windscreen, an aluminium bonnet, doors and rear hatch, and a carbon-fibre roof.

It also has a larger footprint than the standard Toyota Yaris, with all four wheels pushed to the corners of the car.

Both models run the same engine and gearbox, performance brakes and race-car appearance.

A Rallye edition, which gains limited-slip front and rear differentials, lightweight alloy

wheels and Michelin rather than Dunlop tyres, is due to join the range shortly, initially as a batch of 250 vehicles.

Yaris GR costs \$49,500. Pricing for the Rallye was yet to be announced as we went to press.

The Yaris GR platform is also unique, as is the all-wheel-drive system and the sophisticated double wishbone rear suspension that replaces the standard car's rudimentary torsion beam.

In the sub-\$60,000 hot hatch segment, the only vehicles to top the Toyota Yaris GR's 156kW per tonne power to weight ratio are the Honda Civic Type R (163kW per tonne) and Ford Focus RS (169kW per tonne).

The suspension on both models has fixed rate springs and shocks, tuned for performance driving.

In the Rallye edition, grip from the Michelin tyres is profound and the responsiveness out of corners

is remarkable, due in no small part to the all-wheel-drive system and limited-slip differentials.

Braking power is seemingly endless thanks to four-piston calipers clamping massive discs up front.

Most impressive of all, however, is the engine. It has strong pulling power from as little as 2000rpm and a broad delivery right through the rev range up to 7000rpm.

It has a typical three-cylinder thrum but it's not particularly raucous at the intake or exhaust end. You can hear it revving its little heart out, but it's not deafening.

The clutch and gearshift have easy, light actions. The steering wheel is quite large but this enables better accuracy in high-speed turns.

I also sampled the base model Yaris GR on Dunlop tyres, with

no limited-slip diffs and a slightly different suspension tune.

The difference in grip is immediately apparent; it also doesn't climb out of corners with quite the same precision or gusto as the Rallye model.

There's no adjustable stability control as per other hot hatches such as the Ford Fiesta ST.

It's either on or off. There's no drift mode and no launch control, either, although both tend to be not much help on manuals in any case.

That said, the standard GR Yaris is still fun to drive and the differences are likely only obvious on a race track.

On public roads there was plenty of tyre noise on coarse surfaces but the suspension did a fair job of dealing with nasty lumps and bumps. The suspension is busy rather than firm, but definitely liveable.

The Toyota GR Yaris is a little fire-cracker -- albeit one with a huge pricetag.

THINGS WE LIKE

- ✓ Bold design
- ✓ Genuine hot hatch performance
- ✓ All-wheel-drive grip
- ✓ New levels of tech to the hot hatch class.

THINGS YOU MIGHT NOT LIKE

- ✗ The price doesn't make sense
- ✗ Try a Ford Fiesta ST and save close to \$20,000
- ✗ Or a Hyundai i30N and save close to \$10,000

SPEX (Rallye)

- Made in Japan
- 1.6-litre three cylinder turbopetrol/six-speed manual/all-wheel drive
- 200kW of power/370Nm of torque
- 0-100km/h in 5.2 seconds (claimed)
- 8.9L/100mm combined; 98 octane premium; CO2 emissions are 184gkm
- Warranty: Five years/unlimited km
- Standard: Eight airbags, stability control, autonomous emergency braking, lane keep assist, speed sign recognition, Alcantara upholstered sports seats, forged 18-inch alloy wheels, Torsen front and rear differentials, Michelin tyres, red brake calipers, navigation, Apple CarPlay, Android Auto, voice control, digital radio.
- Redbook future values: 3yr: 62%; 5yr: 46%

STARS ★★★★★

- Safety ★★★★★
- Performance ★★★★★
- Handling ★★★★★
- Quality and reliability ★★★★★
- Comfort and refinement ★★★★★
- Value for money ★★★★★
- Overall** ★★★★★



compare with ...

Ford Fiesta ST, Honda Civic Type R, Hyundai i30N, VW Golf R

TOYOTA COROLLA FROM \$23,895



The 12th-generation Corolla hatch starts at \$23,895 for the 2.0-litre petrol Ascent Sport six-speed manual. A continuously variable automatic (CVT) adds \$1500 and is standard in SX (\$28,795) and ZR, at \$32,695.

A hybrid CVT drivetrain option, which also adds \$2000, is available in each model grade.

Corolla sedan is available in all model grades bar ZR hybrid, at the same prices.

The hybrid's 1.8-litre petrol engine/twin electric motor generator/nickel metal hydride battery powertrain in the new Corolla hatch is based on the Prius.

In city traffic, expect the hybrid to use about half the fuel — about 4-5L/100km — of the conventionally-powered 2.0-litre/CVT Corolla. On the highway, though, where the hybrid's engine is running all the time, it loses its advantage. Our test car drank 5.5L/100km at 100km/h in Eco mode, whereas the 2.0-litre petrol model was actually more

frugal, using 4.5-5.0L/100km at a constant 100km/h.

Corolla hybrid's CO₂ emissions of 97 grams per kilometre are by far the lowest in its class. At \$175 a time Corolla also has the cheapest servicing in the class.

As the base model, Ascent Sport gets a plastic steering wheel, tinny audio and just one each USB and 12-volt sockets. Corolla's infotainment features a high-mounted 8-inch touchscreen, voice control that works for all functions and seamless Bluetooth with email and SMS. Navigation with live traffic alerts adds \$1000.

A supportive, well-bolstered driver's seat, complemented by ample driving position adjustment and an exceptionally quiet, controlled, compliant ride make this Corolla the most comfortable to date. Tyre noise is very intrusive on coarse bitumen, though, especially in the hatch.

Adult rear-seat passengers continue to suffer restricted legroom and tight access in the

hatch. Legroom in the longer wheelbase sedan is much more generous. Minimal storage and no vents or device connectors make the back stalls a grim space, too, while the boot is tiny for a hatch of this size. The sedan's boot offers more than twice as much capacity.

Autonomous emergency braking works across the full speed range and includes pedestrian and cyclist detection. Adaptive cruise features effective lane keeping, including Mercedes-style lane centring that can be hit and miss depending on ambient light and the clarity of road markings. Speed sign monitoring and automatic high beams are also standard.

Corolla's 2.0-litre petrol engine is a strong performer, with more power — 125kW — than most rivals, so it's pretty quick. Its relative lack of bottom-end torque is effectively masked by the responsive, well-calibrated CVT, which hooks up

quickly and pins the revs where you want them.

Toyota has been doing mainstream hybrids for longer than anybody else, and it shows in Corolla's beautifully refined, efficient, seamless operation, accompanied by a strong, smooth, turbo-style shove as high-voltage torque kicks in. Overtaking is quick and effortless.

Independent rear suspension is standard. This Corolla is agile, responsive, planted and, yes, almost sporty, would you believe, with a noticeably tighter body and light, precise steering.

Corolla offers proven, efficient engineering, paired with sophisticated safety technology, in an affordable package that's now a more engaging drive, too. The hybrid drivetrain is highly recommended. Tight back seat and boot space may make the hatch hard to live with, though.

THINGS WE LIKE

- ✓ Punchy, frugal, refined petrol and hybrid drivetrains
- ✓ Excellent ride/handling compromise
- ✓ Strong safety specification
- ✓ Stylish, reliable and well built
- ✓ Cheap servicing
- ✓ Comfortable driver's seat and efficient, comprehensive infotainment

THINGS YOU MIGHT NOT LIKE

- ✗ Tiny boot in the hatch
- ✗ Tight back-seat space in the hatch
- ✗ Excessive tyre noise at speed

SPEX (2.0 Ascent Sport CVT)

- Made in Japan
- 2.0-litre four-cylinder petrol/CVT/front-wheel drive
- 125kW of power at 6600rpm/200Nm of torque from 4400-4800rpm
- 0-100km/h N/A
- 5.1L/100km highway; 7.5L/100km city; regular unleaded; CO₂ emissions are 139gkm
- Warranty: Five years/unlimited km
- Standard: Seven airbags, stability control, AEB, adaptive cruise, lane keeping, speed sign monitoring, camera, automatic high beams, dual-zone air, automatic LED headlights, keyless entry and starting, heated side mirrors, Bluetooth with sms and email, voice control, 16-inch alloy wheels
- Redbook future values: 3yr: 62%; 5yr: 48%

STARS ★★★★★

- Safety ★★★★★
- Performance ★★★★★
- Handling ★★★★★
- Quality and reliability ★★★★★
- Comfort and refinement ★★★★★
- Value for money ★★★★★
- Overall** ★★★★★



compare with ...

Ford Focus, Honda Civic, Hyundai i30, Kia Cerato, Mazda3, Subaru Impreza, VW Golf



TOYOTA CAMRY FROM \$30,990



Faced with declining sales, Toyota Australia took the axe to the Camry range in early 2021, deleting the V6 models, offering just one 2.5-litre as the base model and four variants of the 2.5-litre petrol/electric hybrid, which has proven to be the strongest performer, accounting for 70 percent of sales.

The base 2.5-litre petrol Camry Ascent is \$28,990.

Camry Hybrid prices start at \$33,490 for the Ascent, a \$2500 premium over the equivalent 2.5-litre petrol model. Ascent Sport, our test car, is the value sweet spot at \$36,290, SX is \$39,190 and the top-spec SL is \$42,790.

Camry Hybrid Ascent Sport hybrid is astounding value. You won't find another sedan (or SUV) of comparable size at that price, let alone one with a powerful, efficient hybrid drivetrain, five-star safety, dual-zone air, nine-inch infotainment touchscreen, voice control, navigation, parking sensors at both ends, a camera with movable guidelines, keyless entry and starting, a power-adjustable driver's seat and auto-levelling LED headlights.

Add bulletproof reliability and low service costs — \$975 over five years/75,000km — and the Camry ownership proposition looks as grief-free and financially astute as they come.

A supple, quiet ride, the silent operation of the hybrid drivetrain in cruise mode and a driving position that can be tailored for people of all sizes make the Camry Hybrid an exceptionally relaxing, enjoyable long-distance machine.

The driver's seat cushion could use more supportive padding, though.

Infotainment includes Apple CarPlay, Android Auto, digital radio, voice control that works (and extends to reading emails and messages), accurate speed camera alerts and real-time traffic information.

Rear seat legroom is vast, it's a pleasant place to travel and vents, front seat pockets and door bins are provided. Boot space is the same 525 litres as the Ascent Sport petrol variant.

Seven airbags, adaptive cruise control, automatic emergency braking, lane departure warning/lane keeping, automatic high beam, blind spot monitoring and rear cross traffic

alert are standard on Ascent Sport, so it's fully equipped with driver assist safety tech.

Camry's front-wheel hybrid drivetrain includes a 2.5-litre petrol engine, CVT transmission, two electric motors and a lithium ion battery, which replaced the previous nickel metal hydride unit as part of the 2021 update.

Performance is excellent, with an immediate, strong surge of high-voltage torque from rest and an effortless midrange, similar to a turbodiesel. The hybrid system is completely smooth and seamless in operation.

The uglier the traffic, the prettier the fuel numbers (on regular unleaded) look.

I got 3.5-4.0L/100km in heavy traffic; low to mid fours are average in town, while high fours/low fives can be expected when cruising on the highway.

Camry Hybrid is built for comfort, not for speed.

Driven to that brief, it handles with reasonable confidence and poise. It's nose heavy and a tad nautical in tight corners, but it also carries its weight close to the road, so it's securely planted at speed on rough surfaces, with a

smooth, supple ride as well.

The brakes, which combine mechanical and regenerative functions in the hybrid, remain a weak point. They're grabby and difficult to modulate at low speeds — a pain in the neck in heavy traffic.

If you prefer a big sedan to an SUV, Camry Hybrid should be right at the top of your test drive list. Its value is unbeatable.

THINGS WE LIKE

- ✓ The best-value large sedan in Australia
- ✓ Best-in-the-business quality, durability and reliability
- ✓ Frugal, refined drivetrain
- ✓ Comfortable ride
- ✓ Loaded with safety features
- ✓ Low running costs

THINGS YOU MIGHT NOT LIKE

- ✗ Wooden brakes
- ✗ A bit of a boat in corners
- ✗ Driver's seat could be more supportive

SPEX (Ascent Sport Hybrid)

- Made in Japan
- 2.5-litre petrol/electric hybrid/CVT/front-wheel drive
- 160kW (combined system output)
- 4.2L/100km highway; 4.7L/100km city; 95 octane premium; CO2 emissions are 96g/km
- Warranty: Five years/unlimited km
- Standard: Seven airbags, stability control, adaptive cruise control, automatic emergency braking, lane departure warning/lane keeping, blind spot monitoring, rear cross traffic alert, automatic high beam, 17-inch alloys, dual-zone air, voice control, Apple CarPlay, Android Auto, navigation, parking sensors, camera with movable guidelines, keyless entry and starting, auto-levelling LED headlights
- Redbook future values: 3yr: 57%; 5yr: 39%

STARS ★★★★★

- Safety ★★★★★
- Performance ★★★★★
- Handling ★★★★★
- Quality and reliability ★★★★★
- Comfort and refinement ★★★★★
- Value for money ★★★★★
- Overall** ★★★★★



compare with ...

Honda Accord, Mazda6, Peugeot 508, Skoda Superb

TOYOTA 86 FROM \$32,180



The 86 GT kicks off at \$32,180, which, for a car like this, is ridiculously cheap. The GTS costs \$37,380.

It's worth the extra ask. You get 17-inch alloys with 215/45 tyres, rather than the GT's shopping trolley 205/55 16s, plus bigger brakes, with ventilated discs at both ends.

Extra kit on the GTS also includes HID headlights, LED running lights, bits of cow on the seats, groovy red stitching, steering wheel audio controls, slicker instruments, dual-zone air and aluminium pedals.

A six-speed manual is standard; a six-speed auto, with paddles, adds \$2300. It includes a Torsen limited slip differential, like the manual versions.

Premium Sachs sports dampers, Brembo brakes and anthracite coloured 17-inch

alloys are available as a \$2900 option on GT and \$2200 on GTS.

The 86 works because it nails the basic, essential elements of what makes a car great to drive. Except for performance.

Subaru's 2.0-litre naturally aspirated 86's 152kW (in the manual; the auto model's output is 147kW) is unremarkable.

Its torque quota — 212Nm from 6400–6800rpm — is almost pathetically weak and peaky for a car with performance pretensions.

As the torque numbers indicate, this is a highly strung, naturally aspirated four-cylinder petrol engine.

The 2.0-litre begins to climb into the zone at about 4000, then, flattered by short gearing in the precise, snickety-snick box, spins hard through to the 7400rpm redline, sounding a

whole lot meaner and angrier than it actually is.

Time hasn't been kind to the engine. Compared with the flexible, punchy turbo fours found in most hot hatches these days, it lacks torque and feels pretty gutless. It's not particularly smooth, either.

The 86 weighs just 1239kg. That's more than 100kg lighter than the Volkswagen Golf GTi.

Its centre of gravity seems to be half a metre below ground.

When you point it into a corner, with razor-sharp, highly communicative steering, it responds with the grace and agility of a bird changing direction mid-flight.

The brakes are fine and the ride is surprisingly compliant.

The badge says GT and while the 86 is certainly an authentic sports piece, it can also do GT

business, such as long distance drives, in style and comfort.

You sit deep within the 86's elegant, minimalist cabin, wrapped in a snug, supportive seat.

Those things that you touch — the steering wheel, gear lever, wands, handles and controls — use quality materials. The rest doesn't matter.

There are no steering wheel controls in the base model.

This is spun as "enhancing the purity of the driving experience", which I guess it does, but the reality is probably that the project managers spent all their money on the engineering and ran out of cash when it came to the frills.

The second generation 86, yet to be confirmed for sale here as we went to press, features a 170kW/249Nm 2.4-litre Subaru boxer engine, matched with six-speed manual or automatic transmissions, in a significantly stiffer body which uses aluminium for the roof, front guards and bonnet.

THINGS WE LIKE

- ✓ One of the best handling cars on the road, at any price
- ✓ It's a Toyota, so it's well made, cheap to run and it won't break
- ✓ Comfortable driver's seat and driving position
- ✓ Can't argue with the price

THINGS YOU MIGHT NOT LIKE

- ✗ It would be even better with a set of premium performance tyres
- ✗ Prefers 98 octane
- ✗ Engine lacks torque

SPEX (GTS manual)

- Made in Japan
- 2.0-litre four-cylinder petrol/six-speed manual/rear-wheel drive
- 152kW of power at 7000rpm/212Nm of torque from 6400–6800rpm
- 0–100km/h in 7.6 seconds
- 6.4L/100km highway; 10.4L/100km city; 98 octane; CO₂ emissions are 181g/km
- Warranty: Five years/unlimited km
- Standard: Seven airbags, stability control, limited slip diff, 17-inch alloys, Bluetooth with voice recognition, touch-screen navigation, auto-levelling headlights, leather/Alcantara upholstery, heated front seats, dual-zone air, reversing camera, aluminium pedals and scuff plates
- Redbook future values: 3yr: 58%; 5yr: 47%

STARS ★★★★★

- Safety ★★★★★ ANCAP
- Green Vehicle Guide ★★★★★
- Performance ★★★★★
- Handling ★★★★★
- Quality and reliability ★★★★★
- Comfort and refinement ★★★★★
- Value for money ★★★★★
- Overall** ★★★★★



compare with ...

Hyundai i30N, Mazda MX5 RF, Mini Cooper S, Subaru BRZ

TOYOTA YARIS CROSS FROM \$26,990



Toyota's Yaris hatchback has now spawned an SUV variant, the Yaris Cross, which competes in the premium small SUV market against, among others, VW's T Cross, the Ford Puma, Skoda Kamiq and Mazda CX3.

Three drivetrain options are available. The range opens with the 88kW 1.5-litre naturally aspirated petrol/CVT/front wheel drive GX, priced at \$26,990.

A different 1.5-litre triple, which uses the Atkinson cycle for improved fuel efficiency and is mated to a pair of electric motor/generators and a CVT, powers the front-wheel drive hybrid, which starts at \$28,990.

All-wheel drive hybrid variants, which use a third electric motor generator to drive the rear wheels, start at \$31,990.

GXL and Urban model grades add \$3000 and \$6000 respectively.

Yaris Cross sits on the hatch platform but has a longer

wheelbase and larger body for greater interior space.

That said, it's still extremely tight in the back seat compared with the class leading Skoda Kamiq, and the boot isn't exactly voluminous either, though it does have a handy two position floor in front wheel drive variants.

First impressions are not great. The ugly, bulging dash is swathed in hard, cheap plastics, the driver's seat is a basic, unsupportive perch, there's no covered storage close at hand and just one USB and 12 volt socket. Still, the elevated

driving position does give you clear vision around the car, and you get a big digital speedo so you have excuse if you get pinged by one of those sneaky hidden speed cameras.

GX infotainment includes Apple CarPlay/Android Auto connectivity,

voice control and digital radio; GXL and Urban add navigation.

Safety tech in GX includes adaptive cruise, autonomous emergency braking, lane keep assist and speed sign recognition; GXL and Urban add parking sensors, blind spot monitoring, surround cameras and rear cross traffic alert.

We tested the front wheel drive hybrid, and as expected its major attraction is great fuel economy. It runs on regular unleaded and can travel for up to half a kilometre or so at speeds up to about 30km/h using the battery/electric motors alone, so around town it will use 3/4L/100km, which is at least half as much as most petrol-powered rivals.

It's as slow as a week of Tuesdays, though, and while

the engine is smooth and quiet on a light throttle, if you ask for decent acceleration by pushing to the pedal to the floor all you get is a loud, anguished moan and precious little forward progress.

Ride and handling are OK, but there are some pretty good drives in this class now, notably the Puma, Kamiq, T-Cross and Kia Seltos, so the Toyota isn't among the leaders.

That said, its suspension is quite supple and well-controlled, so ride comfort is better than most, and it sits on the road safely and securely. Bridgestone Turanza tyres are fine in the dry but less than adhesive in the wet.

The small SUV class is very competitive now, and Yaris Cross doesn't quite offer as much performance, space or quality for your money as the value leaders, Skoda's Kamiq, VW's T-Cross and the Kia Seltos.

THINGS WE LIKE

- ✓ Fuel efficient, low emissions hybrid power
- ✓ Works best in city traffic
- ✓ Comfortable ride
- ✓ Well sorted infotainment
- ✓ Cheap servicing during the warranty period
- ✓ Toyota reliability

THINGS YOU MIGHT NOT LIKE

- ✗ Sluggish performance and noisy under acceleration
- ✗ Unsupportive driver's seat
- ✗ Ugly dash with few storage spaces or device connectors
- ✗ Tight back seat
- ✗ Tyres lack grip in wet

SPEX (GXL fwd hybrid)

- Made in Japan
- 1.5-litre three cylinder petrol/electric hybrid/CVT/front-wheel drive
- 85kW/260Nm (combined)
- 0-100km/h N/A
- 3.3L/100km highway; 4.2L/100km city; 91 octane; CO2 emissions are 86gkm
- Warranty: Five years/unlimited km
- Standard: Eight airbags, stability control, AEB, adaptive cruise, blind spot monitoring, rear cross traffic alert, lane keep assist, surround cameras, Apple CarPlay, Android Auto, navigation, voice control, digital radio, digital instruments, LED headlights, 16-inch alloy wheels.
- Redbook future value: 3yr: 61%; 5yr: 46%

STARS ★★★★★

- Safety **Not yet tested**
- Performance ★★★★★
- Handling ★★★★★
- Quality and reliability ★★★★★
- Comfort and refinement ★★★★★
- Value for money ★★★★★
- Overall** ★★★★★



compare with ...

Ford Puma, Kia Seltos, Mazda CX3, Nissan Juke, Skoda Kamiq, VW T-Cross

TOYOTA C-HR FROM \$30,915



Toyota came late to the compact SUV party, a growing and eclectic class where many contenders are basically just high-riding hatchbacks. You could say that about the C-HR, an all-new design from Toyota which is designed to get the brand noticed by style-conscious millennials.

It's a bold-looking machine by Toyota's usual conservative standards, and C-HR breaks new ground under the bonnet, too, introducing a new 1.2-litre four-cylinder turbopetrol engine to a class where naturally aspirated 1.6-2.0-litre engines dominate.

The range kicks off at \$30,915 for the front-wheel drive, continuously variable automatic (CVT) transmission drivetrain, while all-wheel drive adds another \$2000.

Navigation, 17-inch alloys and dual-zone air are included, but it's in the area of high-tech, driver-assist safety features where you get outstanding value in the C-HR.

Radar cruise, automatic emergency braking, lane departure alert with steering

assist, blind spot monitoring, rear cross traffic alert, parking sensors at both ends and a camera are all standard. Some \$50,000 SUVs still don't offer this level of safety specification.

Koba variants, available with the CVT only, are \$35,165 with front-wheel drive, \$37,165 with all-wheel drive and \$37,665 with a 1.8-litre petrol/electric drivetrain, as also used in the Corolla.

A new GR Sport variant is also \$37,665.

There's plenty of room up front in a twin cockpit layout, with the driver's half of the asymmetric dash a wraparound shape that puts all of the controls within easy reach.

It's a stylish layout, with plenty of storage, a beautiful leather-wrapped steering wheel, comfortable, supportive seat, made-in-Japan quality and responsive voice control for the infotainment system.

Wireless phone charging is a notable omission.

Rear-seat legroom is fine for adults, but the C-HR's coupe shape, with small windows and high sills in the back, creates a cave-like space, so kids won't be able to see out. It also restricts boot volume and rear vision.

The naturally aspirated engines that dominate this class lack responsiveness and pulling power at low and midrange revs. Toyota's refined, tractable 1.2-litre turbo has plenty of both, and it's an excellent engine for day-to-day driving.

Koba hybrid, though, is worth the extra \$2500 over the 1.2-litre turbopetrol model, for several reasons. It's faster, smoother and pulls more strongly across the rev range.

The hybrid runs on 91 regular unleaded rather than the turbo's preferred 95 premium. It also uses about half as much fuel in traffic, where you can achieve 3-4L/100km, assisted by auto stop/start and the fact that in the peak hour

bump and grind you're often running on electricity alone.

Selectable EV mode operates up to about 40km/h for short distances; B mode increases regenerative braking so you can use EV mode more often.

Highway consumption of 4-5L/100km is comparable to the petrol model.

A tight body, low centre of gravity, sophisticated independent suspension at both ends and quality tyres gives the C-HR sporty-ish, well-controlled dynamics, particularly the all-wheel-drive versions. The suspension tune is suited to European tastes, which means a firm ride overall, but with good bump absorption capability, and C-HR is a comfortable, quiet, long-distance drive.

As a practical kid carrier, C-HR doesn't work, but it's still a class front runner, with the Honda HRV, Kia Seltos, Skoda Kamiq, Subaru XV and VW T-Cross.

THINGS WE LIKE

- ✓ Great quality and sharp design
- ✓ Responsive, tractable 1.2/CVT
- ✓ Agile, enjoyable handling
- ✓ Comfortable seats
- ✓ Best in class safety specification
- ✓ Cheap servicing

THINGS YOU MIGHT NOT LIKE

- ✗ Runs on premium unleaded and it ain't quick
- ✗ Kids probably won't be happy in the back seat
- ✗ Small boot
- ✗ Restricted rear vision

SPEX (Koba 1.2 awd)

- Made in Japan
- 1.2-litre four-cylinder turbopetrol/CVT/all-wheel drive
- 85kW of power at 5200rpm/185Nm of torque from 1500-4000rpm
- 0-100km/h N/A
- 5.6L/100km highway; 8.0L/100km city; premium unleaded; CO² emissions are 148g/km
- Warranty: Five years/unlimited km.
- Standard: Seven airbags, stability control, radar cruise (on CVT models), automatic emergency braking, lane departure alert with steering assist, blind spot monitoring, parking sensors, LED headlights, camera, Apple CarPlay, Android Auto, Toyota Link, voice control, navigation, dual-zone air, 17-inch alloys, rain-sensing wipers
- Redbook future values: 3yr: 57%; 5yr: 42%

STARS ★★★★★

- Safety ★★★★★ ANCAP
- Performance ★★★★★
- Handling ★★★★★
- Quality and reliability ★★★★★
- Comfort and refinement ★★★★★
- Value for money ★★★★★
- Overall** ★★★★★



compare with ...

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TOYOTA RAV4 FROM \$32,695



Toyota RAV4 prices kick off at \$32,695 for the 127kW 2.0-litre petrol/six-speed manual/front-wheel drive GX. Top-spec Cruiser, with a CVT transmission, is \$40,915.

Front-wheel drive hybrids, with a 2.5-litre engine/twin electric motor generators/continuously variable automatic powertrain (also used the Camry hybrid), start at \$37,070 for the GX; GXL is \$39,915 and Cruiser is \$43,415. All-wheel drive GX hybrid, with a third electric motor at the rear, is \$40,070. GXL is \$42,915.

A 152kW 2.5-litre/eight-speed automatic/all wheel drivetrain is fitted to the Edge, at \$48,915.

We're testing the hybrid Cruiser all-wheel drive, priced at \$46,415. It comes with leather seat facings and door trims, power adjustable, heated front seats, a sunroof, JBL audio, power tailgate and dual zone air.

Infotainment includes an eight-inch touchscreen, voice

control, navigation, digital radio, five USB sockets (two in the rear) and wireless phone charging.

You're seated in a luxurious armchair, facing a well-coordinated, stylish dash, with plenty of handy storage and a bright touchscreen with big, easy to hit icons plus a set of manual controls.

Rear seat legroom is expansive and Toyota claims class leading boot space as well.

Smooth and supple, especially around town, the ride can become a little crashy on rough roads at speed, where the soft front end occasionally runs out of travel on nasty bumps.

Safety is comprehensive. All models include lane keeping and adaptive cruise. Cruiser adds surround camera coverage.

Electricity gets the hybrid smartly and smoothly off the

line; petrol power kicks in shortly thereafter.

Combined output of 163kW is high for the class, and while the Cruiser weighs in at a hefty 1745kg, the hybrid's strong, broad torque delivery, and a responsive CVT, also contribute to impressive performance.

Smooth and quiet in cruise mode, the engine does get pretty vocal under acceleration.

You can drive up to about a kilometre on flat terrain using battery power alone, as long as you stay below 60km/h or so with a gentle right foot.

Around town, expect 5-6L/100km, on regular unleaded, about half the consumption rate of most petrol-powered rivals. Highway consumption is about 7L/100km; those same rivals can match this, or beat it.

In line with Toyota's new found commitment to making its cars enjoyable to drive, the 2021 RAV's dynamics are much tighter than its sloppy predecessor's, thanks to a stronger body structure, new multilink rear suspension, wider tracks and, in the hybrid, a low, centred mass.

Light, precise steering and powerful brakes are complemented by all-wheel drive – an asset on dirt roads and in the wet -- plus automatic braking to control understeer in tighter corners.

Toyota pioneered hybrids and its technology is proven and efficient. The RAV is also very cheap to run.

If you're shopping mid-size SUVs, RAV4 now joins Subaru's Forester and the VW Tiguan at the top of the class. It nails the family wagon brief in every respect, and if you haven't previously considered a hybrid, you will after you take a test drive. ■

THINGS WE LIKE

- ✓ A grade safety
- ✓ Roomy, versatile interior
- ✓ Excellent quality and reliability
- ✓ Cheap to run
- ✓ Strong, smooth, efficient hybrid power

THINGS YOU MIGHT NOT LIKE

- ✗ Tyre noise at freeway speeds on certain models.
- ✗ Floaty suspension that can also be harsh over certain bumps.

SPEX (Cruiser hybrid)

- Made in Japan
- 2.5-litre four-cylinder petrol electric hybrid/six-speed CVT/all-wheel drive
- 163kW of power (combined)
- 0-100km/h N/A
- 5.8L/100km highway; 5.0L/100km city; regular unleaded; CO₂ emissions are 109g/km
- Warranty: Five years/unlimited km
- Standard: Seven airbags, stability control, 18-inch alloy wheels, camera, rain-sensing wipers, Apple CarPlay/Android Auto, dual-zone air, power tailgate, sunroof, lane departure warning, blind spot monitor, automatic emergency braking, radar cruise, lane keeping and departure warning, rear cross-traffic alert
- Redbook future values: 3yr: 55%; 5yr: 42%

STARS ★★★★★

- Safety ★★★★★
- Performance ★★★★★
- Handling ★★★★★
- Quality and reliability ★★★★★
- Comfort and refinement ★★★★★
- Value for money ★★★★★
- Overall** ★★★★★



compare with ...

Honda CRV, Hyundai Tucson, Mitsubishi Outlander, Nissan X-Trail, Subaru Forester, VW Tiguan



The Toyota Kluger dominates its seven-seater SUV segment with a combination of pricing, packaging, performance, ease of operation and long-term peace of mind.

Priced from \$44,850, the entry GX, which accounts for the lion's share of sales, includes seven airbags, stability and traction control with hill-start assist, autonomous emergency braking, lane departure alert, adaptive cruise control, automatic high beam, a reverse camera, rear parking sensors, a central touchscreen featuring Bluetooth-activated connected mobility known as Toyota Link, phone and audio streaming, front fog lights, privacy glass, and 18-inch alloy wheels.

Stepping up to the \$54,950 GXL gets you blind spot monitoring, rear cross traffic alert, a larger central screen, satellite navigation, digital radio, a powered tailgate with separate flip-up glass, three-zone climate control, keyless entry and start, a powered driver's seat, heated front seats, leather upholstery, and roof rails.

The \$65,519 Grande, meanwhile, earns its flagship status with a bird's-eye-view monitor to help manoeuvrability, front parking sensors, auto high beam (that senses traffic ahead before dipping down so as not to dazzle other drivers), sunroof, ventilated front seats, driver's seat memory settings, heated exterior mirrors with puddle lights, second-row window blinds, a rear entertainment screen, Blu-ray player and 19-inch alloys.

Few other SUVs offer an interior as functional as the Kluger's, and not just because of its sheer spaciousness, excellent driving position, clear instrument dials, logical switchgear, superb ventilation, and seemingly endless storage compartments.

All seats are easy to access, vision out is largely unimpeded, rear-most occupants have ceiling-mounted ventilation, and the dash has a shelf for electronics to sit securely on while being charged. Thoughtful.

Another strength is the creamy, quiet powertrain, adding to the cabin's refinement.

Behind that brutish bonnet is a 218kW/350Nm 3.5-litre direct-injection V6, sending power to either the front, or all four, wheels via an eight-speed automatic transmission.

The all-wheel drivetrain adds \$4000 to GX and GXL, while in Grande it's an extra \$3727.

Responsive yet pleasingly civilised, the Toyota steps off the line fairly smartly for a two-tonne-plus SUV, providing more than ample performance across most driving situations.

It also boasts a satisfyingly muscular exhaust note doing so.

Yet, despite its significant girth and heft, the Kluger feels comparatively light and agile for its size, zipping in and around tight spaces with remarkable deftness and control.

Toyota says it spent two years tuning the handling and ride for Australian conditions, and it shows.

However, keener drivers might desire a bit more steering feedback, while everybody else might notice the suspension's propensity to feel a bit busy

and unsettled over all but the smoothest surfaces. More compliance would be welcome. Still, being based on Toyota's North American-market Avalon sedan, the Kluger is car-like in its overall characteristics.

Perhaps this model's biggest disappointment is the fact that Toyota Australia chose not to take the consumption and emissions-reducing stop/start system offered elsewhere, so the V6 petrol engine's fuel efficiency isn't as good as it could be.

That said, it is easy to see why the Kluger has been such a family favourite over the years. It's spacious, comfortable, safe, well-made and bulletproof. When you add the powerful V6 and low running costs, its appeal only gets stronger.

A new Kluger is due to arrive in Australia by the end of the year, with petrol and hybrid drivetrains.

By Byron Mathioudakis

THINGS WE LIKE

- ✓ Spacious, versatile interior
- ✓ Easy seat access
- ✓ Sweet, punchy V6 performance
- ✓ Toyota's renowned reliability
- ✓ Refined and comfortable

THINGS YOU MIGHT NOT LIKE

- ✗ V6 petrol engine's comparative thirst
- ✗ Jittery ride
- ✗ Foot-operated park brake
- ✗ Short warranty

SPEX (GX Front-wheel drive)

- Made in the USA
- 3.5-litre V6 petrol/eight-speed automatic/front-wheel drive
- 218kW of power at 6600rpm/350Nm of torque at 4700rpm
- 0-100km in 8.1 seconds (claimed)
- 7.2L/100km highway; 12.4L/100km city; 95 octane; CO₂ emissions are 212g/km
- Warranty: Five years/unlimited km
- The fuel tank holds 72 litres.
- Maximum towing capacity is 2000kg
- Seven airbags, stability control, autonomous emergency braking, adaptive cruise control, Hill Start Assist, camera, rear parking sensors, touchscreen, Bluetooth, Toyota Link, LED daytime running lights, tinted glass, 18-inch alloys and a full-sized spare wheel
- Redbook future values: 3yr: 55%; 5yr: 41%

STARS ★★★★★

- Safety ★★★★★ ANCAP
- Performance ★★★★★
- Handling ★★★★★
- Quality and reliability ★★★★★
- Comfort and refinement ★★★★★
- Value for money ★★★★★
- Overall** ★★★★★



compare with ...

Hyundai Santa Fe, Kia Sorento, Mazda CX-9, Nissan Pathfinder, Skoda Kodiaq, VW Tiguan Allspace

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VOLKSWAGEN POLO FROM \$19,290



The sixth-generation VW Polo starts at \$19,290 for the 70TSi — as in 70kW of power — 1.0-litre, three-cylinder turbo, five-speed manual Trendline. The seven-speed twin-clutch DSG transmission variant is \$21,790.

We're testing the 85TSi — the same engine, with 85kW of power — Comfortline, with a seven-speed, twin-clutch DSG transmission, priced at \$23,390. It's also available with a six-speed manual, at \$20,890. Polo Style, with DSG, is \$25,690.

The sixth Polo is much longer than its predecessors, so two adults can now travel in the back seat without having to visit the chiropractor afterwards and boot volume is 351 litres — a six-pack short of the class-leading Honda Jazz.

You face a beautiful leather-wrapped steering wheel and VW's typical businesslike dash, with brightly lit analogue dials. A digital speedo is useful; less so is air con with central vents located so low on the dash they blow air at your stomach, or up your nose, rather than at your face.

The lightly bolstered driver's seat is sized for big Germans and has plenty of travel, as does the wheel. Vision is clear around the car, assisted by 360-degree proximity sensors and a camera.

Our test car also has the Driver Assistance option with adaptive cruise, blind spot monitoring, rear cross traffic alert and automatic parking.

Packaged at a reasonable \$1400, it complements Polo's standard automatic emergency braking with pedestrian detection, fatigue alert and tyre pressure monitoring and gives the VW the strongest safety credentials in the class.

Ride comfort is good for a small car. The suspension can get a little flustered on choppy surfaces, but that's common of the class.

Automatic stop/start, DSG's usual momentary delay in engaging plus excessive turbo lag can conspire to make moving off from rest a slow business. It can quickly become tedious and, at times, fraught in traffic,

especially when you're trying to take advantage of a gap and you want immediate go-forward.

Your right foot has to apply precisely the right amount of pressure — too little and nothing happens for long enough for the people behind you to get antsy or for the the gap to close; too much and the car lunges inelegantly forward, chirping the front tyres as the engine's torque arrives in a rush.

You get used to it — or maybe you don't — but the Mazda's naturally aspirated 1.5-litre/six-speed automatic is a smoother, more responsive drivetrain in heavy traffic.

You put your foot down and the car moves straight away, at a rate that's exponential to pedal pressure. That's how it's supposed to be.

It's also worth noting that this Polo Comfortline is a fraction slower and thirstier than its 1.2-litre 81TSi predecessor.

That said, once you're rolling, the DSG goes straight for the

high gears and kicks down immediately when required, acceleration is extremely strong and, apart from the cute three-cylinder growl under power, the triple is also quiet and smooth.

On the highway, Polo cruises silently and effortlessly, using 4.5-5.0L/100km; in town, expect 6-7L/100km, on premium.

Handling is unremarkable but confident and secure.

The steering is quite numb and surprisingly indirect for a small car, while the brakes, though powerful, have a slightly wooden pedal feel, a consequence of Polo's standard regenerative braking function.

Polo Mk6 is still one of the better small cars, but it now has to argue class leadership with the Mazda2 and Toyota Yaris. Test drive all three before you decide.

THINGS WE LIKE

- ✓ Comfortable, spacious and well-equipped
- ✓ Frugal, refined, punchy drivetrain
- ✓ Confident handling and a comfortable ride
- ✓ Best-in-class safety with optional Driver Assistance package
- ✓ Full-size spare
- ✓ Intuitive infotainment
- ✓ Strong resale values

THINGS YOU MIGHT NOT LIKE

- ✗ Delayed response when moving off from rest
- ✗ No voice control or navigation
- ✗ Vague, imprecise steering
- ✗ Tinny audio
- ✗ Air con vent placement

SPEX (85TSi)

- Made in South Africa
- 1.0-litre three-cylinder turbopetrol/seven-speed DSG/front-wheel drive
- 85kW of power at 5000-5500rpm/200Nm of torque from 2000-3500rpm
- 0-100km/h in 9.5 seconds (claimed)
- 4.4L/100km highway; 5.8L/100km city; 95 octane premium; CO2 emissions are 112gkm
- Warranty: Five years/unlimited km
- Standard: Six airbags, stability control, automated emergency braking, fatigue detection, tyre pressure monitoring, 8-inch touchscreen, Bluetooth, Apple CarPlay, Android Auto, two USBs, camera, 15-inch alloys, automatic headlights and wipers, leather steering wheel
- Redbook future values: 3yr: 51%; 5yr: 38%

STARS ★★★★★

- Safety ★★★★★
- Performance ★★★★★
- Handling ★★★★★
- Quality and reliability ★★★★★
- Comfort and refinement ★★★★★
- Value for money ★★★★★
- Overall** ★★★★★



compare with ...

Audi A1, Kia Rio, Mazda2, Suzuki Swift, Toyota Yaris



VOLKSWAGEN POLO GTI FROM \$32,890



Hot hatches are growing up. Not only are they getting bigger, they're becoming more refined. The 2021 VW Polo GTI is as big as a 10-year-old Golf and shares much of the latest tech with its bigger brother.

VW has installed the decade-old 2.0-litre turbopetrol from previous Golf GTI models, at a time when rivals are switching to smaller engines. The numbers — 147kW of power and 320Nm of torque — are a lot of mumbo for a small car. However, the claimed 0-100km/h time is the same as the previous model — 6.7 seconds — because the new GTI's bump in size and power has come with an increase in weight.

Lovers of manual transmissions will lament the fact that it comes solely with a six-speed twin-clutch auto.

The cabin has a large matt-red panel across the dash, LED mood lighting, and the Golf GTI's signature flat-bottomed leather sports steering wheel.

The signature tartan-fabric sports seats can be replaced by faux-suede premium pews, and the analogue instrument cluster can be replaced by a digital widescreen.

It's bundled with premium Beats audio for \$1900 and the seats are packaged with a sunroof, 18-inch alloys, and LED headlights for \$3900. Autonomous emergency braking is standard but more advanced safety tech, including radar cruise control, blind zone warning, rear cross-traffic alert and front and rear sensors, are \$1500 extra. Tick all the options and you're north of \$40,000 by the time you're in the traffic.

It may lack a manual gearbox option, but the auto is faster through the gears because there's minimal interruption to power delivery when shifting ratios. It's also handy when

changing gears mid-corner. However, in stop-start traffic there is a pause in the gearbox between releasing the brake pedal and forward motion, a trait of twin-clutch autos.

The exhilarating acceleration once on the move is now accompanied by a rorty growl from the engine and exhaust that delights the senses.

The loudness of the engine can be changed at the press of a button thanks to a rather convincing sound synthesiser.

The stiffness of the suspension can be switched between Sport and Normal settings. Individual mode gives you the best of both worlds: selecting a soft suspension set-up but with sharper throttle and steering.

A little extra weight hasn't hurt the Polo GTI; the previous model was a little too light on its feet and could feel like it was

bobbing over the road. The new one feels glued to it.

The standard wheel/tyre package is 17-inch alloys wrapped in 215/45 Michelins. With this combination, the suspension is incredibly compliant, yet in corners grip is profound.

On optional 18-inch wheels with low-profile Bridgestone rubber the suspension is a touch busier — and the tyres a bit noisier — but even in Sport mode it's not unbearable. If you prefer slightly sharper reflexes, opt for the 18s.

If you're going to spend most of the time on bumpy pavement, the 17s are the better choice as they still have ample grip but provide more comfort.

The Polo GTI might be pricey for a small car, but as a beautifully sorted performance package it's worth every cent.

That said, Ford's new Fiesta ST is a cracker too, so before you put your money down, drive both.

By Joshua Dowling

THINGS WE LIKE

- ✓ The best drive in the small hot hatch class
- ✓ Big power and torque for a small car
- ✓ Superb handling and a comfortable ride
- ✓ Makes a great sound
- ✓ Comfortable driver's seat

THINGS YOU MIGHT NOT LIKE

- ✗ Safety options should be standard at the price
- ✗ No manual option
- ✗ VW reliability can be an issue
- ✗ Expensive servicing

SPEX

- Made in South Africa
- 2.0-litre turbopetrol four-cylinder/six-speed DSG/front-wheel drive
- 147kW of power from 4390-6000rpm/320Nm of torque from 1450-4390rpm
- 0-100km/h in 6.7 seconds (claimed)
- 5.1L/100km highway; 7.9L/100km city; 95 octane premium; CO² emissions are 140g/km
- Warranty: Five years/unlimited km
- Standard: Six airbags, stability control, AEB, camera, adaptive suspension, tyre pressure monitoring, keyless entry and starting, Bluetooth, voice control, Apple CarPlay, Android Auto, eight-inch touchscreen, dual-zone air
- Redbook future values: 3yr: 54%; 5yr: 39%

STARS ★★★★★

- Safety **Not yet tested**
- Performance ★★★★★
- Handling ★★★★★
- Quality and reliability ★★★★★
- Comfort and refinement ★★★★★
- Value for money ★★★★★
- Overall** ★★★★★



compare with ...

Ford Fiesta ST, Mini Cooper, Toyota 86

VOLKSWAGEN T-CROSS FROM \$28,390

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Volkswagen has joined the booming small SUV segment with a high-riding hatchback based on the Polo.

The T-Cross is available initially with a choice of two turbopetrol engines: a 1.0-litre three-cylinder (85kW/200Nm) in the 85TSi Life, at \$28,390, or a 1.5-litre four-cylinder (110kW/250Nm) in the 85TSi Style, at \$31,390, both paired to a seven-speed twin clutch automatic.

Although T-Cross shares the Polo's silhouette – and its dash layout as well – every panel is new and there are significant changes to the interior that add to its practicality.

The rear seat (which splits 60:40) slides forward or back to give you the choice of more passenger knee room or extra cargo space.

The back seats are positioned slightly higher than the front seats, too, for better visibility for passengers and to (hopefully) help prevent the little ones from getting car sickness.

The cargo area is massive, with between 385 and 455 litres of available space (compared to 351 litres for the Polo), depending on the position of the rear seats.

Although the interior has a premium look, some of the cabin plastics are hard to the touch and feel cheap.

However, the dash layout is a modern, logical design with all buttons and dials intuitively positioned.

The infotainment touchscreen also has tuning and volume dials which can be quicker and easier to use on bumpy roads than a steering wheel button or trying to find the right icon to touch on the display.

The test car we drove was equipped with VW's optional digital widescreen instrument display which has a choice of views, though oddly none we found displayed the vehicle speed in a large font. Instead,

the vehicle's speed was tucked away in a corner.

Autonomous emergency braking is standard. However blind spot monitoring, rear cross traffic alert and adaptive cruise – all standard on Toyota's C-HR – are packaged as a \$1200 option on T-Cross Life. They are included on the Style.

We drove the Life, with the 1.0-litre three-cylinder engine. It's fair to say it's not going to pin your ears back but it's fine for commuter driving.

It has a thrumming noise typical of three-cylinder engines but was still relatively refined.

The engine is quite loud when the start-stop system brings the engine back to life when, say, moving away from a set of lights. It doesn't shake the car, it's just a tad noisy.

The seven-speed twin-clutch auto is a smooth operator once on the move but there is still some initial hesitation when moving from rest or when trying to

perform a quick three-point turn.

Seats are supportive and comfortable and seem to be covered in a hard-wearing material.

Because it's a touch taller than a Polo – and because the tyres have so much grip – T-Cross can lean a little in tight turns or sweeping bends, but it feels surefooted overall.

Ride comfort over bumps and expansion joints in the road was surprisingly impressive despite the fact the test car was equipped with low profile tyres.

Overall, the VW T-Cross is a well-sorted and practical package that, as with most city SUVs, comes with a hefty price premium over the hatchback on which it's based. Compare with the Ford Puma, Kia Stonic, Skoda Kamiq (which has the same drivetrains in a larger body) and Toyota's C-HR.

By Joshua Dowling

THINGS WE LIKE

- ✓ Roomy, practical cabin
- ✓ Frugal engines
- ✓ Feels secure in corners and comfortable over bumps
- ✓ Sophisticated infotainment
- ✓ Safe and solid

THINGS YOU MIGHT NOT LIKE

- ✗ One-litre engine won't rip your arms off
- ✗ Runs on premium unleaded, too
- ✗ Twin-clutch gearbox has a few foibles at low speed
- ✗ Some services are expensive
- ✗ Most safety features optional on Life

SPEX (Life)

- Made in Spain
- 1.0-litre three cylinder turbopetrol/ seven-speed DSG/ front-wheel drive
- 85kW of power at 5500rpm; 200Nm of torque from 2000-3500rpm
- 0-100km/h in 10.2 seconds (claimed)
- 4.5L/100km highway; 5.6L/100km city; 95 octane premium; CO2 emissions are 111gkm; fuel tank is 40 litres
- Warranty: Five years/unlimited km
- Standard: Six airbags, stability control, AEB, lane keep assist, parking sensors, automatic headlights and wipers, Apple CarPlay, Android Auto, wireless phone charging, four usb ports, tyre pressure monitoring, 16-inch alloy wheels
- Redbook future values: 3yr: 54%; 5yr: 38%

STARS ★★★★★

- Safety ★★★★★
- Performance ★★★★★
- Handling ★★★★★
- Quality and reliability ★★★★★
- Comfort and refinement ★★★★★
- Value for money ★★★★★
- Overall** ★★★★★



compare with ...

Ford Puma, Hyundai Venue, Kia Stonic, Mazda CX3, Skoda Kamiq, Toyota C-HR



VOLKSWAGEN T-ROC FROM \$33,990



A quick glance around any Australian carpark should be more than enough to prove to you that we're well past the days of talking about how the popularity of SUVs will one day overtake that of hatchbacks, sedans and wagons.

The tide isn't so much turning, but has long since turned, and every manufacturer worth its salty share price has been rushing to bring new SUVs to market as quickly as possible.

Which makes the arrival of the new Volkswagen T-Roc something of a curiosity.

While other manufacturers have been making hay while the SUV sun has been shining for years, the German giant finds itself unfashionably late to the party. T-Roc has been available in Europe since 2018.

The looming question now, of course, is was the T-Roc worth the wait?

Aiming to be a kind of Goldilocks (not too big, not too small) SUV, the T-Roc sits above the Polo-based T-Cross, but below the bigger, more family-friendly Tiguan.

Perhaps the easiest way to think of it is as roughly Golf-sized, given the T-Roc is based

on the brand's most well-known vehicle, while the smaller T-Cross is based on the Polo.

So why not just buy a Golf, I hear you asking?

For three reasons, really; one, you sit higher in the T-Roc, which many people prefer for comfort, easy access, and vision in traffic; two, because you prefer the way it looks, and it is certainly a polished, premium-looking proposition; or three, well, because it's an SUV.

T-Roc 110TSi Style, with a 110kW/250Nm 1.4-litre turbopetrol/eight-speed automatic/front wheel drivetrain, is \$33,990. 140TSi Sport, with a 140kW/320Nm 2.0-litre turbopetrol that sends drive to all four wheels via a seven-speed dual clutch automatic, is \$40,990.

That price is somewhat justified by a healthy feature list, with a heap of safety kit (autonomous emergency braking, adaptive cruise, lane assist, blind-spot monitoring, and sensors front and rear all contributing to its five-star ANCAP rating), the best of VW's interior tech, including

the awesomely tech-savvy Digital Cockpit, and that R-line exterior treatment which adds 18-inch alloys, sports suspension and roof rails.

We haven't yet driven the 110TSi T-Roc, but we have sampled its 1.4-litre drivetrain in other models and it does the job just fine, with great economy and adequate performance.

The 2.0-litre's smooth, muscular power delivery, though, proves the T-Roc's most loveable feature, with serious grunt on offer and a 0-100km/h time of 7.2 seconds.

Ease of use is the other order of the day here, with the diminutive dimensions and light-feeling steering making city work a breeze, but without ever feeling so pokey that you're worried about taking it on long road trips.

It might not offer the interior space of the bigger Tiguan, but neither does it feel as tight in the cabin (at least with the whole family on board) as the smaller T-Cross model.

A happy compromise, then, and one that serves up a useable 392 litres of load space with the

rear seats in place, or 1237 litres with them folded flat.

VW also has the 221kW 2.0-litre turbo T-Roc R available in Europe, and it's a pretty sure bet that it will also show up here in the not too distant future. Better late than never.

By Andrew Chesterton

THINGS WE LIKE

- ✓ Design looks premium and polished
- ✓ Tech and safety offering first class
- ✓ Ample grunt on offer
- ✓ Goldilocks size for a young family
- ✓ Drives like a Golf

THINGS YOU MIGHT NOT LIKE

- ✗ Pricy compared to a Golf wagon or a Tiguan
- ✗ Scratchy cabin plastics lower the premium feel
- ✗ DSG transmission can hesitate from rest and stutter in slow moving traffic
- ✗ Some services are expensive

SPEX

- Made in Portugal
- 2.0-litre four cylinder turbopetrol/seven-speed DSG/all-wheel drive
- 140kW of power at 5000rpm/320Nm of torque from 1500-4180rpm
- 0-100km/h in 7.2 seconds (claimed)
- 5.8L/100km highway; 8.5L/100km city; 95 octane premium; CO2 emissions are 155gkm; fuel tank is 55 litres
- Warranty: Five years/unlimited km
- Standard: Six airbags, stability control, AEB, blind spot monitoring, rear cross traffic alert, adaptive cruise, lane keep assist, sports suspension, 18-inch alloys, digital instruments, dual zone air, navigation, Apple CarPlay, Android Auto, keyless entry.
- Redbook future values: 3yr: 54%; 5yr: 38%

compare with ...

BMW X2, Kia Seltos, Mercedes GLA, Subaru XV, Mazda CX30, Toyota CHR



STARS ★★★★★

- Safety ★★★★★ ANCAP
- Performance ★★★★★
- Handling ★★★★★
- Quality and reliability ★★★★★
- Comfort and refinement ★★★★★
- Value for money ★★★★★
- Overall** ★★★★★

VOLKSWAGEN TIGUAN FROM \$39,690



Volkswagen's Tiguan opens at \$39,690 for the 110kW 1.4-litre turbopetrol/six-speed dual clutch (DSG) front wheel drive 110TSi Life.

The 132TSi 2.0-litre turbopetrol DSG Life, with a seven-speed DSG transmission and all-wheel drive, is \$43,690.

The 162TSi Elegance, with a 162kW 2.0-litre turbopetrol/AWD, is \$50,790. The 162TSi R-Line is \$53,790.

A 147kW 2.0-litre turbodiesel/AWD 147TDi Elegance is \$52,290, or \$55,290 in R-Line specification.

The extended-wheelbase, seven-seater Tiguan Allspace 132TSi is arriving now, but VW had not yet announced pricing as we went to press. The 162TSi Wolfsburg Edition is \$59,990.

The Tiguan driver sits in a firm, comfortable chair, facing a dash similar to the Golf, with VW's typically clean, efficient layout, albeit with a few quirks. Access to all seats is easy via wide opening doors.

The rear seat is comfortable and spacious, with an adjustable

backrest angle plus 180mm of fore-aft adjustment.

In the five-seater, the 615-litre load space is generous and the low floor convenient, as is hands-free opening and closing for the tailgate.

VW correctly calls Allspace a "5+2", because the two fold up rear seats are suitable only for young kids – or very short trips – and access is tight.

The larger section of row two is on the kerbside, so it takes some muscle to fold and slide it to let kids in and out of the back stalls.

Tiguan is the benchmark drive in the mid-size SUV class.

The five seater's dynamics are outstanding, with excellent control, security and roadholding on rough surfaces.

All-wheel-drive models have an extended electronic differential lock on both axles, which helps the Tiguan get around corners with great poise and improves traction on unsealed roads.

The ride is a touch lumpy and fussy, but big hits are absorbed with ease.

Base variants also deliver flexible, refined performance, helped in the front-wheel drive 110TSi by the Tiguan's light weight for its size.

The 110TSi also deactivates cylinders two and three under light loads to save fuel.

It works seamlessly and effectively. When you want more oomph, all four kick in, the 1.4 responds willingly and is exceptionally refined. That said, the extra urge of the 132TSi model is certainly noticeable.

VW's 132kW 2.0-litre engine is getting on, as evidenced by noticeable turbolag when moving off from rest, accompanied by the usual momentary hesitancy from the DSG transmission. Once rolling, it's a tractable, refined engine.

Allspace's handling is as good as a seven-seater SUV gets. Light

weight, disciplined body control, accurate, well-weighted steering and strong brakes give the Allspace more agile, responsive handling than most five seaters.

A 2021 update includes infotainment and safety tech from Golf VIII, with semi-autonomous IQ Drive featuring adaptive cruise, adaptive lane guidance and automatic stop and go in traffic, plus matrix LED headlights on Elegance and R-Line, beautiful 10.25-inch digital instruments standard across the range and touch controls for the air conditioning.

Tiguan vies for best in class status in this crowded class with the Ford Escape, Toyota RAV4 and Subaru Forester.

You should also test drive its twin under the skin, Skoda's Karoq, which offers 110TSi and 140TSi turbopetrol models at bargain prices.

THINGS WE LIKE

- ✓ Smooth, quiet frugal engines
- ✓ Roomy cabin and boot
- ✓ Excellent fit and finish inside
- ✓ Secure and comfortable on the open road
- ✓ Class-leading safety

THINGS YOU MIGHT NOT LIKE

- ✗ It's expensive
- ✗ DSG transmission has its quirks
- ✗ Space-saver spare
- ✗ Question marks remain on long-term reliability

SPEX (132TSi Life DSG)

- Made in Germany
- 2.0-litre four-cylinder turbopetrol/seven-speed DSG/all-wheel drive
- 132kW of power from 3900–6000rpm/320Nm of torque from 1500–3940rpm
- 0–100km/h in 7.7 seconds (claimed)
- 6.5L/100km highway; 9.2L/100km city; 95 octane premium; CO₂ emissions are 173g/km; fuel tank is 60 litres
- Warranty: Five years/unlimited kilometres
- Standard: seven airbags, stability control, autonomous emergency braking, lane keep assist, adaptive cruise, blind spot monitoring, rear cross traffic alert, 18-inch alloy wheels, tyre pressure monitoring, eight-inch touchscreen, navigation, digital instruments, power tailgate, automatic LED headlights, automatic parking
- Redbook future values: 3yr: 53%; 5yr: 36%

STARS ★★★★★

- Safety ★★★★★ EuroNCAP
- Performance ★★★★★
- Handling ★★★★★
- Quality and reliability ★★★★★
- Comfort and refinement ★★★★★
- Value for money ★★★★★
- Overall** ★★★★★



compare with ...

Ford Escape, Kia Seltos, Skoda Karoq/Kodiaq, Subaru Forester, Toyota RAV4



VOLKSWAGEN TOUAREG FROM \$81,490



The second generation Touareg pricing opens at \$81,490 for the 3.0-litre V6 turbodiesel 170TDi. The same engine, chipped for 210kW, powers the 210TDi Elegance, priced at \$99,490, or \$108,490 in R-Line specification. The 310kW 4.0-litre V8 turbodiesel V8TDi R is \$136,490.

It might sound like a cliché to say the Touareg has risen to a new level and is more luxurious than before but, to be frank, it's a fair observation on this occasion.

The example tested was equipped with an \$8000 "Innovision" package that includes an epic 15-inch touchscreen infotainment display, a curved 12.3-inch widescreen instrument screen, a heads-up display, and an ambient lighting package with a choice of 30 colours to reflect your mood.

Standard equipment includes power operated memory front seats, four-zone air-conditioning, front and

rear parking sensors, 19-inch alloys, a sensor key with push-button start, Apple Car Play and Android Auto.

Safety technology includes low-and high-speed autonomous emergency braking, front and rear cross traffic alert, blind zone warning and radar cruise control with traffic jam automatic stop-and-go.

As with most five-seaters, the Touareg has two ISOFIX mounts for child capsules and three top tether points.

There's no shortage of USB ports to keep everyone's devices charged (two in the back and two in the front).

VW's 210kW 3.0-litre V6 is a muscular, responsive engine with deep reserves of bottom end and midrange grunt, good fuel efficiency and effortless everyday driveability, in partnership with the smooth, efficient eight-speed automatic.

It returns 9-12L/100km in town and 6-7L/100km on the highway, where its range exceeds 1000km. It will pull its maximum 3500kg fully loaded, though VW does mandate light towball downloads: 130 kg with five people aboard, and 280kg with two.

Equally impressive as the grunt is the new Touareg's quietness, comfort and refinement.

By coincidence I had a new BMW X7 on test at the same time. The VW was quieter.

Comfort and Normal suspension settings deliver a compliant, controlled ride, even on rough surfaces, despite low profile tyres and 20 inch alloys. Sport mode is tolerable, too.

A flat, firm rear bench features adjustable legroom and backrest angle, plus ventilation and two USB connectors.

Boot space is vast, with nearly two metres of floor length

available in extended configuration.

To trim weight, VW has used aluminium for the roof, doors, rear fenders and bonnet.

The only steel body panels are the front fenders and tailgate.

This could partly explain why the Touareg feels relatively nimble and takes corners with far greater agility and poise than SUVs of this size usually do.

Overall, the VW Touareg is so luxurious I was expecting it to have soft-close doors.

That's about the only thing stopping it from rubbing shoulders with its German luxury counterparts.

Drive it before you sign up for a BMW X5 or Mercedes GLE. Leave badge snobbery out of the argument and its arguably just as good.

By Joshua Dowling

THINGS WE LIKE

- ✓ A bargain compared with Audi Q7, BMW X5 and Mercedes GLE
- ✓ The \$8000 optional 15-inch central touchscreen and 12.3-inch curved digital display for the instruments
- ✓ Luxury levels of refinement
- ✓ Hot hatch levels of pace
- ✓ 3500kg towing capacity

THINGS YOU MIGHT NOT LIKE

- ✗ The price eclipses \$100,000 with options
- ✗ Inflatable space saver spare tyre isn't ideal
- ✗ Lacks speed sign recognition increasingly standard on rivals

SPEX

- Made in Slovakia
- 3.0-litre V6 turbodiesel/eight-speed automatic/all-wheel drive
- 210kW of power at 4000rpm/600Nm of torque from 1750-3000rpm
- 0-100km/h in 6.1 seconds
- 6.3L/100km highway; 7.8L/100km city; CO2 emissions are 180g/km; fuel tank is 90 litres
- Max towing weight: 3500kg
- Warranty: Five years/unlimited kilometres
- Standard: Stability control, eight airbags, AEB, adaptive cruise with traffic stop and go, blind zone warning, front and rear cross-traffic alert, rear camera, tyre pressure monitors, four zone air, power tailgate, navigation, Apple CarPlay, Android Auto, adaptive suspension, 20-inch alloys, automatic parking
- Redbook future values: 3yr: 54%; 5yr: 43%

STARS ★★★★★

- Safety ★★★★★
- Performance ★★★★★
- Handling ★★★★★
- Quality and reliability ★★★★★
- Comfort and refinement ★★★★★
- Value for money ★★★★★
- Overall** ★★★★★



compare with ...

Audi Q7, BMW X5, Mercedes GLE, Lexus RX, Range Rover Sport, Porsche Cayenne

VOLVO XC40 FROM \$47,490



Volvo's XC40, the 2018 Wheels Car of the Year, takes the fight up to well-credentialed competition including Audi's Q3, BMW's X1/X2, Jaguar's E-Pace and the Mercedes GLA.

Two-litre turbopetrol engines are matched with an eight-speed automatic. Prices start at \$47,490 for the 140kW/300Nm T4 Momentum, with front-wheel drive. T4 Inscription, with all-wheel drive, is \$52,990.

T5 R-Design is \$56,990. It runs all-wheel drive, and two turbos that lift power to 185kW and torque to 350Nm.

The Recharge Plug-in Hybrid is \$64,990.

R-Design includes firm, supportive heated sports seats upholstered in leather and suede, plus dark interior decor with beautifully intricate Nordic styling touches, including a concave aluminium matrix in the dash, illuminated at night by LEDs.

External R-Design details include a contrasting black roof, black grille, groovy 20-inch "Diamond Cut" alloy wheels and "Hammer of Thor" bending LED headlights.

Millennial-native infotainment includes a nine-inch, hi-res portrait-style swipe and touchscreen, with full smartphone app connectivity, navigation, digital radio and voice, supplemented with quality Harman Kardon sound.

It's close at hand, fast and logical, but adjusting the air-con would be safer and quicker with an old-fashioned dial, Bluetooth doesn't extend to emails or messages and you will occasionally vent at the voice control.

It's a Volvo, so superb comfort is a given, with the only potential issue being interference from protruding head restraints. Rear seat legroom is generous, though the bench is quite low to gain headroom, so kids may feel entombed.

There's oddment storage everywhere and a sizeable boot with a clever fold-up floor that creates two separate compartments.

The ride, especially in town, is surprisingly compliant and comfortable, given the

aggressive wheel/tyre (245/45 20) combination and non-adjustable sports chassis. At speed, the suspension absorbs imperfect surfaces without fuss.

A detailed run-through of XC40's safety tech would take the entire page. Basically, it's got everything, including semi-autonomous steering that, says Volvo, can point you back to the straight and narrow if you're about to run off the road and autonomous emergency braking (AEB) that also works if you're about to turn across an oncoming car or enter an intersection and get T-boned.

Volvo's 2.0-litre engine launches the XC40 to 100km/h in a respectably rapid 6.4 seconds.

It works co-operatively with the eight-speed, although shift quality and timing are less refined than the German-brand drivetrains. Selecting D or R at rest requires two flicks of the lever for some strange reason, and the auto/stop start kicks in with a lurch when you release the brake.

Four drive modes include Eco, Comfort, Dynamic and Off-Road – but I wouldn't go there in this.

Expect 6-6.5L/100km on the highway and 10-12L/100km in town.

While the XC40 is relatively heavy by class standards, its finely controlled suspension, all-wheel drive, light, precise steering (in Comfort mode; Dynamic is too heavy), great brakes and Pirelli P Zero tyres make it, if not quite as agile and well-balanced as an A-grade hatchback, at least capable enough to enjoy along a winding road, where it never feels less than 100 per cent planted.

The XC40 offers elegant, expressive design, an interior that's as good as it gets for comfort, practicality and quality, world's best safety and a tight, tidy drive. Try it before you sign up for a German-brand SUV.

THINGS WE LIKE

- ✓ Beautiful Scandinavian design
- ✓ Spacious, comfortable, practical cabin
- ✓ Powerful, responsive 2.0-litre
- ✓ World's best safety credentials
- ✓ Enjoyable handling and comfortable ride

THINGS YOU MIGHT NOT LIKE

- ✗ Very expensive servicing
- ✗ Eight-speed auto has a few quirks
- ✗ Touchscreen is pretty but some operations are complex

SPEX (T5 R-Design)

- Made in Belgium
- 2.0-litre four-cylinder turbopetrol/eight-speed automatic/all-wheel drive
- 185kW of power at 5500rpm/350Nm of torque from 1800-4800rpm
- 0-100km/h in 6.4 seconds (claimed)
- 6.4L/100km highway; 10.0L/100km city; 95 octane premium; CO2 emissions are 176kgm. Fuel tank is 54 litres
- Max towing capacity 2100kg
- Warranty: Five years/unlimited km
- Standard: Seven airbags, stability control, AEB, adaptive cruise with Pilot Assist, blind spot monitoring, rear cross traffic alert, 360-degree cameras, head-up display, automatic parking, Bluetooth, Android Auto/Apple CarPlay, digital radio, navigation, leather/suede upholstery, heated sports seats, 20-inch alloys, sunroof, power tailgate.
- Redbook future values: 3yr: 52%; 5yr: 35%



STARS ★★★★★

- Safety ★★★★★
- Performance ★★★★★
- Handling ★★★★★
- Quality and reliability ★★★★★
- Comfort and refinement ★★★★★
- Value for money ★★★★★
- Overall** ★★★★★

compare with ...

Audi Q3, BMW X1/X2, Jaguar E-Pace, Mercedes GLA, Range Rover Evoque, VW T-Roc



VOLVO XC60 FROM \$65,690



Volvo's second-generation XC60 added some sophisticated Scandinavian style to the traditional Volvo virtues of safety and sensibleness when it was launched in 2017. At the time it was made in Sweden; now, it's made in China, as Volvo is owned by the Chinese carmaker Geely.

It's still a Volvo through and through, characterised by spaciousness, efficiency and safety. These are all baked into what Volvo's designers and engineers call SPA, shorthand for Scalable Product Architecture. What this acronym means in material terms is a strong core structure, modern four-cylinder petrol and diesel engines (all with at least one turbocharger) and a good automatic transmission, plus high-grade suspension, brake, steering and electrical systems.

This XC60 is larger than the model it replaced. While extra distance between the axles yielded better rear-seat legroom than before, the 505-litre cargo bay isn't especially big.

The XC60 introduced three new active safety systems to incrementally increase the life-preserving powers Volvo engineered into the SPA's electronic network of sensors and computers.

Steer Assist can help you swerve safely to avoid a low speed impact, while Oncoming Lane Mitigation can steer you back into your lane of an oncoming vehicle is detected.

Decked out in high-grade Inscription specification, the XC60's interior is a beautiful, elegant place.

There's a warmer, simpler feel to the ambience than in the Volvo's rivals from Germany. Still, the XC60 does feature an equally powerful arsenal of infotainment and driver-assist tech, much of it controlled via the large, portrait-oriented touch screen in the centre of the attractive instrument panel. This

reduces button clutter to the bare Scandinavian minimum.

The front seats are perfectly positioned and comfortably supportive, while the three-place second row delivers the kind of flipping and folding flexibility essential in an SUV.

The XC60 range opens with the 140kW 2.0-litre turbodiesel D4 Momentum, matched with an eight-speed automatic and all-wheel drive, priced from \$65,690. Inscription specification is \$72,690.

The T5 Momentum, with a 187kW 2.0-litre turbopetrol, starts at \$65,690. T5 Inscription is \$72,690.

The T8 Polestar, a plug-in hybrid all-wheel drive that combines a 235kW supercharged 2.0-litre petrol engine with an electric motor and lithium-ion battery that offers up to 45km of range on electricity alone, is \$100,690.

The T6, at \$79,690, runs the same engine as the T8, minus

the electric assistance and with a conventional mechanical all-wheel-drive system.

The XC60 is a pleasant SUV to drive. Volvo doesn't aim for the same kind of pseudo-sporty driving feel as some of the Germans, and is the better for it.

Handling is neat and tidy and the base model turbodiesel engine delivers better-than-adequate performance without fuss.

But it's always obvious that there's a four-cylinder engine under the bonnet, and this soundtrack may not align with everyone's idea of a premium SUV driving experience.

It's worth noting too that since the XC was launched, the game has changed, with some very well credentialled newer rivals now competing for your dollar, some at much lower prices.

Try Volkswagen's Tiguan, the Skoda Karoq and Kodiaq, the Ford Escape and Land Rover Discovery Sport before you sign up.

By John Carey

THINGS WE LIKE

- ✓ Gorgeous interior in high-grade models
- ✓ Exterior style
- ✓ Volvo's safety features
- ✓ Comfortable suspension
- ✓ Strong, frugal T8 plug-in drivetrain

THINGS YOU MIGHT NOT LIKE

- ✗ Four-cylinder turbodiesel is pretty noisy
- ✗ Very expensive servicing
- ✗ The Germans are sportier handlers

SPEX (D5)

- Made in China
- 2.0-litre four-cylinder turbodiesel/eight-speed automatic/all-wheel drive
- 140kW of power at 4250rpm/400Nm of torque from 1750-2500rpm
- 0-100km/h in 8.4 seconds (claimed)
- 5.0L/100m highway; 6.1L/100km city; CO₂ emissions are 143gkm; fuel tank is 60 litres
- Warranty: Five years/unlimited kilometres
- Standard: Seven airbags, stability control, automatic emergency braking, steering assist, Bluetooth, Apple CarPlay, Android Auto, navigation, leather, 19-inch alloys, four zone air, power tailgate
- Redbook future values: 3yr: 53%; 5yr: 33%

STARS ★★★★★

- Safety ★★★★★ (EuroNCAP)
- Performance ★★★★★
- Handling ★★★★★
- Quality and reliability ★★★★★
- Comfort and refinement ★★★★★
- Value for money ★★★★★
- Overall** ★★★★★



compare with ...

Audi Q5, BMW X3, Jaguar F-Pace, Land Rover Discovery Sport, Mercedes GLC, Range Rover Velar

VOLVO XC90 FROM \$90,990



The second XC90 is one of the biggest things out of Sweden since ABBA. This almost five-metre-long and more than two-metre-wide seven-seater was the first flagship SUV from Volvo after it was bought by Chinese company Geely in 2010. It premiered the company's new style, engines and safety technologies when launched in 2015.

The 2021 range opens at \$90,990 for the turbodiesel D5 in Momentum trim grade.

The higher Inscription grade costs \$95,990.

Choosing T6 turbopetrol power carries no price premium for either Momentum or Inscription. T6 R-Design is \$97,990.

Both engines are transverse-mounted 2.0-litre fours and Volvo has no plans to offer any engine with a greater number of cylinders than this.

Such is life in the new world of low-emission motoring.

Both drivetrains are from Volvo's new low-consumption, Euro 6b rated Drive-E family.

The D5 runs a 165kW and 470Nm twin-turbocharged diesel; T6 has a 236kW and 400Nm supercharged and turbocharged petrol-burner. Both are teamed with an eight-speed automatic.

The petrol/electric hybrid T8, with average claimed consumption of 2.1L/100km, is priced at \$115,990 as the R-Design.

The interior is this Volvo's greatest strength. It's a pleasant environment for driver and passengers alike.

A huge 12.3-inch portrait-oriented screen is the focus of attention in an instrument panel remarkable for its beautifully clean design, premium materials and absence of button clutter.

The 40/20/40 split-folding second-row seat is broad and comfortable and features both a fore-and-aft slider and a built-in child booster in the centre position. Further rearward, the foldaway third-row seats are suitable for adults up to about 170cm tall and are also easy to climb into.

There's enough space for schoolbags and shopping with all seats occupied; with the third-row seats stowed, cargo capacity becomes vast.

Sensibly, the Swedes haven't attempted to make their heavy SUV a sporty vehicle to drive.

The steering delivers little feel and there's a fair amount of body roll when cornering.

Still, the XC90 can be placed accurately into a corner and doesn't grow flustered when driven on a winding road at a decent clip. It's calm, confident and capable enough for its size and weight.

Air suspension is an option but as is usually the case, it doesn't deliver a super-smooth ride at low speeds, lacking compliance as it compresses.

Most buyers will likely find the standard "Touring" setup does a good enough job — and it does.

Although the new XC90 is lighter than the old one, kerb weights are a hefty 2100kg and up. Still, neither engine struggles. The D5 is a very fine

diesel; smooth, reasonably quiet and nicely responsive. The twin-turbocharged T6 petrol four brings a noticeable jump in performance but its growly eagerness isn't as sweet a match with the XC90's laid-back character.

The XC90 introduces two new Volvo-developed safety technologies. The first is a collision avoidance system that prevents it being driven across the path of an oncoming car.

The second innovation is a group of seat, seatbelt and airbag deployment features designed to reduce injuries in a run-off-the-road crash.

Stylish, roomy, safe, well-priced and pleasant to drive, the big Volvo works because, unlike its rivals, it doesn't try to be a sports car. It's design/engineering brief is comfort, luxury, space and safety, and it fits that brief very convincingly.

By John Carey

THINGS WE LIKE

- ✓ Beautiful interior
- ✓ A true seven-seater
- ✓ Fuel-efficient engines
- ✓ Sensible ride/handling compromise
- ✓ Super safety credentials
- ✓ Well priced and loaded

THINGS YOU MIGHT NOT LIKE

- ✗ Unappealing four-cylinder noises
- ✗ It's overweight
- ✗ Feel-free steering

SPEX (D5 MOMENTUM)

- Made in Sweden
- 2.0-litre four-cylinder twin turbodiesel/eight-speed automatic/all-wheel drive
- 165kW of power at 4250rpm/470Nm of torque from 1750–2500rpm
- 0–100km/h in 7.8 seconds (claimed)
- 5.6L/100km highway; 6.3L/100km city; CO₂ emissions are 152g/km
- Warranty: Five years/unlimited kilometres
- Fuel tank capacity: 71 litres
- Maximum towing weight: 2700kg
- Standard: Seven airbags, stability control, 19-inch alloy wheels, child seat boosters, leather, four-zone air, lane departure warning, automatic emergency braking with pedestrian avoidance, radar cruise, 360-degree cameras, automatic reverse parking, parking sensors, hill descent control, automatic headlights with automatic high beam, power tailgate, Bluetooth, navigation
- Redbook future values: 3yr: 53%; 5yr: 34%

STARS ★★★★★

- Safety ★★★★★ ANCAP
- Performance ★★★★★
- Handling ★★★★★
- Quality and reliability ★★★★★
- Comfort and refinement ★★★★★
- Value for money ★★★★★
- Overall ★★★★★



compare with ...

Audi Q7, BMW X7, Mercedes GLS



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