

How To Buy a New SUV

By Dave Hoffman

When the concept of the American Dream first came into consciousness it was about owning your own home. These days that dream comes with some embellishments such as a flat screen TV, a cell phone with a personalized ring, and of course, the middle American of all cars, the SUV. An SUV, or sports utility vehicle, is a sign of power. Bigger is better, especially when it comes to asserting yourself on the road.

So what is the appeal of an SUV? There are many. An SUV gives you a pulling capacity approaching that of a pickup truck but there is room for extra passengers. Some SUVs can pull over 2500 pounds. Most seat a minimum of five passengers, and many offer three rows of seating.

Some SUVs are multi functional when it comes to passenger room. In some the third row of seating is removable and the back seat can fold down for more storage space. The cargo area of an SUV is taller than that of a station wagon and many are just as long. Folding or removing seats provides more room.

Many people consider SUVs safer than smaller cars because of their larger size and heavier build. The taller seating allows people greater visibility. Many of us who have driven behind an SUV in a compact car have experienced the opposite effect. Manufacturers have worked hard to overcome the safety concerns of SUVs from a few years ago. Most SUVs handle better in the snow and most have the option for four wheel or all wheel drive for off road driving.

To determine which vehicle is best you have to look at what you plan to use it for. There are three classifications of sized for SUVs. Compact or mini, mid size, and full size.

Basic compact models can sell for less than \$20,000. They can come with four or six cylinder engines. The four cylinder engines a fuel use measuring in the high 20s miles per gallon, while the six cylinder engine burns at a rate close to 20 miles per gallon. They offer basic safety options such as airbags and basic amenities or upgrades. Minis carry about five passengers but may be tight in the rear. They allow for the back seat to fold down and offer about 70 cubic feet of capacity. They have the less expensive maintenance and operating costs.

Mid size and full size SUVs cost anywhere from the mid \$20s to over \$40,000 for higher end models. Mid size come standard with six cylinder engines, with the option of eight cylinders, and all full size use eight cylinders. Full size eight cylinder engine SUVs achieve between 12 and 20 miles per gallon. A stronger engine is needed for pulling heavy loads.

The mid size and full size SUVs have more extensive safety features than the mini. In addition to side airbags they have stability control and technology to protect the vehicle from rolling over. The larger the vehicle is the more luxuries and amenities are available. The larger vehicles all offer back seating that comfortably seats five passengers and many offer an additional third row of seating. Mid size SUVs have up to 100 cubic feet of cargo room and full size ones can have even more than that.

In most vehicles with three rows of seating the third row is removable or will fold down for additional cargo room and in some models the back row seat will fold into the floor.

All SUVs have the option of two wheel drive, four wheel drive, and all wheel drive. If you are planning on doing off road driving be sure to get the four wheel drive or all wheel drive which distributes the power among all four wheels automatically for maximum traction. If you have four wheel drive you can switch between two and four wheel drive depending on driving conditions. This is a nice feature because four wheel drive uses more fuel and SUVs aren't known for their fuel efficiency. Recently however, gas/electric hybrids have been introduced that get much better mileage than traditional gas engines.

Since SUVs have such a range of uses you must think about what your driving needs are before shopping for a new SUV. All sizes have car based models and truck based models. The car based models handle better and are designed with room and comfort in mind. Truck based models are sturdier because they are designed to tow more weight and handle off road driving.