



AFFORDABLE CARS 2007

CARS THAT WON'T BREAK THE BANK

What to buy: new or used?
Choosing the right car for you
Does cheap to buy = cheap to own?



THE ENVIRONMENTAL ALTERNATIVE: **+ SCOOTERS & MOTORBIKES**



Small cars: is
Toyota Corolla
still king?



Latest economical
city runabouts
compared

12 BEST USED CARS UNDER \$15k

CONTENTS

THE BUYING PROCESS

- 03 Choosing the right car
- 07 Cheap to run or cheap to buy?
- 24 Scooters & motorbikes
- 28 Buyers' checklist

SECOND-HAND GEMS

- 08 We find the 12 best cars under \$15,000 to suit every person

MULTI-CAR COMPARISONS

16 Light cars compared

Ford Fiesta v Honda Jazz v Hyundai Getz v Kia Rio v Mazda 2 v Mitsubishi Colt v Proton Savvy v Suzuki Swift v Toyota Yaris v VW Polo

20 Small cars compared

Ford Focus v Holden Astra v Honda Civic v Hyundai Elantra v Kia Cerato v Mazda 3 v Nissan Tiida v Toyota Corolla v VW Golf

Cars are more affordable

now than ever before. For less than \$20,000 you can purchase a new car with room for five, dual airbags, antilock brakes and electronic stability control. It will have electric windows, air conditioning, a CD player and many other handy features. And it'll come with a three-year warranty and be reliable.

Used cars are no different. Shop wisely and you can get the same features listed above in a near-new car at close to half the price.

But that doesn't mean consumers want to throw away their hard-earned cash... oh no. Quite the contrary. With such a bevy of automotive riches out there waiting to be bought, it's harder than ever to make sure you get the most value for every dollar you'll spend.

That's where Drive's Affordable Cars magazine comes in. Within these 30 information-packed pages are the keys to unlocking the best affordable cars money can buy.

Cheers, The Drive Team



GABRIEL MOTORS PTY LTD
Sales and Service

- Prestige car sales • Loans
- Car servicing • Premium car wash

Gabriel - 0439 999 999 **Mark** - 0418 655 553

Raymond - 0439 777 777

gabrielmotors@bigpond.com.au

**For quality pre-owned
prestige vehicles click **HERE****

258 Victoria Rd Rozelle NSW 2039

Ph: (02) 9818 3288 Fax: (02) 9555 8799

www.gabrielmotors.com.au



Which car for me?

Choosing the right car for your needs from the thousands on offer is easy with our step-by-step guide.

THE 21ST CENTURY NEW CAR SHOWROOM is a much more interesting place than its 20th century predecessor.

Your choice then was simple, because, well, you didn't have many choices. The car makers' balance sheets looked much better that way. They decided what you would drive and if their must-have new model didn't quite suit you... tough. You had to compromise.

Not any more. Today's car buyer is smarter, fussier and less brand loyal, so most brands are about providing customers with as much choice as possible in vehicle size, style, price and specification.

None of which makes the process of buying a new car any easier, of course, but it does mean that if you think about what you want and do some research you can find a car that precisely fits your lifestyle,

driving requirements and budget.

If you just wander in to a new car showroom without a clear idea of what you want and how much you should pay for it, you will end up with a car and a deal that suits the salesperson. This may prove to be a very expensive mistake on your part.

There are three broad areas you need to think about to start the process of finding your car.



700 cars - 1 location
19 independant dealers
pre-approved finance
Cafe playground and plenty of parking
 Corner of The Great Western Hwy
 & Carlisle Av Minchinbury, NSW

Click here: www.greatwesternautocity.com.au



WHAT DO YOU WANT THE CAR TO DO?

This is basic lifestyle stuff, which can help you to decide on the size and type that best suits your day-to-day requirements.

It's also a decision of increasing relevance in the context of the global warming problem. Is it smart to choose a car that consumes more energy, and produces more emissions, than necessary for the task of getting you around?

HOW MANY PEOPLE IS THE CAR GOING TO CARRY, AND HOW OFTEN?

If it's just you, nearly all the time, you live in an inner suburb and the only occasions on which you leave the city are via the

airport, then you will end up with a completely different shortlist to someone who lives in the outer west, has three kids, four bicycles, two surfboards, a dog and goes on camping holidays up the coast.

It's not just the size of the car that counts, though, it's how efficiently the designers use its interior space.

Don't think only big cars have big interiors. Have a look at a few smaller alternatives, especially wagons and compact soft roaders, some of which actually give you more capacity and options.

If you're going to chauffeur kids around, there are added factors to consider. Some

cars are a pleasure to live with because their designers consider the needs of parents and children. Others can be a nightmare because they don't.

If you want to give your kids the best possible chance of surviving a crash, you want a five star NCAP crash test rating plus side and/or curtain airbags for the back seat. You want conveniently placed child restraint anchor points. Easy back seat access and a high seating position make life much more comfortable for everyone.

Simple things like a remote unlocking boot or tailgate, shopping bag hooks, a net to secure schoolbags and rear seat ventilation pay for themselves on every drive.



TWINSTAR AUTOS
QUALITY USED CARS

Over 60 affordable & quality
price-ranged cars from
\$1,500 - \$15,000

Click here to start searching

Cnr Beach Rd &
Harland Ave, Malaga

Ph: 1300 851 792

**WHERE DO YOU DRIVE?**

Let's leave the feral charms of smokin' V8s and other sacred mechanical objects to one side here. We're supposed to be approaching this in a rational manner. That's my excuse, anyway.

It doesn't matter whether they run on petrol, diesel, ethanol, hydrogen or yak fat – big, high performance engines use more fuel than smaller, less powerful ones.

So ask yourself how much performance you need, especially if you live in the city. If you want power for power's sake, we understand, but whether you use it or not you will certainly pay for it – every time you fill up, get the car serviced, pay your insurance premium or fit new tyres.

City driving suits four cylinder petrol

It doesn't matter whether they run on petrol, diesel, ethanol or yak fat – big, high performance engines use more fuel than smaller, less powerful ones.

engines and hybrids, because it's where both deliver their greatest performance/fuel economy benefits compared with other types of powerplants.

In day to day driving around Sydney, a four cylinder petrol engine of 1.8-2.5 litres, producing 100-125kW of power in a mid-size hatch, sedan, wagon or compact 4WD, will usually do the job just fine.

However some manufacturers install four cylinder petrol and diesel engines in cars that are too heavy. An underpowered

car is a lose-lose proposition, because it's slow and thirsty.

If you want a large car or 4WD, a six cylinder engine with enough power and torque to shift the plot efficiently and easily makes sense.

On the open road their long-legged gait can produce economy comparable with four cylinder engines. If most of your driving is out of town or you tow on a regular basis, a turbo diesel is worth considering.

'Everything'

GPS

202 Victoria Rd
Rozelle NSW 2039
T. 02-9818 7040

sales@everythinggps.com.au

Marine

In-Car

Personal

Adventure

Sports & Lifestyle

Communications

Where are you?



THE BUYING PROCESS



MANUAL OR AUTOMATIC?

Today's automatics are light years ahead of the clunkers of not so long ago as far as sophistication, refinement and efficiency are concerned, especially five- and six-speed transmissions which can return the performance and economy of a manual.

The set-and-forget nature of an automatic is great on the daily commute. Autos also work nicely with turbo diesels, because they minimise turbo lag. When you get the chance to actually drive your car properly, the sequential manual shift now common on automatics allows you to have some manual-style fun.

FRONT, REAR OR ALL-WHEEL DRIVE?

Ninety five percent of the time, you won't notice. All-wheel drive will give you better grip in the wet or on loose surfaces, however if you choose a car with

were. Paying a lot of money for a "prestige" European badge might make you feel as flash as a rat with a gold tooth, but it does not necessarily mean you've bought yourself a good car.

Work out your price limit, then test drive two or three cars at that price. Next, test drive a couple of cheaper cars, which, were you less flush with cash, you might be thinking about instead. Then ask yourself why you should be spending the extra dosh on the pricier models.

Resale values are critical. Pick the wrong car and it will be worth only 35 percent or so after three years. The right one will be worth up to 70 percent.

Finally, don't make the mistake of negotiating only the price of the car itself, then letting the salesperson add on road charges, dealer delivery (otherwise known as the \$1000-\$2000 car wash) and your chosen options.

The only number that counts is how much it will cost you to drive the car

home, so negotiate an all inclusive "driveaway" price, or, if you have a trade in, a "changeover" price.

DO YOUR RESEARCH

Before you go near a showroom, do your research at Drive.com.au.

We have all the information you need to work out a shortlist of two or three cars, and calculate how much you should expect to pay for each one, including any options you want.

Test drive each car, make your decision, then - and only then - you're ready to deal. When a salesperson knows you're serious, and firm about what you want, you won't be treated like a fool. If you feel you're being given the run around, walk out.

Shop the first price you get at two or three dealers and you'll be surprised at how much you can save. Rule one in the car business is that the price is always negotiable.

Price and brand are no longer the definitive indicators of quality, competence and driving enjoyment that they once were.

stability control you'll get the best possible protection from slips, spins and skids at both ends.

HOW MUCH DO YOU HAVE TO SPEND?

You'll hear this a lot on your car buying adventure, along with "What do I have to do to get your business today?" and "The boss says this price is good for today only".

Price and brand are no longer the definitive indicators of quality, competence and driving enjoyment that they once



find your next car @
wacars.com.au
WA Cars for WA People
Click here to start searching

THE BUYING
PROCESS

When is a bargain not a bargain?

If the price of a car is rock bottom, chances are its condition could be too.

CAVEAT EMPTOR: LET THE BUYER BEWARE. SHOPPING FOR a second-hand car can save you money, but if you don't step warily it could cost you thousands of dollars down the track.

First off, let's be optimistic and look on the happy side of life. Let's assume you've uncovered that fabled little old lady who's selling the car she drove to church on Sundays. You lucky devil.

It still pays to get a full inspection done of the car, because there's a fair chance our adorable seller didn't bother getting the car regularly serviced. And it's also a good idea to check the car's registration and VIN (vehicle identification number) with the relevant department in your state (see panel).

Why? If she's not the legal owner of the car (let's say that her grandson is, and he's asked her to sell it while he's in Europe) then you could have trouble getting the transfer of ownership forms completed.

Nine times out of ten if the price of a used car is too good to be true, it usually is. A cheap price means the owner wants to get rid of it fast, for any of a number of reasons. Perhaps they need cash in a hurry. Perhaps the car is a ticking timebomb with an engine on its last legs. Perhaps it's so full of rust underneath your foot will go straight through the floor...

Aah, you say, perhaps the seller has not done their homework and has undervalued the car through ignorance... This is rare – but possible – and even more reason for you to do your homework thoroughly.

Remember the old saying: "You only get what you pay for".

Then there's the most obvious reason a vehicle is advertised

under-priced; it is a stolen car.

Grab the vehicle's registration details and its VIN, and check it with the authority in your state. If the seller won't give you those details, walk away. If you have any doubts about the seller, walk away. If you have any doubts about the car, walk away.

If it's stolen, at best it will be taken from you by the authorities with no financial compensation. At worst, you could be facing charges of receiving stolen goods or... grand theft auto.

There are simply too many used cars on the market for you to waste time and possibly money on a vehicle that could be stolen, or in poor physical condition.

ENCUMBERED VEHICLES

Make sure the vehicle you're inspecting is not under finance or stolen.

NSW	Roads & Traffic Authority	www.rta.nsw.gov.au
VIC	VICRoads	www.vicroads.vic.gov.au
QLD	Department of Main Roads	www.mainroads.qld.gov.au
WA	Dept of Planning and Infrastructure	www.dpi.wa.gov.au
SA	Transport SA	www.transport.sa.gov.au
NT	NT Transport & Infrastructure	www.ipe.nt.gov.au
TAS	Transport Tasmania	www.transport.tas.gov.au
ACT	ACT Territory & Municipal Services	www.tams.act.gov.au

SUNDELL HOLDEN GORDON
ENJOY THE NEW EXPERIENCE

FANTASTIC ECONOMY & FANTASTIC VALUE

BARINA

\$13,990
FR
DRIVE AWAY
6.9L PER 100 KM



VIVA

\$17,990
FR
DRIVE AWAY
FROM 7.4L PER 100 KM



ASTRA

\$19,990*
FR
PLUS ON ROAD COSTS
FROM 7.4L PER 100 KM



836 Pacific Highway, Gordon
www.sundell.com.au

9418 0000

* Plus dealer delivery and statutory government charges. Pictures for illustrative purposes only.

**BEST USED CARS
UNDER \$15k**



BEST USED CARS UNDER \$15k



From economical city cars to practical wagons and performance sedans, we sniff out the best used cars under \$15,000.

REAL ESTATE AGENTS HAVE A GOLDEN RULE IF YOU WANT TO BUY A HOUSE THAT will appreciate in value: position, position, position. We've got a similar mantra when you're after a cheap used car: condition, condition, condition.

Rat cunning also helps. You should avoid luxury cars that look like a million bucks because that's how much they'll cost to fix when something goes wrong. Odometers are like property investment schemes. If they look too good to be true, they're lying to you. And if the bloke flogging the Mazawakazuki turbo coupe says "Maaaate" a lot, and the car idles at 7000rpm, it might pay to be cautious.

Here's a selection of cars under \$15,000 we reckon are worth considering.



**Australia's Most Popular People Mover.
From Denlo Kia, Australia's biggest
Carnival dealer.**



KIA MOTORS
The Power to Surprise™

> COMPACT CAR

Toyota Echo

1999-2005, FROM \$6000

Echo raised the bar a long way for little cars. A nippy 63kW 1.3 litre engine is matched with a five speed manual or four speed auto.

There's much more space inside than you think; four adults can travel in comfort. The boot is tiny though. A high driving position, and bright digital instruments, in the centre of the dash, make it a real easy thing to drive. Ride and handling are OK in town but mediocre elsewhere.

The Echo isn't a speed freak's car. Lots were bought by women, of all ages, attracted by its practicality, blue chip badge and cute Euro look. So you want one of these. Early models may have up to 200,000 km on the clock now (so suspect courier use), but if you keep hunting you're a chance to get one with well under 100K, owned by a little old lady who shows you a complete service book while she makes you a cuppa. Buy it.

The Echo's 1.3 is bulletproof, but it works hard so it's got to be almost knackered at 200,000 km. No matter what the kilometres, regular oil changes are essential, preferably every 5000km. Models from March 2003 on start at about \$9000 and are worth going for. They have a stronger, safer body, upgraded suspension for better handling and three lap sash belts in the back seat. Power steering, air-conditioning and a CD player are standard.

**WORTHY SECOND CHOICES****2002-2007 Hyundai Getz**

Korean, so late models are cheap, but this one's not too nasty.

2001-October 2005 Holden Barina

The Opel hatch. Better than the current recycled Daewoo.

2002-2007 Mazda2

Small wagon body style works great if you've got young kids.

> SMALL CAR

Mazda 323

1998-2003, FROM \$6500

Introduced in September 1998, the last of the Mazda 3s was available as a hatch, the Astina, and a sedan, called the Protege. It was initially offered with 78kW 1.6 and 92kW 1.8-litre engines, with five-speed manual or four-speed auto transmissions. A better drive, with more equipment, than the comparable Corolla of the time, the Mazda's Japanese quality counts. Back seat space is a bit tight, the ride's a bit hard and it's not the quietest, smoothest drive around.

Like the Echo, the Mazda 3 base models had a conservative buyer profile, especially the Protege sedan, a favourite down at the local bowls club. It's worth choosing a 1.8, especially if you want an automatic-transmission but also because it's got more gear, including 15-inch alloys (14s on the Protege) and a CD stacker. The February 2001 BJ11 1.8s (from \$10,000) added ABS brakes and dual front airbags.

No major dramas on the reliability front, but regular cooling system maintenance is essential otherwise the engines can overheat, blow head gaskets and possibly damage the head. Do the usual check for oil/white sludge in the coolant. The Mazda was also reskinned and sold as the Ford Laser until 2002. You'll pay around \$1000-\$1500 less for the same year model.

**WORTHY SECOND CHOICES****1998-2001 Toyota Corolla**

The AE112 isn't the greatest Corolla ever, but you still can't kill it with an axe.

1996-1998 Toyota Corolla

The last Aussie made Corolla, the AE101/102 is also the best used one. Starts at \$4500.

1998-2001 Subaru Impreza

Impreza went 100 percent all wheel drive in 1998. Safe. Good value.



Subaru Penrith Ex-fleet Savings.
The affordable alternative to a new car.

[Click here for details.](#)



**BEST USED CARS
UNDER \$15k**

> MEDIUM CAR

Hyundai Sonata

2001-2003, FROM \$5500

The EF-B Hyundai Sonata launched in September 2001, and although it's no great shakes to drive, it is well built, comfortable, as big as a Camry, equally refined and great value.

The 104kW 2.4-litre four is a better engine than the 132kW 2.7 V6, and heaps cheaper as a used car. Five-speed manual or four-speed automatic transmissions.

We keep picking cars that senior citizens like, but do you ever see them doing burnouts or donuts? The Sonata was the first clear evidence that Hyundai was lifting its quality game. Savage depreciation makes the 2001-2002 2.4s, some with less than 100,000km on the clock, a dead set bargain at \$5500-\$8000.

Get one with the optional passenger airbag/ABS safety pack.

The EF-B was a more durable, reliable car than the 1996-2001 EF it replaced, but over the longer term a Sonata probably won't hang together like a Toyota Camry, so if there's no service history for the example you're looking at, walk away.

Engine oil leaks, warped discs and expensive to fix automatics have affected some cars. Interior plastics and fittings are probably getting a bit ratty by now as well.



WORTHY SECOND CHOICES

1996-2000 Subaru Liberty

A class act, but older than the Hyundai for the money.

1997-2000 Toyota Camry

The SXV20R Camry 2.2 litre is the epitome of cheap (\$5000-\$8000) and reliable.

1995-1997 Nissan Bluebird

Don't laugh. It was actually a good car. Get one from a deceased estate for \$2000.

> LARGE CAR

Mitsubishi Magna

2000-2004, FROM \$5000

Magnas were always heavily discounted new so late model used ones are the best value family cars you can get. The ugly Dumbo-look front end TJ dates from 2000; the prettier TL from June 2003 and the TW from October 2004. Go for the 155kW 3.5 V6 engine, with a four-speed sequential automatic. Four airbags, ABS brakes and traction control are standard on base ES. Why would you buy a new Falcadore when you can get one of these so cheap?

Lots of Magnas were owned by rental fleets. Wander down to any Mitsubishi dealer and you'll see a row of very tidy looking 2004 models that have just been bought at auction or by tender. They'll have 40,000-50,000km on the clock, drive like new and – get this – you'll still have a couple of years of factory warranty left. Offer \$15,000 straight up and drive home happy.

Later model Magnas are generally very reliable, durable cars (unlike their 1980s-1990s predecessors) and build quality is far superior to Falcadores. However for some bizarre reason Mitsubishi has never been able to do a 100 per cent reliable automatic, so if there's any slurring, delayed shifting or harshness, forget it. Otherwise, these newer Magnas are OK.



WORTHY SECOND CHOICES

2000-2002 Holden Commodore VX/VXII

The best of the pre-VE Commodores. Safety kitted Acclaim starts at around \$8000.

2002-2004 Ford Falcon

The BA is Falcon tough and better on-road than earlier models.

2000-2002 Toyota Camry

The 3.0 litre V6 sedan starts at \$7000 or so. A well-kept Camry will still feel like a new one.

**200 QUALITY
CARS TO CHOOSE FROM**



**PRICES
FROM
\$9,990**

3 YEAR / 175,000 KM WARRANTY • ALL MAKES AND MODELS • FIXED PRICE SERVICING • ALL CARS AT www.sundell.com.au



SUNDELL HOLDEN GORDON
836 Pacific Highway, Gordon www.sundell.com.au

**Certified
USED VEHICLES**

9418 0150

Pictures for illustrative purposes only.

> SPORTS CAR

Nissan 300ZX

1989-1996, FROM \$6500

This is a nice piece which sent motoring scribblers delirious at the time, evoking favourable comparisons with Porsche. It uses a 166kW 3.0-litre V6, rated as one of the world's best engines for a decade or so, with a five-speed manual or four-speed auto and rear-wheel drive. Suspension, steering and brakes are set up for genuine sports handling, but the ZX is as comfortable as a GT-style coupe. Four seats, the rears for little kids only. A-grade quality, so if it's been looked after it will still be a good thing.

In a perfect world, you'll find an original owned by one bloke since new. Lots have been bought by doof-doofers and butchered with dumb modifications or stupid driving. Cruise, ABS and 16-inch alloys are standard. Later models (94-on) got goodies like a 10-stack CD player. The 95-96 25th Anniversary model (of the original 240Z) comes with 17-inch alloys and upgraded, adjustable suspension.

The only way to get an accurate analysis of condition — assuming it drives OK — is to get an expert to give it the once-over. Most examples will have been crashed or thrashed, but the ZX is a pretty robust car so problems might be hard to spot. It is as complex as any current sport piece, so problems will cost a squillion to fix. Original, one owner, service book is what you want.

**WORTHY SECOND CHOICES****1999 Toyota Celica**

First of the current model. Screaming 1.8 will keep you well entertained, and good front drive dynamics.

1992-1996 Eunos 30X

Dirt cheap (\$3500-\$8000) because the brand no longer exists. Frantic 1.8-litre V6.

1998-2000 Nissan Pulsar N15

Last of the 2.0 litre SSS Pulsars. Why did Nissan ever stop making them?

> PERFORMANCE CAR

Holden Commodore SS

1998-2001, FROM \$13,500

If you're looking for maximum bang for your bucks in late model machinery you can't go past the home-grown sports sedans. A BA Falcon XR6 is just out of reach at \$15,000, so we'll go back a couple more years to the red corner, where Holden has the Gen III 5.7-litre V8 six-speed manual VX SS, a sweet, good looking Commodore with 225kW of power, 460Nm of grunt and a ride/handling compromise that works on Australian roads.

VX was the third Commodore in the VT-based series, so it complies with the too true "never buy the first new-model Commodore" adage. The 5.7 Gen III was introduced on the 1999 VT Series II.

Like most performance cars, the SS has two types of owners, idiots and genuine car heads who respect their machinery. A good one will be stock, privately owned and not an ex-police chaser. Check also that you're not inspecting an SS lookalike Executive.

The 5.7 litre V8 is the main thing to look at. Some owners enjoyed a trouble-free run, others gave up after several engine rebuilds. If it runs or idles rough, walk. Piston slap, excessive oil consumption and oil leaks are bad news. Even an OK engine will probably use some oil. Avoid the automatic. Power steering pumps can fail and hoses can leak. Brakes tend to have a hard life.

**WORTHY SECOND CHOICES****2001-2002 Ford TE50/TS50**

The last Tickford AUIII Falcon, with a smokin' 250kW 5.6-litre V8. Rare, but good.

1996-2000 Nissan 200SX

A genuine WRX beater, with a 147kW 2.0 turbo and rear drive.

1997-2001 Honda Prelude VTi-R

Last Prelude came fully loaded, with a 147kW 2.2-litre four.

> COMPACT 4WD

Toyota RAV4

1998-2000, FROM \$7800

These are the last RAV4s in the original bodystyle, introduced in 1994. They're smaller than subsequent models, but tougher and better set up for a bit of dirt-road work, with higher clearance than previous models and a locking centre differential.

The 96kW 2.0 litre engine goes OK and it's a Toyota so it won't be falling to bits, but the five-speed manual is rubbery and the brakes lack some bite.

This model is available in three bodystyles: three and five-door wagons, plus a very rare soft-top. Base spec didn't get you much apart from four steel wheels and an engine; Cruiser spec added 16-inch alloys, a CD player, limited-slip rear diff and a sunroof. This RAV also dates from the days when Toyota put safety features on the options list. It slugged buyers an extra \$2540 for two airbags and ABS brakes, would you believe.

You won't find many with less than 100,000km on the clock now, but the basic package is durable well beyond this as long as it's looked after, with no endemic problems. A car that's done a fair bit of dirt-road work will be loose and wearing out fast; get underneath and check for corrosion caused by sea salt.

**WORTHY SECOND CHOICES****1997-2001 Honda CRV**

A much softer drive, but more at home in suburbia too.

1997-2000 Subaru Forester

The smallest of the compact SUVs, but the best drive and by far the safest.

1998-2000 Suzuki Grand Vitara

Real off road ability with low range, plus 2.0 litre four or 2.5 V6 engines.

> LARGE 4WD

Holden Jackaroo

1996-1997, FROM \$6500

These were the last of the Jackaroos based on the 1992 model. They performed strongly in comparison tests at the time, but for some reason fell from favour and was canned in 2003. The 130kW 3.2 V6 petrol and 84kW 3.1-litre 4-cyl turbodiesel deliver respectable performance. Five-speed manual/four-speed autos (with petrol engine only) operate a part time 4WD system with low range.

You get a wagon that's built like a brick s... house, more efficient use of interior space than Pajeros or Patrols of similar vintage, much more comfortable seats and, in the five-door SE, seven of them. A three-door Jackaroo is also available, but hard to find. The top spec is the 3.2 petrol Monterey seven seater, priced from about \$10,000. It's got ABS, two airbags, cruise and 16-inch alloys.

The key to buying a reliable 4WD is finding one that's spent most of its time on the bitumen, and hasn't been used to tow the dreaded Millard around the country. So treat evidence of either as a warning. The 3.2 turbodiesel was more reliable than the 3.0 which superseded it, but can still cause problems. We've had owners call us with problems on Isuzu (the manufacturer) turbodiesel engines, usually faulty injectors.

**WORTHY SECOND CHOICES****1996-200 Mitsubishi Pajero**

First models (NK/NL) with the 3.5V6, a suburban family favourite.

1996 -1997 Nissan Patrol

Last of the GQs. Buy the 2.8 or 4.2 diesels. The 4.2 petrol's thirst will send you broke.

1992-1996 Toyota LandCruiser

First of the 4.5-litre petrol 80 Series. 4.2 diesel is good too; forget the turbo version.



> PEOPLE MOVER

Mitsubishi Nimbus

1990-1994, FROM \$8000

The 1998-2001 UG Nimbus won a couple of NRMA Best Car awards in the People Mover class because it did what a family wagon should do at a bargain price. The same applies today.

It's an attractively styled seven seater, with a torquy, economical 2.4-litre four matched with five-speed manual or four-speed auto transmissions.

The Nimbus is more compact than rivals like Mazda's MPV and the Toyota Tarago, but it uses interior space very efficiently. It's heaps cheaper as a used car than the Honda Odyssey, but get one with ABS brakes, which were optional at the time. Air-conditioning is standard, and the back two seats can be removed.

The 2.4 stands up against its rivals because it's got better low-down pulling power. It's also trouble free, and though it will have 130,000km or more on it by now, running costs and servicing will be relatively cheap.



WORTHY SECOND CHOICES

1995-1997 Honda Odyssey

Up to seven seats and a 2.2 litre four. Drives like a car, not a van.

1996-1999 Mazda MPV

Uses a 3.0 litre V6, has eight seats, but it's pretty snug inside.

1990-2000 Toyota Tarago

Priced from \$4500 for 1990 GLi with eight seats and heaps of space.



> CONVERTIBLE

Mazda MX-5

1998-2000, FROM \$10,300

This is the second generation of the MX-5, which uses a 106kW 1.8-litre engine, driving the rear wheels (of course) via a five-speed manual or four-speed automatic.

A manual folding soft-top is standard, but a removable hard-top was also offered. It has a bit more room than the original, a glass rear window and a stronger body, plus more-reliable fixed instead of pop-up headlights.

According to the books, 1998 models start with about 90,000km, but we reckon if you look around you might find one with a lot less than that.

The MX-5 was an instant classic, so many blokes bought them as Sunday drives and treated them like precious objects. Persistence should turn up a low kilometres, Mickey Mouse example.

That said, don't be put off by examples with more than 100,000km on the clock, because the MX-5's 1.8-litre engine

is basically a bulletproof shopping trolley engine (from the 323 Astina) given a bit of a tweak.

The main issue is likely to be the soft-top, which will have stretched and deteriorated a bit by now, so water leaks might be a problem. Check that it goes up and down smoothly, and that the lugs align with the locating points in the windscreen header rail.



WORTHY SECOND CHOICES

1993-1994 Ford Capri

It didn't sell, but the last ones drove competently and are dirt cheap – sub-\$5000. 1.6 atmo or turbo engines.

1998-1999 Saab 9-3

Swedish style for \$13,000-\$15,000, with the low boost 2.0 turbo.

1995-1998 VW Golf

MkIV 2.0-litre convertible seats four and is pretty solid. Slow too.



> PRESTIGE CAR

Volvo 850

1995-1997, FROM \$4000

The boxy but good Volvo 850 came in a vast array of models, all rugged and safe. Most variants are also available in sedan and wagon body styles. Sensible ones include the S, CD and SE and GLT, with a 106kW/125kW 2.5-litre five-cylinder/five-speed manual or four-speed auto/front-wheel drive. The T5 (from \$6500) got a 166kW 2.3 turbo that went hard but stretched front end grip; the rare 184kW R version (1996-1997, from \$10,000) is a rocket but just about undrivable at full noise on a rough road.

Go for upspec luxury variants like the SE and GLT (from about \$7000-\$10,000), with the 125kW five-cylinder engine and five-speed manual or four-speed autos. They're punchy, economical, comfortable and well equipped, with leather, alloys, ABS brakes, two airbags and cruise. The wagon also has neat integrated child seats and a big load area. The T5 and R get lower sports suspension and cool body kits/wheels.

Lots of power through the front end equals wear and tear on suspension mounts, links and bushes, plus constant velocity joints, especially in T5 and R. These can also have turbocharger and engine mount failure problems. A recall affected these cars to fix a potential throttle jam. Autos can also fail, as can the air-conditioning. Still, we've seen good examples with 250,000km on the clock; look for one with less than half this and you're away.



WORTHY SECOND CHOICES

1999 Audi A4

The last of the B4s, the 132kW 1.8 turbo quattro manual. Nice.

1999 Honda Legend

The first update of the 1996 model made it handle properly. 147kW 3.5V6 is OK.

1999 Holden Caprice

The Gen III V8 with all the fruit and more acreage than the SCG.

> LUXURY CAR

Lexus LS400

1990-1994, FROM \$8000

The LS400 blew away the BMW 7 Series and Mercedes S-class for refinement, quality and value when it was launched. It does the same as a used car, and you're less likely to burn vast sums fixing problems. The 190kW 4.0-litre V8 is as smooth as they come, handling is OK and you get the genuine cone of silence effect. Beautifully soft leather, great sound system and an alarm are standard.

A Lexus is a Toyota with a fancy image, so you can expect similar quality, reliability and durability. It's the best in the business, so if you find a Lexus that's been cared for — and most have — and it has a service record the kilometres shouldn't worry you too much. Most will have covered 130,000km or more, but like the MX-5 some spend most of their life in the shed, so you may find one with half this.

Only two major issues to look for. The power-steering pump needs to be checked for leaks, and 1992-1994 models were recalled to fix a front suspension lower ball joint wear problem. On the test drive, if you can feel any play or slackness in the steering, get this checked. Otherwise, an LS will be a whole lot more reliable than the following three cars.



WORTHY SECOND CHOICES

1994-1997 Audi A6

Used 2.4-2.8 V6 engines. Go for the quattro variants. Avant wagon is a good kid carrier.

1996-1997 BMW 528i

An E39 sedan can be had for \$15,000 if you look hard and haggle.

1992-1993 Mercedes Benz E300

Last of the W124s. After this they started building the E-class down to a price.

NEW LIGHT CARS
COMPARISON

Motoring's mighty minis

Rising petrol prices and interest rates are making small cars more attractive. Drive compare 10 fuel misers.

THESE ARE THE NEW DARLINGS OF THE Australian car market: they're small and beautiful, but when you add on the \$40 or \$50 cost of filling the tank they become drop-dead gorgeous, which might explain why sales are up 23 per cent on last year.

Small cars are the most cost-conscious sector of the market, so the players are always tweaking prices and equipment lists to maintain a competitive edge. We dissected the class last October, but much has changed since then. Some models now have up to \$2000 of extra value compared with last year; others are less attractive propositions.

One car we drove but didn't rate is the Holden Barina, which is a rebadged Daewoo Kalos that Holden imports from Korea. Since our previous comparison, the Barina sedan - a left-hand-drive model sold in Europe as the Chevrolet Aveo - scored two stars out of five in Euro NCAP crash tests. One star carried a strike-through, which indicates a significant risk of life-threatening injury. The Barina hatch was subsequently crash tested by the Australian NCAP organisation and scored only two stars out of five.

The Barina is the only new car in Australia with such a poor NCAP rating. Despite strong sales (thanks to an attractive \$13,490 starting price) we won't recommend it at any price. Most of these cars we're more confident about.

> FORD FIESTA

Price From \$15,990

Engine 1.6-litre, four-cylinder

Transmission Five-speed manual or

four-speed automatic

Power 74kW / 146Nm

Weight 1056kg

Spare tyre Temporary

Fuel Premium unleaded (91-98RON)

Fuel rating label 6.6 litres/100km;
7.5 litres/100km

The Ford Fiesta LX three-door hatch starts at \$15,990. Air-conditioning, formerly a \$2000 option, is now standard. Anti-lock brakes are a \$700 option, or are packaged with the four-speed auto for \$2200.

The car, is German engineered and built, has a solid, robust quality, excellent dynamics and supportive seats with plenty of front-seat travel to accommodate tall drivers.

It has another less-appealing European attribute: 95 RON fuel is recommended for its 74kW 1.6-litre engine.

We have no complaints about its performance, though. There are faster cars tested here, but the 1.6-litre pulls strongly across a wide range of revs and it would be fine paired with the automatic transmission.

Other negative aspects of European cars are their more frequent service intervals and more expensive maintenance. Generally speaking, the bigger services come sooner in European cars than Japanese cars.

At highway speeds, some tyre noise and exhaust boom are evident, but the engine is quite refined. The dash, however, is dated and fussy. The back-seat has tolerable room for adults and the boot is relatively large.

The Fiesta recorded average scores on the NRMA Insurance collision repair cost and theft scales, but it's at the high end of the running costs comparison. It achieved four stars out of five in Euro NCAP crash tests.

> HONDA JAZZ

Price From \$15,990

Engine 1.3-litre four cylinder

Transmission Five-speed manual or

continuously-variable transmission

Power 61kW / 119Nm

Weight 1010kg

Spare tyre Full-size

Fuel Regular unleaded

Fuel rating label 5.7 litres/100km;
5.8 litres/100km.

Honda now imports the five-door Jazz from Thailand rather than Japan, so it arrives without the usual 10 per cent import tariff. The base 1.3-litre GLi manual used to cost \$17,390 with air-conditioning. It's now \$15,990, or \$17,990 with the continuously variable automatic transmission tested here. The Thai import also has remote central locking and a full-sized spare tyre in an equipment list that includes anti-lock brakes and power windows all round.

CVTs are natural partners for small engines because they maximise performance and efficiency while also shifting more seamlessly than a conventional automatic (although the noise can take some getting used to). The 61kW 1.3-litre Jazz engine feels more powerful than its size suggests. The Jazz also runs second in the fuel-economy contest, on regular unleaded.

No other small car has the outright space, or space efficiency, of the Honda. It will take four large adults in comfort and you still get a huge boot, which can be configured in several ways.

The karaoke-machine dash is simple and functional. A compliant ride in town can become bouncy on the open road, where handling is in the "don't push it" category.

The Jazz has a four stars out of five NCAP safety score and an average collision repair cost rating, but it's the easiest car here to steal, NRMA Insurance says.

NEW LIGHT CARS
COMPARISON

> HYUNDAI GETZ

Price From \$13,990**Engine** 1.4-litre, four-cylinder**Transmission** Five-speed manual or four-speed auto**Power** 70kW / 126Nm**Weight** 1075kg**Spare tyre** Full-size**Fuel** Regular unleaded**Fuel rating label** 6.2 litres/100 km; 7.1 litres/100km

Winner of the 2004 and 2005 small-car class in Australia's Best Cars award program, the Hyundai Getz is priced from \$13,990 for the 70kW 1.4-litre three-door hatch; a \$500 increase on its price last October.

The 78kW 1.6-litre starts at \$14,990, though while the World Cup was on (Hyundai was a sponsor) you could get one for the same price as the 1.4-litre, plus \$500 worth of petrol to further sweeten the deal. A four-speed automatic transmission adds \$1890; five-door versions add \$1000. In other words, be sure to shop around.

The Getz has been rated as the car with the lowest running costs by the NRMA for the past three years. Kia's Rio now holds that title.

An upgrade late last year saw Hyundai include anti-lock brakes in the 1.6-litre, along with active front-seat head restraints. Power windows and an alarm are other worthwhile inclusions, as is a long warranty: five years/130,000 kilometres.

So the Getz has the meat-and-potatoes aspects of ownership nailed. On the road, though, and in the style and efficiency of its interior layout, it's been overtaken by newer models. The 1.6-litre goes well enough, but the ride can be harsh at low speeds and the suspension is under-damped.

Front-seat leg room is tight and the driver's seat is uncomfortable. Rear-seat room is acceptable, boot space is generous and you get a full-sized spare.

It scores three NCAP stars out of five, has an average security rating and is the cheapest car to repair after a front-end bingle.

> KIA RIO

Price From \$15,990**Engine** 1.6-litre four cylinder**Transmission** Five-speed manual or four-speed auto**Power** 82kW / 145Nm**Weight** 1181kg**Spare tyre** Full-size**Fuel** Regular unleaded**Fuel rating label** 6.8 litres/100km; 7.0 litres/100km.

Logistics prevented us from going to Rio, but the car and its price are the same as when we did our comparison last October.

A five-door hatch or four-door sedan costs \$15,990 but this is a drive-away price, which represents a saving of about \$2000 on the usual dealer delivery charge, plus on-road costs such as stamp duty, CTP Insurance and registration, which you have to factor in to the deal on other cars.

The Rio has a similar character to the Getz, which is fair enough since Hyundai owns Kia. However, it has a more powerful (82kW) 1.6-litre engine and firmer suspension for superior handling. Standard

equipment includes air-conditioning, CD player, dual airbags and power windows. Anti-lock brakes add \$850 and a four-speed auto is \$2000.

Rear-seat leg room is on the tight side, but the boot is large. A full-sized spare tyre is under the floor. The fuel rating label shows a figure of 6.8 litres per 100km for the manual and 7.0 litres per 100km for the automatic.

The Rio scored four stars in Euro NCAP crash tests and is cheap to run.

> MAZDA 2

Price From \$16,290**Engine** 1.5-litre, four-cylinder**Transmission** Five-speed manual or four-speed auto**Power** 82kW / 141Nm**Weight** 1064kg**Spare tyre** Temporary**Fuel** Regular unleaded**Fuel rating label** 6.6 litres/100km; 7.0 litres/100km

The base-model Mazda 2 Neo, priced at \$16,290, has made-in-Japan quality and a no-grief ownership proposition.

Its 82kW 1.5-litre engine, the most powerful in the group (with the Rio's 1.6-litre), gives the Mazda ample performance, though excessive noise, vibration and harshness - a frequent problem with four cylinder Mazda engines - take some of the sparkle off this small car.

A four-speed automatic transmission adds \$1850. An optional safety pack adds front-seat, side and curtain airbags, plus anti-lock brakes, to the standard two front airbags for only \$1150.

The Mazda's already competent dynamics were improved on the updated model released late last year, with electric power steering and a more rigid body. As in the Jazz, space efficiency is the five-door Mazda's chief attraction. A long cabin, with a deep flat floor and a wagon-style back end, yields a roomy rear seat (which can also move backwards and forwards) and a load area with a low, easy-to-load floor. However, the child restraint anchors are inconveniently placed.

The car's fit and finish are the best of the bunch with a clean and stylish dash and a

comfortable driver's seat.

The Mazda 2 recorded average scores for security and repair costs. It's one of the less expensive small cars to run and it scored four out of five ANCAP stars.

> MITSUBISHI COLT

Price From \$15,990**Engine** 1.5-litre, four-cylinder**Transmission** Five-speed manual or continuously variable transmission**Power** 77kW / 141Nm**Weight** 1130kg**Spare tyre** Temporary**Fuel** Regular unleaded**Fuel rating label** 5.9 litres/100km (manual); 5.6 litres/100km (auto)

Mitsubishi recently introduced a manual model, ES, priced from \$15,990. A 77kW 1.5-litre engine is matched with an automatic CVT transmission in the middle-of-the-range LS, which is now priced at \$18,990. Like the Jazz, it has a smooth and efficient drivetrain, albeit a little louder than the Honda's. It has the lowest petrol consumption of the 10.

Colt also leads the pack with the market's longest warranty: five years/130,000 km and 10 years/160,000 km on the drivetrain (non transferable).

Anti-lock brakes, alloy wheels, an in-dash six-stack CD player and power windows are standard on the LS. Side curtain airbags are a \$1200 option.

The Colt's suspension isn't as good as some of its peers and our rear-seat passengers complained of a pogo-stick ride during our test.

There's plenty of headroom and leg room, but the seats were less supportive than other vehicles in this group, something the company is believed to have fixed this in the new generation. Some testers didn't like the foot-operated parking brake, others noted the small boot, inconveniently placed child restraint anchors and a space-saver spare as other annoyances.

A recent update has breathed some new life into the forgotten Colt. It's a midfield performer in running costs and security, but is relatively expensive when it comes to crash repairs. It scored four out of five stars in Euro NCAP's test.



NEW LIGHT CARS
COMPARISON> **PROTON SAVVY****Price** From \$13,990**Engine** 1.2-litre, four-cylinder**Transmission** Five-speed manual**Power** 55kW / 105Nm**Weight** 950kg**Spare tyre** Full-size**Fuel** Premium unleaded (95RON)**Fuel rating label** 5.7 litres/100km

The Malaysian carmaker has been loitering on the fringes of the Australian small-car market for a decade. The five-door Savvy is Proton's attempt at being regarded as a serious small-car player.

Priced at \$15,990, the Savvy has the smallest, least powerful engine in the class: a 55kW 1.2 litre, which can muster a mere 105Nm of torque.

It's not supposed to be a racing car, but it is slow even by class standards: with four up, in the manual, the Drive team took nearly 30 seconds to get the Savvy up to 100 km/h on the timed section of our test loop. The gearbox didn't help, having a very heavy, stiff action. On the plus side, it is one of the least thirsty vehicles in this contest.

Proton has made improvements with this all-new model but, by current standards, the quality is below average: wind and road noise are excessive, back seat space is tight and resale values are likely to be weak.

Reasons to be cheerful? Proton owns Lotus and it shows in the finely tuned suspension and decent handling. Reverse-parking sensors are standard and the automatic (which is in fact a manual with an automated clutch) costs just \$1000 extra.

The Savvy has an average collision-repair cost rating and is slightly below average for security. It has not been tested by NCAP or assessed for running costs by the NRMA.

> **SUZUKI SWIFT****Price** From \$15,990**Engine** 1.5-litre, four-cylinder**Transmission** Five-speed manual or four-speed auto**Power** 74kW / 133Nm**Weight** 1030kg**Spare tyre** Space saver**Fuel** Regular unleaded**Fuel rating label** 7.0 litres/100km; 7.5 litres/100km

The Swift took the money in our comparison last October, when we said it had "the best overall package in terms of value, price, build quality and dynamics".

Suzuki has held Swift prices this year: the base model is still \$15,990, with the S at \$17,990. Both are powered by a zippy 74kW 1.5-litre engine with a smooth shifting five-speed manual. A four-speed automatic transmission adds \$2000.

The Swift handles confidently and securely, steers accurately and rides comfortably. In a class where non-stick rubber is the norm, its 185/60-15 Bridgestone tyres have good grip.

Tall drivers may find the seat has insufficient travel and, as is often the case in Japanese small cars, is short and narrow. Rear-seat and boot space are tight.

For your money, there are plenty of inclusions: anti-lock brakes, air-conditioning, two front airbags, remote central locking, CD player, power windows and mirrors and a leather-wrapped wheel with audio controls are standard; the S adds side and curtain airbags, 15-inch alloy wheels and foglights.

The Swift S scored four stars out of five in NCAP tests. It's average for security and repair costs, but running costs are pretty low.

> **TOYOTA YARIS****Price** From \$14,990**Engine** 1.3-litre, four-cylinder**Transmission** Five-speed manual or four-speed auto**Power** 63kW / 121Nm**Weight** 1025kg**Spare tyre** Full-size**Fuel** Regular unleaded**Fuel rating label** 6.0 litres/100km; 6.5 litres/100km

This replacement for the Echo is Australia's top-selling small car, which goes to show that although a rock-bottom price always works in this class, many buyers downsize and don't want to drive a cheap tin box. They're prepared to pay a premium for a

blue-chip badge, high safety standards and 21st-century design and engineering.

The Yaris delivers all these attributes in spades. We've tested the base model 63kW 1.3-litre YR three-door, which is priced at \$14,990. A four-speed automatic transmission adds \$1500; you can have two extra doors for \$1200.

Two front airbags and anti-lock brakes are standard; add driver's side knee, front-seat side and curtain airbags for \$750 and you've got the only five-star NCAP scorer here. The Yaris gets four stars without the side and curtain airbag package.

Toyota deserves credit for making this important safety pack so affordable (rumour has it Toyota makes a loss or barely breaks even on the deal), but it hasn't completed its noble gesture by making it readily available.

If you want a Yaris with side and curtain airbags it's a special order from Japan. Toyota claims there is only a 10 per cent take up rate; perhaps this would improve if vehicles with extra airbags were kept in stock.

The 1.3-litre is a more refined engine than the 80kW 1.5-litre in the premium Yaris models. It goes surprisingly well even when the car is loaded and returns great economy. It is complemented by a comfortable, controlled ride and excellent handling.

Like the Jazz, the Yaris has an unconventional but refreshingly different and efficient dash layout, with storage cubbies everywhere. Comfortable seats, easy-to-read instruments and clear vision all round the car are other attractions.

The back seat slides backwards and forwards, and when it is pushed back, provides plenty of leg room. The boot, however, is tiny.

The NRMA says the Yaris is at the lower end of the 10 for running costs. However, it is relatively expensive to repair after a low-speed crash. Security is average.

> **VOLKSWAGEN POLO****Price** From \$16,990**Engine** 1.4-litre, four-cylinder**Transmission** Five-speed manual or four-speed auto**Power** 59kW / 130Nm**Weight** 1077kg**Spare tyre** Full-size**Fuel** Premium unleaded (95RON)**Fuel rating label** 6.5 litres/100km; 7.6 litres/100km

As soon as you swing open the driver's door, the Polo's chief attraction becomes apparent: it is well made and strong.

A large, comfortable driver's seat with lots of travel, plenty of back-seat and boot space, a good finish using quality materials, finely tuned suspension and low noise and vibration levels reinforce this impression. The base-model Club three-door costs \$16,990; VW has a \$19,490 drive-away deal that doesn't seem like any discount at all. Its 55kW 1.4-litre engine is tractable and refined but underpowered against its Japanese and Korean rivals. It also requires premium unleaded petrol. The four-speed automatic transmission (which costs an extra \$2000) struggles with such a small engine, but it's fine for a city runabout.

The Club's equipment list is skinny in some respects. You have to hand wind the



NEW LIGHT CARS COMPARISON

front windows for example, but it does have a height-reach adjustable steering wheel and automatic air-conditioning.

Side curtain airbags and anti-lock brakes add \$1200. The Polo scores four stars out of five in Euro NCAP, leads the class in security and has average crash-repair costs.

THE VERDICT

Comparison tests are by their nature ruthless affairs. The weak are quickly exposed and dispatched, so you might like to send the kiddies out while we do the initial axe work.

Despite significant improvements, it's difficult to find a compelling reason to consider the Proton.

If you just want reliable, honest A-to-B transport at the lowest possible price, with minimal regular costs, the Getz and the Rio will do the job. However, for not much more money you can get a more contemporary, enjoyable and better built car.

Now the culling process becomes more difficult, because the cars themselves are quite different and have individual attributes that will appeal to different buyers.

The Polo is safe and solid, but relatively expensive, underpowered and under-equipped in this company. If you can justify the premium price and aren't looking for a rocket ship, you'd be happy in one of these.

The Fiesta, like the Polo, requires

premium unleaded but you get no tangible performance benefit compared with others that run on regular. It's also likely to have higher maintenance costs. Otherwise, the Fiesta is a good thing and much better value than when it was launched.

The made-in-Japan Colt has the longest warranty and a frugal thirst. It has a relatively roomy cabin but a small boot. The Mazda 2 has also been freshened up and it too exemplifies Japanese quality and attention to detail in a spacious, comfortable package. But it's noisy by class standards and that can become irritating after a while.

Third place goes to the Suzuki Swift. It's well equipped for the money and drives sweetly; on the debit side, occupant space is tight. It slips from its former No. 1 spot because of a stronger performance from the Honda Jazz and Toyota Yaris than for any significant weaknesses on its part.

The big price reduction on the Jazz lifts its value-for-money quotient to give it second place. Its space efficiency, comfort and brilliant interior design give you big-car versatility with small-car economy



from the high-tech 1.3-litre engine and CVT drivetrain.

Since our comparison last October, in which the Yaris came second, it has achieved five stars out of five (with side airbags) in Euro NCAP tests. In a small car, you need all the crash protection you can get, so this is decisive.

The four members of the Drive team who went around (and around) our test loop in every car rated the Yaris an exceptionally comfortable and refined device. Performance, dynamics and fuel efficiency are exemplary. Its interior design is practical, innovative and impossibly cute.

Factor in the Toyota trifecta of quality, reliability and durability, and the Yaris clinches the top slot.

Trinity Ford

Ford Ranger 4x2

Single Cab – 2.5 Litre Diesel Turbo

\$
22,888

DRIVE AWAY
A.B.N. Holders

Includes:

- 5 Speed manual • Power steering
 - Air conditioning • Alloy tray • Metallic
- Paint add \$310



Available for immediate delivery into any area!

what's **BIG** in small cars



The Corolla is the best-selling small car but is it the best? Drive tests the 10th-generation model against eight rivals.

IT WASN'T ALWAYS SO BUT AUSTRALIANS now buy more small cars than any other vehicle type. Over the past 10 years we've turned away from "big cars for a big country" and embraced hatchbacks and compact sedans for the daily grind in increasingly congested cities.

Small cars now account for more than 20 per cent of new vehicle sales. With at least 24 makes and models from which to choose, it is one of the most competitive segments of the Australian new-car market.

The Toyota Corolla has been around for 40 years and has been the small-car sales leader for more than a decade. With the new, 10th-generation model now arriving in dealerships we gathered the Corolla's likely rivals in their most popular and most affordable guises (base model automatics) to see how they compare.

> FORD FOCUS

The Focus is one of Europe's top-selling cars but, when introduced to Australia to replace the much-loved Ford Laser in late 2002, got a lukewarm reception.

When the all-new, second-generation Focus was released in mid-2005, Ford renewed its efforts. Sales of the new model surged and the Focus continues to sell well.

The appeal? Unique styling, a roomy cabin, generous cargo space, reasonable fuel economy and secure handling.

For those who want to make the most of the Ford's 107kW of power, it is one of only four cars in this group with an automatic

transmission with manual override (the others are the Kia Cerato, Mazda3 and VW Golf 1.6).

But, for all its attributes, the Focus isn't perfect. Despite having more power than most, its acceleration was near the back of the pack. In our laden uphill 0 to 100km/h test, the Focus stopped the clock at 17sec. Only the 1.6-litre VW Golf was slower.

The secure grip in corners comes at the expense of ride comfort; the Focus transmits bumps more than other cars in this class and the suspension and tyres are comparatively noisy. Only one child seat anchor bracket is fitted standard (in the middle of the back seat) but there is provision for the fitment of three child seat anchor brackets – the customer can purchase additional brackets if required. The spare tyre is a skinny space-saver.

Some interior materials, such as the dash, are soft to the touch and have a quality feel, while other surfaces have the same grain yet are made from hard plastic and feel cheap.

Headroom for rear seat passengers is relatively tight but leg room is good.

Minor annoyances include the fiddly wiper controls and, while the Ford deserves a tick for having convex mirrors on both sides, the mirrors themselves are quite small. The audio system has no auxiliary input and the crease in the dash reflects badly in direct sunlight.

However, the lack of important safety equipment weighs most heavily against the Focus. It scores five stars out of

five in independent crash tests by Euro NCAP, when the car is equipped with six airbags. In Australia, though, standard equipment on the base model Focus includes only two airbags. Anti-lock brakes (standard on most rivals) and seat-mounted side airbags are a \$1290 option pack and head-protecting curtain airbags and stability control are not available locally.

> HOLDEN ASTRA

Holden has two small-car contenders: the Astra and Viva. We tested the Astra because it outsells the Viva two-to-one, though the Astra is about \$4000 more than the equivalent Viva model. The Astra was designed and engineered in Germany and is built in Belgium. The Viva comes from Korea.

The current Astra was introduced in late 2004 but has had minor annual updates, including one half way through 2007.

(A three-door Astra appears in our photographs but the model we've based this test on is the five-door hatch.)

With the revised model came an updated 1.8-litre engine with 103kW of power and 170Nm of torque. The previous Astra was thirstier and slower than its peers, so the changes make the Astra's economy and performance competitive.

The cabin has a quality feel but could do with more storage space. There is a large glovebox but only a small centre console. The door pockets are small, too, with modest recesses for drinks.



> TOYOTA COROLLA

RRP \$22,990
Engine 1.8-litre, four-cylinder.
Power 100kW at 6000rpm.
Torque 175Nm at 4400rpm.
Transmission Four-speed automatic.
Fuel economy 7.7L/100km.
Turning Circle 10.4m.
Safety Two airbags, anti-lock brakes. Side, curtain and knee airbags \$750. Stability control not available. Five-star NCAP rating.

> MAZDA 3

RRP \$22,990.
Engine 2.0-litre, four-cylinder.
Power 108kW at 6500rpm.
Torque 182Nm at 4500rpm.
Transmission Four-speed automatic.
Fuel economy 8.4L/100km.
Turning Circle 10.4m.
Safety Two airbags and anti-lock brakes. Side and curtain airbags and stability control costs \$1830. Four-star NCAP rating.

> NISSAN TIIDA

RRP \$20,240.
Engine 1.8-litre, four-cylinder.
Power 93kW at 5200rpm.
Torque 174Nm at 4800rpm.
Transmission Four-speed automatic.
Fuel economy 7.8L/100km.
Turning Circle 10.4m.
Safety Two airbags, anti-lock brakes. The \$22,240 ST-L model has side and curtain airbags. Stability control not available. Four-star NCAP rating.

> HONDA CIVIC

RRP \$22,990.
Engine 1.8-litre, four-cylinder.
Power 103kW at 6300rpm.
Torque 174Nm at 4200rpm.
Transmission Five-speed automatic.
Fuel consumption 7.2L/100km.
Turning circle 10.6m
Safety Two airbags, anti-lock brakes. The \$26,990 VTi-L model has side airbags and the \$32,490 Sports model has curtain airbags. Four-star Euro NCAP rating.

> HYUNDAI ELANTRA

RRP \$21,990.
Engine 2.0-litre, four-cylinder.
Power 105kW at 6000rpm.
Torque 186Nm at 4600rpm.
Transmission Four-speed automatic.
Fuel economy 7.8L/100km.
Turning Circle 10.34m.
Safety Two airbags, anti-lock brakes. Stability control and side and curtain airbags available in \$1790 option pack. NCAP rating; not yet tested.

NEW SMALL CARS
COMPARISON

Power windows are not standard. Like the Focus, the Astra has three child seat anchor points but Holden provides only one bracket (middle of the rear seatback) as standard.

Convex mirrors on both sides of the car provide reasonable rear-three-quarter visibility.

The Astra has secure handling and soaks up bumps better than the Focus does. There is a full-sized spare in the boot.

At \$23,990, the base model Astra CD is \$1000 dearer than its Ford rival but has more safety equipment – anti-lock brakes, dual front and seat-mounted side airbags are standard.

Curtain airbags are available on the next model up, the CDX, but that costs \$26,990 – and stability control is not available. The CDX model does get extra equipment for the \$3000 premium, however.

> HONDA CIVIC

The Civic has enjoyed phenomenal sales growth since the new eighth-generation model was released solely as a sedan in early 2006. Civic sales in the first four months of this year are up 65 per cent compared with the same period last year.

With its spaceship-style dashboard and digital instruments, excellent fuel economy and roomy interior, it's easy to see the appeal.

Made in Thailand (which has a free trade agreement with Australia), the Honda has the advantage of a lower import tariff than its peers, although at \$23,490 for the automatic VTi version, it's no cheaper than its main rivals.

A long wheelbase (the distance between the front and rear wheels) means the new Civic has near-medium-sized proportions.

As the only car in this group with a five-speed automatic transmission (the Volkswagen Golf has a six-speed auto and the others have four-speeders), the Civic delivers excellent fuel economy and reasonable acceleration.

The layout of the controls is brilliant; they are simple to use. In the cabin, there is generous storage space, with a large centre console, numerous cubbies and large, deep door pockets. Many of the cars in this test had covered vanity mirrors on the sun visors but the vanity mirrors on the Civic sedan are huge – similar in size to a large television remote control. The large convex

side mirrors provide an excellent view of the traffic around you.

There are three child restraint anchor points on the rear parcel shelf.

The Civic's large-ish dimensions help give it a plush ride – until the going gets rough. On bumpy back roads, the Civic's suspension feels under-damped at times and transmits sharp bumps through the cabin. The tyres were comparatively noisy, too. At least there is a full-sized spare wheel and tyre.

Other criticisms? The back seat does not split-fold, the boot hinges intrude on cargo space (although the boot itself is huge by class standards) and there are no audio controls on the steering wheel (only cruise control).

Two airbags and anti-lock brakes are standard but other important safety features such as seat-mounted side airbags and head-protecting curtain bags are available only on more expensive models, starting from \$26,490 for the VTi-L auto. Stability control is not available at any price.

> HYUNDAI ELANTRA

Despite the introduction of an all-new model in October 2006, the Elantra isn't proving as popular as the maker hoped. In the first four months of this year, sales were down 37 per cent compared with the same period last year.

This is odd, given that the new model is likely the best car yet to wear the Hyundai badge. As Drive's recent expose showed, the quality of Korea's biggest car maker is significantly better than some more fancied rivals.

As with the Honda Civic, the Elantra (previously available as a hatch and sedan) is now a sedan only, although its sleek lines are designed to give it a hatch-like appearance.

As with most Hyundais, the Elantra is well equipped and well-priced. The automatic SX model is \$21,990 – \$1000 less than the Focus, Civic, Mazda3 and Corolla and \$2000 cheaper than the Astra. Then there is the Elantra's five-year, unlimited-kilometre warranty (the others have a three-year warranty).

The cabin is roomy and has plenty of storage pockets, the instruments (which glow blue at night) are clear and the controls are easy to use. A couple of minor

observations: the digital display on the radio is not legible when you're wearing polarised sunglasses (the radio in the VW Golf has the same problem) and the power window switch does not have an "auto up" function (most others in this test do).

Two airbags, anti-lock brakes and three child restraint anchor points on the rear parcel shelf are standard and seat-mounted side airbags, head-protecting curtain airbags and stability control are available as an option for \$1790. Large convex mirrors on both sides provide an excellent view of what's around you.

A full-sized spare wheel and tyre are standard and the rear seats split-fold to create more cargo space.

But the Elantra is not without its shortcomings. The bootlid has exposed hinges that protrude into the cargo space when the boot is shut and the base model does not get an adjustable headrest for the middle rear seating position.

Much of our testing was done in wet conditions and that highlighted a shortcoming in the Elantra's dynamics. In city and suburban driving, the Elantra is comfortable, competent and enjoyable to drive, possibly the most impressive Hyundai we've driven yet. But on wet, bumpy back roads, the Elantra's Kumho Solus tyres lacked grip. Alarmingly, when we went into an understeer skid (where the car wants to push straight ahead instead of travel around the corner), the car's stability control system failed to trigger.

It was a telling exercise. Some safety experts are calling for stability control (which can stop a skid by automatically applying the brakes and/or cutting engine power when it detects a lack of traction) to be mandatory on all new cars. But, as we discovered, stability control is only as good as the grip of the tyres and the calibration of the system.

> KIA CERATO

The Cerato hatch and sedan are available only in one model grade. The options are colour, transmission and the level of safety equipment. We tested the hatch because it's the most popular option.

At first, \$21,490 for the automatic Cerato hatch seems attractive – until you learn



> KIA CERATO

RRP \$21,490.
Engine 2.0-litre, four-cylinder.
Power 105kW at 6000rpm.
Torque 186Nm at 4500rpm.
Transmission Four-speed automatic.
Fuel economy 8.9L/100km.
Turning circle 10.1m.
Safety Two airbags. Anti-lock brakes \$850 option. Side and curtain airbags and anti-lock brakes \$1700 option. Stability control not available. Three-star Euro NCAP rating.

> FORD FOCUS

RRP \$22,990.
Engine 2.0-litre, four-cylinder.
Power 107kW at 6000rpm.
Torque 185Nm at 4500rpm.
Transmission Four-speed automatic.
Fuel economy 8.0L/100km.
Turning circle 10.7m.
Safety Two airbags. Anti-lock brakes and front seat-mounted side airbags \$1290 option. Curtain airbags and stability control not available. Five-star Euro NCAP rating.

> HOLDEN ASTRA

RRP \$23,990.
Engine 1.8-litre, four-cylinder.
Power 103kW at 6300rpm.
Torque 170Nm at 3800rpm.
Transmission Four-speed automatic.
Fuel consumption 7.8L/100km.
Turning circle 10.6m.
Safety Front and side airbags, anti-lock brakes. The \$26,990 CDX model adds curtain airbags. Stability control is not available. Five-star Euro NCAP rating.

> VOLKSWAGEN GOLF

RRP \$27,790
Engine 1.6-litre, four-cylinder.
Power 75kW at 5600rpm.
Torque 148Nm at 3800rpm.
Transmission Six-speed automatic.
Fuel consumption 8.3L/100km, premium unleaded.
Turning Circle 10.9m.
Safety Front, side and curtain airbags, anti-lock brakes, traction control. Stability control costs \$690. Five-star Euro NCAP rating.



that the price does not include such basic items as anti-lock brakes. Two airbags are standard but seat-mounted side airbags, curtain airbags and anti-lock brakes are available in a \$1700 option pack. Anti-lock brakes can be chosen separately for \$850. Stability control is not available.

There are three child restraint anchor points on the boot floor, immediately behind the seatback. The Cerato has a decent amount of cargo space and the boot floor holds a full-sized spare wheel and tyre.

It's not the prettiest car in the class but



the Cerato's conventional hatch design creates a lot of cabin space, with head and shoulder room average for the class.

There is ample oddment storage space, including four drink holders and deep door pockets and the layout of the instruments and controls are straightforward.

Acceleration is also class average (most cars in this group completed our laden uphill 0 to 100km/h test in about 16 seconds) and acceleration was smooth.

The Cerato's ride comfort was a pleasant surprise. It soaked up bumps well but was not so confident in corners.

On our test loop, the Cerato had noticeably more steering rack rattle in corrugated corners. Some cars are better than others at disguising when the wheel on the inside of the corner gets upset by a few ruts but the vibration could be clearly felt through the steering wheel in the Cerato.

As with the Hyundai Elantra, Ford Focus and Nissan Tiida, the Cerato clumsily has two key fobs – the key itself plus an attachment with the remote locking and boot release buttons. The Honda Civic, Holden Astra, Toyota Corolla, Mazda3 and Volkswagen Golf had neat, compact key designs that house the vital buttons in the head of the key.

> MAZDA 3

This is one of the darlings of the small-car fraternity and a category winner in Drive's Car of the Year award in 2006.

Despite being 31/2 years old, the Mazda3 is still selling well. Sales are up 12.4 per cent

in the first four months of this year compared with the same period last year as Mazda continues to break records.

The Mazda3 is the second most popular small car in Australia, behind the Toyota Corolla, but has a higher proportion of private buyers than the Corolla. It also ranked higher than the Corolla in a recent quality survey.

The Mazda3 Neo, with an RRP of \$22,990 in automatic guise, is generally well equipped but for one exception: power windows are an option on the base model. It has been a long time since we've seen window winders.

Power windows are \$610; we wonder if power windows were left off the car to enable Mazda to advertise an attractive starting price.

Two airbags and anti-lock brakes are standard, while seat-mounted side airbags, curtain airbags and stability control are available for \$1830. There are two child restraint anchor points on the rear seatbacks.

The Mazda3 is the only car in this group with a seatbelt warning light for all five occupants. A display above the rear view mirror shows who's buckled up and who's not – especially handy for parents who find that some kids like to unclip their seatbelts from time to time.

The passenger-side mirror is convex but the driver's-side mirror is flat. Rear three-quarter visibility on the driver's side could be improved by a convex mirror.

The Mazda3 has a roomy cabin with plenty of practical

storage space and fuss-free controls.

The Mazda3 has generous cargo space; unfortunately that's been partly aided by a skinny space-saver spare tyre.

On the road the Mazda is surefooted and comfortable. Early versions of the Mazda3 transmitted excessive road noise into the cabin. An updated model in mid-2006 aimed to address those complaints. There is no doubt it is an improvement on early models but it is still average by class standards.

The Mazda3 was by far the zippiest among this group of cars (in our laden uphill 0 to 100km/h test it stopped the clock at 14 seconds, comfortably 1.5 seconds faster than its nearest rivals) but that performance comes at a price. The Mazda3 is the second-thirstiest in its class, with an official fuel rating label of 8.4 litres/100km. Most cars in this group wear a 7.8L/100km window sticker and the best of this bunch (the Honda Civic) sips 7.2L/100km.

> NISSAN TIIDA

This is the car Sex and the City star Kim Cattrall hyped on TV ads when it was released in early 2006. Despite all her vaunted sex appeal, sales of Nissan's Pulsar replacement flopped.

Its odd-looking upright body was one possible turn-off, the peculiar name was another (it's pronounced Tee-da). In reality, the price and the relatively Spartan equipment list were the main reasons behind the Tiida's slow start.

Just over a year on, Nissan is beginning

to reap the benefits of a significant overhaul of the Tiida and none of the changes were mechanical. Nissan slashed the RRP by at least \$2000 and added more standard equipment (such as anti-lock brakes and cruise control). You can now get a base model Tiida ST manual for \$17,990 plus on-road costs. The automatic is, incredibly, just \$20,240, making it cheaper than even the Korean competition.

How does Nissan do it? It began importing the Tiida from Thailand at the beginning of 2007. Sales in the first four months of the year are up a staggering 79 per cent.

The Tiida has a roomy cabin, with simple controls. Large door pockets and handy cubbies make good use of the available space. What's most apparent, though, is how much headroom there is. At least there is some benefit from its lanky body.

The window area is quite large and visibility around the car is excellent, aided by the ultra-wide convex mirrors on both sides. Quality, fit and finish are superb and there is no difference (to our eyes at least) between the Thai- and Japanese-built examples.

The Tiida's not perfect and the cheap price brings a few concessions. Power windows are not available on the base model and there are no steering wheel audio controls. At least it has a full-sized spare wheel and tyre.

On the safety front, the Tiida ST has two airbags and anti-lock brakes but only the \$22,240 ST-L model gets curtain airbags, while seat-mounted side airbags and stability control are not available at any price.

Perhaps the biggest sin on the safety side is the complete lack of headrests on the rear seat and the lap-only belt on the centre rear seat. Two child restraint anchor points are mounted at the rear of the cargo area, which means the straps would limit the amount of available storage space when in use.

As we've commented previously, the Tiida's electric power steering can feel too light and over-sensitive but it is otherwise untroubled in traffic or on the open road. On bumpy corners the Tiida feels as if it's on its tippy-toes at times but the grip was always there. The Tiida had the quietest tyres (Bridgestone B250, 185/65R15) on coarse-chip surfaces and the least amount of road noise in general. It was also the second-fastest in our laden uphill 0 to 100km/h dash, with a time of 15.5 seconds.

> TOYOTA COROLLA

The new Corolla may be the world's biggest-selling car but it is yet to conquer Europe. That is why the hatch version of the 10th-generation model was styled in Toyota's design studio in France. Toyota is hoping the new Corolla has the right blend of Made-in-Japan quality and European flair to appeal to a broader range of customers.

There is a family resemblance to the previous model, though this model is new from the ground up, with a stronger body and a flat floor (to maximise cabin space).

Owners of the current Corolla will immediately feel at home in the new one, with all basic controls in the usual places and clear, easy-to-read instruments.

The big surprise, though, is the long, surfboard-shaped console between the front seats. It brings the gearshift and handbrake within easy reach and gives the cabin a cockpit feel. However, it's not



necessarily the best use of space. There is a small pocket underneath the "bridge" (as Toyota calls it) and a modest centre console – and that's about it. The door pockets are generously sized and have provision to hold a drink bottle but the shallow tray above the air-conditioning vents is effectively useless as anything placed there slips out the moment the car accelerates or negotiates a corner.

Rear space is abundant and all five occupants have lap-sash belts and adjustable headrests. Two airbags and anti-lock brakes are standard. Seat-mounted side airbags, curtain airbags and an driver's knee airbag are available in a \$750 option pack. Stability control is not available at any price.

The engine capacity of the Corolla's four-cylinder is the same as the previous model's, 1.8 litres, though this engine is a different design. New efficiencies have enabled Toyota engineers to offset the Corolla's weight increase (between 50 and 180kg depending on the model) so that the official fuel rating label is a respectable 7.7L/100km – on a drive from Queensland to Sydney we averaged 7.6L/100km.

The new Corolla is actually fun to drive, with secure handling in corners and on bumpy back roads.

As with most cars in this class, there is a fair amount of road noise transmitted into the cabin; we'd say the Corolla is on par with the Mazda3 for noise, vibration and harshness on coarse-chip surfaces (they are shod with identical Yokohama Aspec tyres).

Despite the weight increase, the Corolla is brisker than we expected. In our laden uphill 0 to 100km/h test it was third-fastest in the group (15.7 seconds). The auto transmission shifts well most of the time and holds gears on long downhill runs but on uphill sections it is reluctant to shift down a gear – or is too eager to shift into top gear.

Visibility all around is good, aided by the large, convex side mirrors.

The Corolla gets front power windows only and has among the least amount of cargo space of all the hatches in this group; on the bright side, at least there is a full-sized spare wheel and some storage space under the rear cargo floor.

► VOLKSWAGEN GOLF

At \$27,790 the base Golf automatic would normally have been priced out of this comparison test. But we were keen to sample one of Europe's biggest-selling cars – and the pioneer of the small-car class – as a benchmark for the more affordable vehicles.

The Golf is selling at record levels locally. Despite the latest Golf being a little over three years old, sales in the first four months of this year are up by 27 per cent compared with the same period in 2006.

VW pairs the 1.6-litre, four-cylinder with a six-speed automatic (the only such transmission in this test), which is needed to extract the most from such a small engine in a relatively big car.

The auto gearbox has a sports shift mode but we're not sure how much use it is. The laden uphill 0 to 100km/h test confirmed our initial impressions: the Golf 1.6 is slow, even by class standards. Very slow.

That said, the Golf's lack of energy is really only apparent on a long hill on an open road. Around town, it's fine. You simply learn to press the accelerator more often which, unfortunately, has the effect of slurping more fuel. Despite having the smallest engine here, the Golf 1.6 is among the thirstiest – and it demands premium unleaded.

These issues aside, the Golf is a delight to drive, soaking up irregularities in the road without fuss and providing secure handling.

The driving position can be adjusted to suit almost any body type (there is ample adjustment in the seat height and steering wheel height and reach), which perhaps adds to the feeling of confidence in corners.

The cabin is roomy and cleverly laid out, with generously sized storage pockets and plenty of them. The back seat is roomy and the cargo area is among the best in the class. It's a well thought-out package.

Despite the Golf scoring poorly on industry quality surveys, our test car was trouble-free.

It was missing such luxuries as steering wheel-mounted audio controls and cruise control but was otherwise well-equipped.

Standard safety equipment includes front, side and curtain airbags. Stability control is a \$690 option. There are three child restraint

anchor points mounted on the back of the rear seat. A space-saver spare is standard.

THE VERDICT

Given that their prices and features are similar, the main difference with these nine cars is the level of safety equipment.

The Kia Cerato is better than we expected but it needs more standard safety equipment. It doesn't even get anti-lock brakes; they're an \$850 option or come as part of a \$1700 pack that includes side and curtain airbags but not stability control. But even with this equipment it's only a three-star car for safety. It was first off our list.

The Nissan Tiida is zippy, economical, roomy, well-built and extremely well-priced. Curtain airbags (but not seat-mounted side airbags) are available on the \$22,240 ST-L model but stability control is not available. Of greater concern, though, the Tiida ST is the only car in this group without headrests for rear passengers and a lap-only belt for the centre rear seat. It was next to go.

The Ford Focus handles well but was penalised by its firm ride and lack of safety features such as curtain airbags and stability control – which aren't even an option.

The Hyundai Elantra is well-priced and well-equipped – and has the best warranty in the business – but is let down dynamically. The \$1790 optional safety pack (side and curtain airbags and stability control) is reasonably priced but we have reservations about the effectiveness of the stability control system.

The Honda Civic deserves to finish higher up the order but among its shortcomings are that side and curtain airbags are available only on the more expensive models and stability control is not available at any price. Other cars in this test, once equipped with optional curtain airbags, cost less than the \$26,500-plus Civic with the same equipment.

With its recent upgrade, the Astra 7.5 received some worthwhile changes (dual and side airbags are standard) but you have to spend \$26,990 on the CDX model to get curtain airbags.

The VW Golf is a worthy proposition if the budget stretches that far (it has a full armoury of safety equipment and the roomiest cabin). Many buyers are prepared to pay a premium for the badge but it is overpriced in this company.

That leaves the new Toyota Corolla and the Mazda3 and a tough decision.

The Corolla is roomy, economical and, for the first time, fun to drive. The optional side, curtain and driver's knee airbags are an affordable \$750 pack. A Corolla with the optional safety pack is \$1580 cheaper than the Mazda3 with optional power windows and its optional safety pack. But, with that, the Mazda gets stability control, which is not available on the Corolla, a significant omission on an all-new car. Further, the Corolla's stylish interior comes at the expense of storage space and it has a smaller cargo area.

Corolla fans will love the new model but this test goes to the Mazda3 because it has the option of a more complete safety package, has a roomy, functional interior, a large cargo area and good build quality. It is fun to drive and also the zippiest, although its fuel economy does suffer.

If the Corolla had stability control, it might well have been a different result.



Scooters & motorbikes: The environmental alternative that's light on your hip pocket.



Australians are warming to what Europeans have known for decades – two wheels are cheaper than four. **GLENN BUTLER** argues for the humble scooter and motorbike.

SCOOTER AND MOTORBIKES ARE RIDING A growing wave of popularity in Australia. Why?

Forget equality of the sexes, or battling for the underprivileged; environmental sustainability is society's over-riding cause in the 21st century. Newspapers seldom go a day without with the impending doom of the planet and its dwindling natural resources taking front page

How big is your carbon footprint? Is your house eco-friendly? Do you harness as much renewable energy as you could? Are you water-wise?

It's not easy; saving the planet usually requires a financial sacrifice on the consumer's part. Usually.

More than half of all car journeys undertaken in Australia are for the benefit of a single occupant. Imagine, if you will, if we transferred every one of those journeys onto a scooter or a motorbike, which uses one-third as much fossil fuel, sometimes less?

Take the humble scooter. It has a one-cylinder engine one-fifth the size and thirst of a Toyota Corolla. It sips two litres of fuel per 100km travelled. It's cheaper, too, costing anything from \$2500 to \$7500, and a weekly fuel bill is less than \$20.

Smaller scooters have no gears, so it's a twist of the wrist for go, a pull on the bicycle-style handbrake to stop. As for practicality; many scooters have a storage compartment under the seat large enough to swallow the rider's helmet and jacket, so there's no lugging the lid around the shopping centre with you.

In this modern age where conspicuous consumption of natural resources is very un-cool, scooters are trendy, and have been ever since Gregory Peck and Audrey Hepburn propelled them to social awareness in Roman Holiday. Many millions of or Europeans living in France, Italy and beyond depend on scooters as their main – and often only – form of transport.

BARINA

POWERFUL YET EFFICIENT 1.6 LITRE ENGINE
• 5YR / 175,000KM WARRANTY • ROADSIDE ASSISTANCE



\$13,990
FR
DRIVE AWAY



SUNDELL HOLDEN GORDON
836 Pacific Highway, Gordon www.sundell.com.au

9418 0000

Pictures for illustrative purposes only.

CAN A SCOOTER WORK IN AUSTRALIA?

So why don't more people utilise the humble motor scooter in Australia?

Could it be that we tough, rugged Aussies are actually soft? Are we too used to the comforts of a motor car that we are not prepared to give them up?

Australians enjoy one of the mildest climates on Earth, so it can't be that.

Most Australians typically live their weekly lives within a 40km radius of home. That's work, shopping, dining out, visiting friends and relatives... the lot. So it can't be the big miles, despite the romantic notions to which we hold of life in a big country.

A scooter makes sense on so many levels it is hard to see why we do not embrace it

like our European cousins.

Don't think you have to choose between a car and a scooter. The two can live in harmony. Need to duck down to the shops? Taking the kid to soccer practice? Going to work and back? The scooter can perform all these mundane tasks as well as – or better than – a car. For times when a scooter won't suit, the car is always ready and waiting.

THE DOWNSIDES

True, a scooter is never going to handle a typical family's weekly shopping load. Nor is it ideal on a wet and wintery Melbourne morning. A scooter cannot carry a baby seat. You will need a helmet (it's the law) and it's advisable to wear some protective clothing (to cover as much exposed skin as possible).

A scooter is not perfect.

But the fact remains that the majority of single-occupant car trips Australians make can be accomplished more economically on a scooter, and with less environmental impact.

It's worth thinking about.

MOTORBIKES: MOBILITY OR MENACE?

I'm not going to pretend for a minute that motorcycles are as safe as cars. But they are far from the disaster-waiting-to-happen that many people would have you believe.

Let's get the unsavoury facts out of the way first. Motorcyclists are over-represented in the road toll. If a motorcyclist loses control or crashes he or she does not have two tonnes of metal to protect them.

Motorcycles are also smaller and less visible than big, boxy cars, and car drivers are not attuned to looking for motorcycles so mistakes (often) happen.

But don't for a minute think motorcyclists need to be protected from themselves. Or that motorcycles should be banned.

More people in Australia drown each year than die on motorcycles. Should we ban swimming? More people are injured annually playing the various forms of football in Australia than are injured on motorcycles, and I'm certainly not going to advocate banning football.



EDUCATION IS THE KEY

Getting a motorcycle licence is much tougher than a car licence. To get a learners' permit a budding motorcyclist must demonstrate an ability to control a motorbike and to react correctly in an emergency situation.

To get a car learners' permit all you need to do is pass a multiple choice quiz.

Motorcyclists are taught from day one not to use the law or the road rules for protection. Motorcyclists are told to always assume they are in the wrong. Always.

If approaching a green light with a car coming from the side, do not blithely sail through assuming the car will stop. Approach with caution, and make sure the car is stopping, or is not a danger, before proceeding through the intersection.

The reason behind this teaching method is quite simple. If a car and a motorbike come together, which person gets hurt more? Which person is more vulnerable? Which person is a much higher death risk?

So, let's assume the worst does happen, what solace is there for the paralysed motorcyclist lying on the road to know that he or she was, after all, in the right?

THE REASONS

There are three obvious reasons why motorcycles are a good alternative to cars.

First, they are more affordable, and cheaper to run. The typical motorcycle will use less fuel than a cutting-edge hybrid car like the Toyota Prius or Honda Civic. Less than \$20 a week will translate into 200-300km. Few people would rack up higher mileage in their weekly commute.

Second; motorcycles are convenient. They can fit into much smaller parking spaces which can often be found closer to your destination.

Third; there are no distractions. Forget changing the radio station, or answering that phone, or even listening to your passengers rabbit on about the current price fluctuations in the commodities market. No distractions leaves you free to concentrate on the road ahead.

THE FOURTH REASON...

I know I said three reasons, but the fourth is a cracker. Are you ready for it?

Motorcycles are fun.

The majority of people who have never ridden a motorcycle will never understand that many motorcyclists ride for the camaraderie and enjoyment. It is a hobby or a passion, and it is a relaxing way to rack up the kilometres.

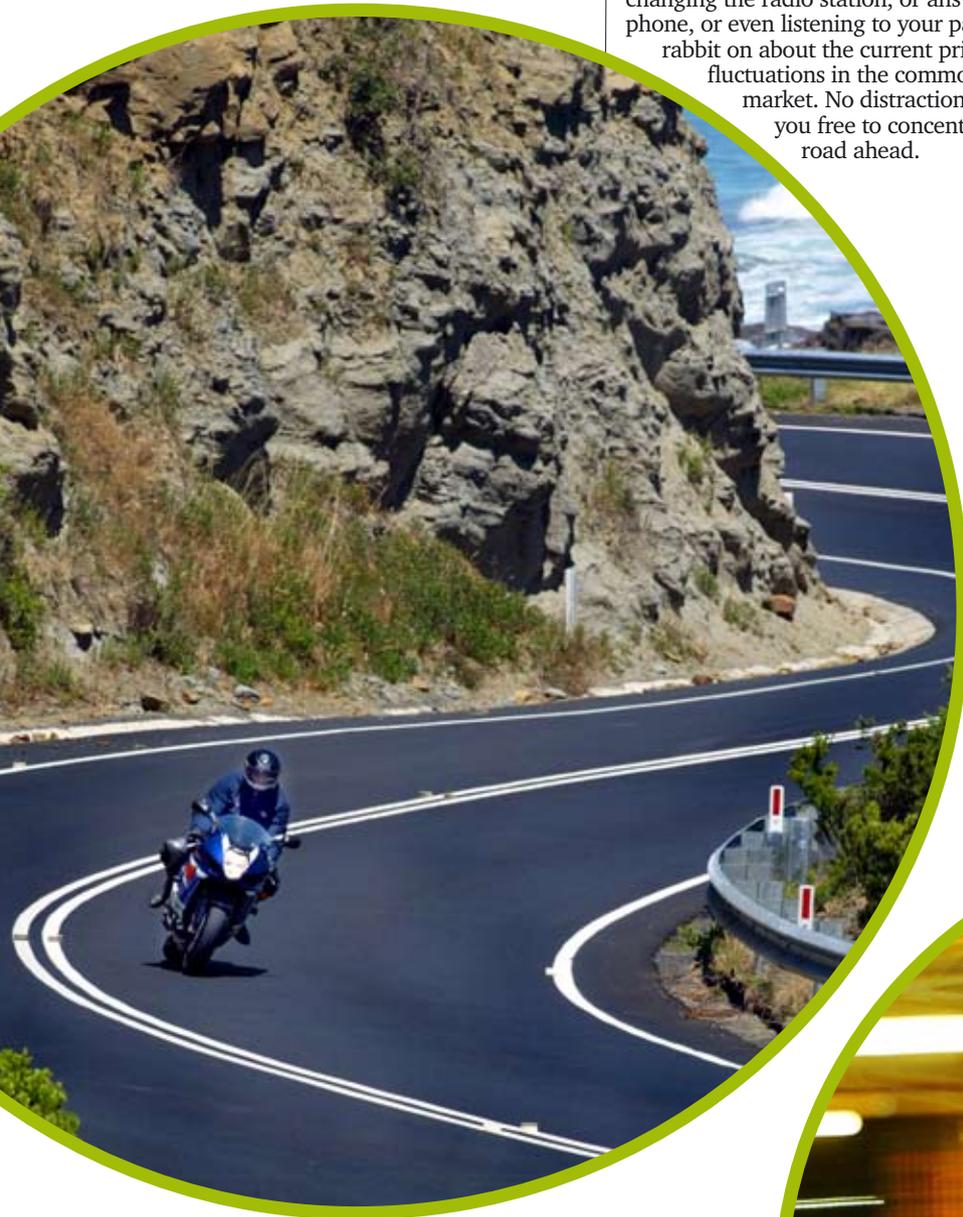
That carefree 'wind-in-the-face' feeling is not fiction. It does blow your stress away.

Talk to any motorcyclist and chances are they've gone for a ride at some time with no particular destination in mind, or no reason to go anywhere. Just. For. Fun.

In fact many thousands of motorcyclists do it every weekend. Have you wondered why?

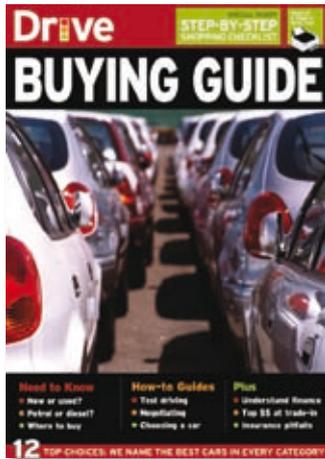
Well, there's only one way to find out.

And remember: Always ride safely.



> DRIVE E-MAGAZINE DIRECTORY

it ullan vullam zzzrillutat. Num niamet lumsan vel dolesent luptat.Em quatue tem illummy nonsenibh ero del utel velit del duis dunt eugiamc onumsan hent ulput prate digniatem zzriure dolore dunt ipisis dolor senim doleniati

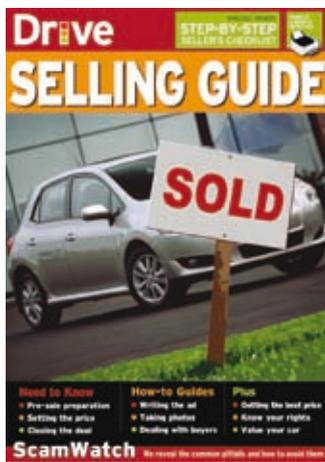


> CAR BUYING GUIDE

Buying a car is the second most expensive purchase we will make, but it doesn't need to be a headache.

Drive's free 40-page Car Buying Guide eMag has everything you need to know to save money on your next car.

Download our free eMag to take the stress out of buying your next car.



> CAR SELLING GUIDE

Selling a car is one of the biggest transactions you will make in life, but there are steps you can take to make it a relatively smooth and simple process for both you and potential buyers.

Drive's free 24-page Car Selling Guide eMagazine has everything you need to know about getting the best price for your treasured possessions.

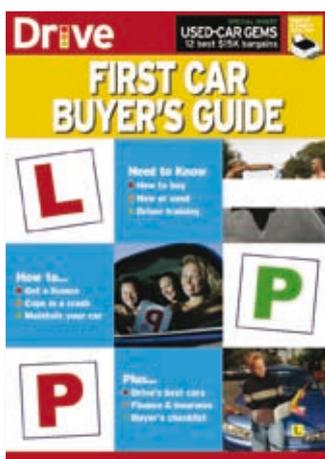
Download our free eMagazine to take the stress out of selling your next car.



> PRESTIGE DRIVE

They say knowledge is power, and Drive's 38-page Prestige Vehicle Guide equips you with all the crucial information that will help you make the smartest new-car investment - whether it be a classy compact or a luxurious limousine.

And while the finer things in life aren't usually free, Drive's Prestige Vehicle Guide can be viewed for free.



> FIRST CAR BUYER'S GUIDE

Irrespective of cost, looks or age, your first car is always special. It is a gateway into a whole new world of personal freedom.

Whether you just need a city runabout or embark on a trans-continental road trip to the other side of Australia, a car can take you there.

To help ease your passage into the world of motoring, Drive's First-Car Buyer's Guide arms you with everything you need to know to choose the right first car for you. As well as expert recommendations on good first cars, we offer advice on obtaining your driver's licence, how to find the right car, and how to look after it once you've done the deal.

BUYERS' CHECKLIST

BUDGET:

Drive.com.au

CAR:

**ONROAD
PRICE:**

(MINUS)

**TRADE-IN
VALUE:**

(EQUALS)

**CHANGEOVER
PRICE:**

NOTES:

OPTIONS:

FINANCE

QUOTE 1

QUOTE 2

QUOTE 3

NOTES

INSURANCE

QUOTE 1

QUOTE 2

QUOTE 3

NOTES

BUYERS' CHECKLIST

BUDGET:

Drive.com.au

CAR:

REGISTRATION PLATE

REGISTERED UNTIL

VIN/CHASSIS NUMBER

OWNERSHIP / ENCUMBERED

Does the vehicle really belong to the person selling it?

NSW	Roads & Traffic Authority	www.rta.nsw.gov.au
VIC	VICRoads	www.vicroads.vic.gov.au
QLD	Department of Main Roads	www.mainroads.qld.gov.au
WA	Dept of Planning and Infrastructure	www.dpi.wa.gov.au
SA	Transport SA	www.transport.sa.gov.au
NT	NT Transport & Infrastructure	www.ipe.nt.gov.au
TAS	Transport Tasmania	www.transport.tas.gov.au
ACT	ACT Territory & Municipal Services	www.tams.act.gov.au

INSPECTION TIPS

Do not inspect a car at night or on rainy days. Any inspection in these low light conditions will miss things.

Check exterior panel condition by looking along the side of the car for dents or patchy paint - the latter may be covering repairs.

Check tyre condition and tread depth as bald tyres could be symptomatic of a car that has not been properly cared for.

Check the interior carefully. Try all switches, dials, controls and adjustments. Check seat and carpet condition; does it tally with the car's age and mileage?

The engine should start immediately and settle quickly into a smooth, quiet idle. Any knocking or rattling is bad news.

Remove the oil filler cap while the engine is idling. Oil fumes or smoke is bad. Let the car idle for a minute then ask the seller to rev it while you stand behind it. Watch for blue exhaust smoke - that's bad.

Test the steering on a quiet road. On full lock, there should be no clicking noises; these indicate worn CV joints.

Make sure to use all gears of a manual car and work your way through the gears in an automatic to check they select easily and

all work without funny noises. The gears in a manual should engage smoothly and quietly, and there should be no clutch slip. An auto should also change gears quickly and smoothly.

Test the brakes to ensure a firm pedal and smooth, confident stops. The brakes should pull the car up straight, with no noises or pulling to one side.

The suspension should work smoothly and quietly on bumpy roads. If the car bounces, gets nervous or twitchy, the suspension is probably overdue for replacement.

The air-conditioning should operate quietly and produce cold air within a minute.

If the car has power-adjustable seats, windows and mirrors, check them. Replacement electric motors, or wiring problems, can be difficult and costly.

Does the audio system work properly? Speakers deteriorate with age and high interior temperatures in summer. Aftermarket speakers, which don't cost much, will usually sound better anyway.

Are the seats comfortable? Some seat padding can sag and become unsupportive over time. The seatbelt webbing should not be frayed, the retractor mechanism should work smoothly and the buckles should be easy to secure and release.

LOOK AND TICK:

- body panels
- paint finish
- windscreens & windows
- log books, service history
- spare tyre, tyre iron, wheel jack
- interior carpets, boot space
- seat condition & comfort
- door locks, keys, remote

DRIVE AND TICK:

- driving position
- adjust mirrors, steering wheel
- passenger head and legroom
- accelerates smoothly, strongly
- steering feel, U-turn
- ride quality over bumps, potholes
- engine sound, response, power
- gearbox feel, shift quality
- brake feel, stopping power
- visibility, ease of parking
- radio, aircon, other controls
- headlights, brake lights, cabin lights

BUYERS' CHECKLIST

BUDGET:



CAR:

GENERAL NOTES

EXTERIOR

INTERIOR

ON-ROAD

GENERAL