

DRIVE

CAR OF THE YEAR **2025**



Santa Fe is coming to town

Hyundai takes the hybrid SUV to new heights



All 19 category winners

Celebrating

20
YEARS

2006 - 2025



Buying an award winning car

FROM THE EDITOR

2025: A hybrid renaissance

By James Ward, Director of Content

As they say in the classics, “What a time to be alive!”

The Australian automotive market has always been a complex and diverse beast. We are globally renowned as having one of the most competitive new car landscapes in the world, where over 60 brands fight for just over one million annual sales, and where the top five manufacturers own 50 per cent of the transactions.

In the past 12 months we have seen unprecedented change, as seven new brands seek to dip their corporate toes into the mix (with still more to come) and established players have been forced to consider their showroom line-ups to support government tax and emissions legislature.

We’re in the midst of a hybrid renaissance of sorts, with sales of the petrol-electric technology stepping up significantly in 2024.

As more brands bring a wider range of hybrid models to market, Australia’s top-selling brand, Toyota, has started to pull its petrol-only models and fully embrace a hybrid-only passenger car range.

Throwing all of this activity and consideration at the Drive Car of the Year judges, then, makes the 2025 awards more important to consumers than ever!

This year sees Australia’s most comprehensive new car awards program celebrate two decades of providing new car buyers with the most relevant data and information on the best cars available today.

The categories are still in line with consumer activity, and have been extended to 19, with the addition of the Best Dual-Cab



The Drive team have worked tirelessly to assess every new car made available in the past year in their quest to name the country’s best.

Ute under \$150K segment to address the growth in popularity of the large American-style “pick-ups”.

We’re thrilled to see a number of new brands top the list of winners, with Chery, Chevrolet, Mini and Polestar all receiving their first awards, but we’re almost more excited to see seven of our 19 winners carried over from the 2024 awards –

achievements that really cement these vehicles as the best of breed.

Electrification plays a big role in the winning line-up too, with 12 of the winners either hybrid or pure electric models. The understanding of where electric adds benefit couldn’t be more evident, with both of the on-electric-specific luxury car category wins being taken by electric

vehicles for the first time. It would seem that silence truly is golden.

As always, the judges have worked tirelessly to assess every new car made available during 2024, both on the road and on paper, and on behalf of the entire team at Drive, I am thrilled to reveal the best cars in Australia for 2025.

This is Drive Car of the Year!

DRIVE
CAR OF THE YEAR 2025

BEST MEDIUM SUV
UNDER \$80K



GENESIS GV70 ADVANCED
EXPECTATIONS EXCEEDED



THE 2025 DRIVE CAR OF THE YEAR

Hyundai's hybrid hero



The Hyundai Santa Fe Hybrid is a perfect exercise in blending the wants and needs of Australian family-car buyers. It's priced from \$55,000 plus on-road costs.

By James Ward

The needs and wants of Australian family buyers have conflated significantly over recent years, so much so that the idea of buying a car where you have to compromise even slightly is something of a foreign concept.

Buyers want and need efficient and effortless hybrid power. They want and need well-considered practicality and functional operation. Heated seats, wireless smartphone charger, power tailgate? It's 2025, and while these are things buyers once *wanted*, surely for a modern world, these are now *needed* too?

It's this consideration, in conjunction with the Drive Car of the Year overall winner assessment, as a car that moves the game forward the most for Australian new car buyers, that enabled judges to arrive at a unanimous decision – the Hyundai Santa Fe Hybrid is the 2025 Drive Car of the Year.

The Santa Fe nameplate is no stranger to the Drive Car of the Year awards, as it took segment trophies in 2018 and 2020, but the new-generation car that launched in mid-2024 has stepped Hyundai's large SUV to another level.

From the retro-futuristic styling, through generous standard equipment to the delivery of hybrid power across the range, the new Santa Fe ticks all the want and need boxes that Australian families are looking for these days.

Even hearing people say it looks like a Land Rover Discovery is enormous praise for how Korea's modern interpretation of family functionality should look for 2025.

Powered by a 1.6-litre turbocharged four-cylinder petrol engine paired to a 1.5kWh lithium-ion battery and electric motor, the hybrid Hyundai offers 172kW and 367Nm combined outputs with a claimed combined cycle fuel consumption of 5.6L/100km.

This driveline is offered with all-wheel drive in all three trim grades, and the entry level variant also available with a sharply priced front-drive option.

Inside there are three rows of seats that can even be configured with the choice of a more spacious six-seat layout in the top-specification Calligraphy variant. While this is relatively normal for any large, modern SUV, the key to the Santa Fe's charm lies in its delivery.

Gone are generic trims and dull monotones. Instead, the Santa Fe rises to become a special occasion each time you open the door. You can be greeted by interesting and impressive browns, whites and greens. The trims stand out, the quality and touch points feel high quality, and, all of a sudden, the family SUV has become a brilliant place in which to spend time.

Functionality isn't overlooked, with over a dozen cup holders scattered throughout.

There are thoughtfully placed USB charge points, heated seats in all models and even some wild inclusions like an ultraviolet sanitising tray to remove those invisible germs from your phone or glasses.

On the road, the Santa Fe tours with ease. The six-speed automatic transmission is well-matched to the hybrid system and the ride quality and body control has a brilliant balance between comfort and dynamic feel.

As a consumer-centric awards program, Drive Car of the Year judges often need to place themselves in the mind of a target buyer to understand how well a car performs within the context of its role. For the Santa Fe, this was as simple as being themselves, so broad is its appeal.

The Hyundai Santa Fe Hybrid is a perfect exercise in blending the wants and needs of Australian family-car buyers, and we are thrilled to announce it as the 2025 Drive Car of the Year.

Quintuple quality

For a car to be awarded a back-to-back win is impressive. To take three in a row, outstanding. Four, brilliant. But for any vehicle to win five consecutive Drive Car of the Year awards, is simply exceptional.

This year we celebrate two cars that have archived a high five: the Land Rover Defender 110 and Kia Carnival.



DEFENDER OF THE REALM

The iconic Defender 110 has cemented itself as the pre-eminent premium off-roader on local roads, tracks and wilderness. Equally at home in the suburbs as it is on the savannah, the Defender's integrated air suspension and near endless personalisation options make it an unbeatable proposition for those wanting to explore the world in comfort.



CARNIVAL RIDE

There's nothing quite like the Kia Carnival. A ground-up, clean-sheet, big-space family car that doesn't have to compromise by sharing its DNA with an SUV or delivery van. The Carnival's approach to family practicality is unsurpassed and it remains the best way to manage the myriad transportation needs of a large or growing household.

20 YEARS OF DRIVE CAR OF THE YEAR

Two decades of Australia's best cars



Our judges have spent 20 years putting new cars to the test to find the best one for Australian buyers (above). The inaugural winner was the second-generation Audi TT (below).

By James Ward

Let's wind the clock back 20 years to the mid-early-oughts of 2006. In cinemas around the country you were helping Tom Hanks solve the *Da Vinci Code*, our Socceroos played their first FIFA World Cup finals match in over three decades and beat Japan 3-1, and we said goodbye to Steve Irwin and Peter Brock within four days of each other.

This was the year that *Drive* owner, Fairfax Media – as it was then – launched the Drive Car of the Year program, to identify the best cars for Australian new-car buyers.

Back then, 47 car brands were vying for your attention, including fresh offerings from Dodge and Hummer, and while it was the last time we would see a new Daihatsu for sale, you could still buy a Saab, a Proton, or even a Maybach.

The Holden Commodore was Australia's top-selling car (56,531 units) and we produced over 200,000 cars (201,623) on local soil. Things were good, but the market still hadn't topped one million new car sales, with the 2006 total falling just short at 962,521.

The cheapest new car was a \$13,490 Holden Barina; the top four brands (Toyota, Holden, Ford and Mazda) accounted for nearly 56 per cent of all sales.

The inaugural Drive Car of the Year program introduced Australia's car-buying public to a comprehensive analysis of the best new cars on sale and included 20



categories spanning popular market segments as well as key industry callouts. The awards back then, as they continue to be, were designed to assess the market as a whole and call out the best of the best for a multitude of buyers.

The winner of the 2006 Drive Car of the Year overall award was the second-generation Audi TT, which was praised by the judges for bringing balance, performance and sporting manners to a far more affordable segment than its capability would have you believe.

The awards have evolved over the past two decades with naming conventions (for example, Best 4WD awards became SUV

categories in 2009), price bands and even market segments all adjusting to suit changing times.

Things changed slightly a few years ago when the awards included a dedicated program for commercial vehicles in mid-2019, and then switched from an end-of-year announcement in 2019 (for the 2020 year) to a start-of-year announcement in 2021 to manage the challenges of gathering the team of judges during the COVID pandemic.

From the Audi TT in 2006 and BMW M3 in 2007, sports cars gave way to more family-focused transportation as the awards found their footing with a consumer-centric market.

In 2015, the Australian-developed Ford Everest was the first SUV to take the overall award, and in 2018 electrification hit the prime time with the Toyota Camry Hybrid taking the honours.

Despite their market growth and popularity with buyers, DCOTY wouldn't see a dual-cab ute achieve the highest prize until 2023, when last year's winner, the Kia EV9, became the inaugural all-electric winner.

The Hyundai Santa Fe Hybrid, as the 2025 Drive Car of the Year, marks the second time the Korean brand has taken the overall win (Hyundai i30 in 2017) and it is also the second time a hybrid family SUV (Toyota RAV4 Hybrid in 2020) has won the top spot.

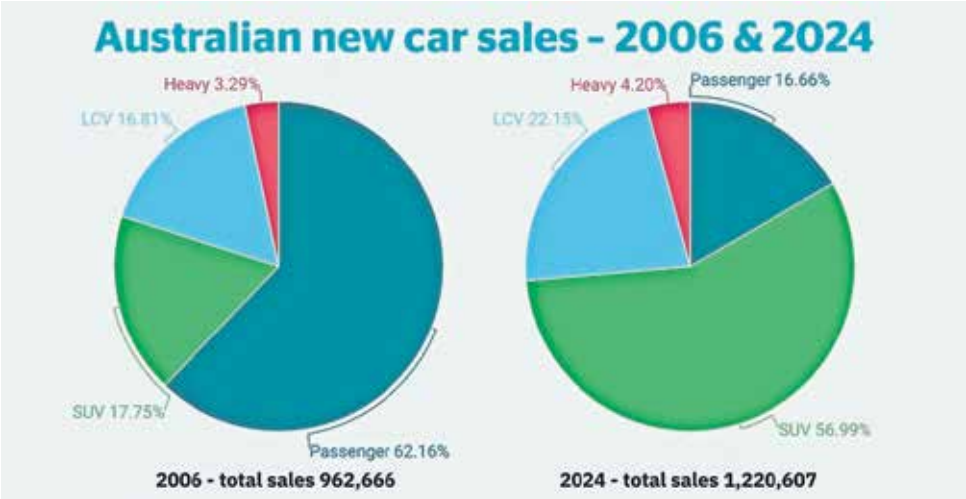
For some fun facts, there have been 38 different car brands that have achieved at least one category win with Ford securing the most awards, seeing 38 trophies (including two this year) now adorning the bookshelves at the Blue Oval's HQ.

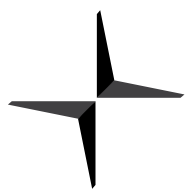
Volkswagen has had at least one win in every award year, and both Ford and Toyota have topped the tables in 2015 and 2021, respectively, with five wins each in one single year. The most awarded car, across multiple model generations, is the Volkswagen Golf, which has earned 15 trophies, including one outright win in 2009.

With 19 new car categories for 2025, Australia's most comprehensive new car awards program celebrate its 20th year in market, and given the rate of change of the automotive industry, is arguably now more relevant than ever.

The 2006 Drive Car of the Year award winners

DRIVE CAR OF THE YEAR Audi TT	BEST LUXURY CAR OVER \$60K Mercedes-Benz S-Class	BEST ENGINE BMW N54 3.0L straight-six twin-turbo
BEST 4WD UNDER \$40K Toyota RAV4	BEST PEOPLE MOVER Honda Odyssey	BEST FUEL ECONOMY Lexus GS450h
BEST 4WD OVER \$40K Audi Q7	BEST UTILITY Holden Commodore	BEST SAFETY FEATURE Volvo integrated booster seat
BEST SMALL CAR UNDER \$20K Toyota Yaris	BEST PERFORMANCE CAR UNDER \$60K Volkswagen Golf GTI	BET INNOVATION Volkswagen DSG transmission
BEST SMALL CAR OVER \$20K Mazda 3	BEST PERFORMANCE CAR OVER \$60K Audi TT	BEST RECREATIONAL VEHICLE Ford Territory
BEST MEDIUM CAR Honda Accord Euro	BEST EXTERIOR Aston Martin Vantage	BEST DREAM CAR Ferrari 599 GTB
BEST LARGE CAR Toyota Aurion V6	BEST INTERIOR Honda Civic	
BEST LUXURY CAR UNDER \$60K Lexus LS250		





Polestar 4



WLTP: 17.8-21.7 kWh/100 km and CO₂: 0 g/km.

DRIVE
CAR OF THE YEAR **2025**

BEST LUXURY CAR
UNDER \$100K



BEST LARGE SUV UNDER \$80,000

Hyundai's head-turner

HYUNDAI SANTA FE

Key facts

- Priced from \$53,000-\$75,500 plus on-road costs
- Five-year warranty
- 5.6-9.3L/100km consumption (claimed)

Why it won

- It's a lot of car for the money, even in base-spec
- Stand-out looks
- Hybrid fuel economy to rival segment-leading Kluger

By Kathryn Fisk

Hyundai's new Santa Fe has moved the game on for the segment, with judges noting it's "one of the best family SUVs on sale in Australia today", full stop.

Judges were won over by its inescapable value for money, even at the entry point of the range, saying it had a "a lot of large SUV" on offer for only \$55,000 plus on-road costs.

And that was before the petrol-only versions joined the line-up in December 2024, meaning the starting price for the Santa Fe now comes in at an even more tantalising \$53,000 plus on-roads - making it even more affordable for families.

The standard equipment list for the base Santa Fe is stacked with tech goodies, such as dual 12.3-inch screens for the infotainment and driver's instrument cluster, wireless phone charging, a powered tailgate, and 20-inch alloy wheels.

If you have kids to put in the third row, both seats have top tether points and ISOFIX anchors. A five-star ANCAP rating and features like blind-spot monitoring and 10 airbags are also standard in every model.

Drive's pick of the bunch, though, is the mid-spec Hyundai Santa Fe Hybrid Elite, priced from \$65,000 before on-road costs.

It offers a nice blend of equipment, technology and niceties such as leather-appointed seats, a heated steering wheel, and a Bose premium sound system.

But it's not just the bells and whistles that wowed the judges; the Santa Fe offers hybrid power to challenge the Toyota Kluger and its Kia Sorento cousin. Its impressive 5.6L/100km claimed fuel economy rating is a major plus to help keep costs at the bowser down.

On the road, the six-speed transmission is well-matched to the hybrid system and the Santa Fe is comfortable and well mannered, with good body control and dynamic feel, making it equally suitable for the daily demands of urban living as well as for hitting the road on a long-distance tour.

Beyond practicality though, the Drive team was won over by the Santa Fe's head-turning looks, with its boxy design making it look contemporary - perhaps even futuristic - giving it instant kerb appeal. It looks nothing like anything else in the large SUV space.



BEST MEDIUM SUV UNDER \$50,000

Tucson: hybrid masterstroke

HYUNDAI TUCSON

Key facts

- Priced from \$39,100 to \$61,100 plus on-road costs
- Five-year warranty
- 5.3L/100km consumption (claimed)

Why it won

- Spacious interior with quality finishes
- Sophisticated hybrid powertrain
- Impressive standard equipment in all grades

By Tom Fraser

The Hyundai Tucson was already among the best in the medium SUV segment, but the updates the Korean manufacturer issued mid-way through 2024 proved to be a masterstroke.

There were subtle updates to exterior styling and more substantial tweaks inside the cabin to improve the user experience, but the addition of a hybrid powertrain was the most significant update of all.

It's a beautifully refined system that provides ample power outputs alongside frugal fuel use. The judges were particularly impressed by how smooth the system was at handing off between petrol and electric power.

Hyundai is relatively new to the hybrid game, but to smash it out of the park on its first effort is really a fantastic achievement.

In addition to a new hybrid powertrain, Hyundai has improved the Tucson's infotainment system, has added new features (such as the Baby Mode), and improved practicality and cabin ergonomics.

There's even a new shortcut to mute some of the driver assistance warning systems, a fantastic example of the brand's fast response to consumer feedback.

We also love that Hyundai has been generous with the amount of variants and options available within the range. You can have the stylistic N Line pack on any trim grade, hybrid also comes on any trim grade, and AWD is widely available for those who want it.

As a family-focused SUV, the new Tucson has been equipped with myriad safety measures to ensure owners and occupants are as safe as possible behind the wheel.

Even base models get important features such as autonomous emergency braking (AEB), front and rear park sensors, lane-keep assist and lane-departure warning, blind-spot warning, and adaptive cruise control.

The car does come at a higher cost than its predecessor, with the top-spec now breaching the \$60,000 barrier. However, the new equipment and improvements to the underlying package are a welcome addition. And for those with a maximum of \$50,000 to spend, our pick of the range is the \$49,100 drive-away Hyundai Tucson N-Line Hybrid.



BEST SMALL SUV UNDER \$50,000

Small Kona's big heart

HYUNDAI KONA

Key facts

- Priced from \$32,500 to \$71,000 plus on-road costs
- Five-year warranty
- 4.2L/100km consumption (claimed, hybrid)

Why it won:

- Spacious interior with premium design touches
- Comfortable ride and confident handling
- Impressive standard equipment

By Kez Casey

Hyundai's showing at the Drive Car of the Year 2025 awards demonstrates that the same level of attention to detail paid to the brand's larger models like the Tucson and Santa Fe is also present in the smaller, more affordable Kona.

As was the case last year, this year the Kona stood out from the pack thanks to an interior that feels more premium than its price point suggests. Practicality and versatility aren't forgotten about, with spacious seating and plenty of storage for anything owners are likely to bring along for the ride.

Passengers get comfortable seats, good adjustability, fantastic visibility, and plenty of room both front and rear. That's not always the case when small SUVs need to adhere to compact external dimensions.

Even the most basic version of the Kona comes with standard equipment like LED headlights, keyless entry and start, a huge 12.3-inch infotainment touchscreen, a wireless phone charger, leather steering wheel, and dual-zone climate control with rear-seat air vents.

That's a comprehensive equipment list for a car that starts from \$32,500. Opting for the hybrid version adds \$4000 to the price of entry, but more than just cutting fuel use, Hyundai's hybrid system adds extra oomph at city speeds.

A choice of petrol, turbo-petrol, and hybrid four-cylinder engines makes it easy to find your perfect match from performance to economy.

In the judges' eyes, the hybrid versions stand out, with decent performance and respectable fuel consumption, prompting the panel to select the \$43,500 (plus on-road costs) Kona Hybrid Premium as its pick of the bunch.

The smooth blending of electric and petrol power, and the conventional driving feel of the Kona Hybrid's six-speed automatic blend the best aspects of smooth and quiet hybrids without the sometimes laggy or lacklustre driving feel that is felt in rivals.

On the safety front Hyundai again shows a strong hand, with the Kona boasting a comprehensive suite of well-calibrated safety technologies.

The overall polish and presentation of the Hyundai Kona ensures it's a fitting winner of this category.

The award-winning SANTA FE Hybrid.

Drive Car of the Year.

Best Large SUV Under \$80k.



DRIVE
CAR OF THE YEAR **2025**

OVERALL
WINNER

DRIVE
CAR OF THE YEAR **2025**

BEST LARGE SUV
UNDER \$80K

Explore the award-winning range at
[Hyundai.com.au](https://www.hyundai.com.au)

 **HYUNDAI**

BEST FAMILY ELECTRIC VEHICLE UNDER \$100,000

Creating some Buzz

VOLKSWAGEN ID. BUZZ

Key facts

- Priced from \$87,990 to \$109,990 plus on-road costs
- Five-year warranty
- 422-452km claimed driving range (WLTP)

Why it won

- Commanding SUV-like visibility for the driver
- Abundant passenger and cargo space
- Seamlessly smooth driving

By Trent Nikolic

The Volkswagen ID. Buzz electric people mover has proven unequivocally that it works as a clever family hauler, making it a smarter choice for genuine family buyers than an SUV. It takes out this category thanks to its smart cabin design, real-world practicality and space, and driving dynamics that belie the physical size of what is a very capable people mover.

The model range is clever, too, with options to suit a variety of budgets. There’s a five-seat version of the ID. Buzz available, but the model we’ve taken the closest look at for our assessment is the long-wheelbase, seven-seat version, which sneaks into this category thanks to pricing just under \$100,000 before on-road costs.

That’s because we think the three-row model is the one most likely to take the fight right up to the SUV brigade. If you don’t need three rows, though, the five-seater is the ID. Buzz for you.

You could also argue that this ID. Buzz is



more car-like to drive than any Volkswagen Kombi that has gone before it, and that’s thanks largely to the electric vehicle platform that underpins it.

Visibility is excellent, it’s easy to manoeuvre, and the ID. Buzz shrinks around you the more you drive it. The ride quality and general cabin comfort on the move is also worthy of mention, with the 19-inch rims the preference if you spend a lot of time on poor road surfaces.

Volkswagen’s integration of tech is excellent, too, with smartphone connectivity that is easy to set up and reliable once running, and an interactive driver’s display that is easily visible and customisable to suit your preferences.

When you factor in the comfort across all seats, the charging ports on offer for passengers, and the useful way you can tailor the layout to suit your family’s needs, you’ve got an exceptional people mover that also cuts a shape figure on the road.

The judges reckon the ID. Buzz is the people mover than can finally coax SUV loyalists away from their compromised three-row layouts.

BEST URBAN CAR UNDER \$30,000

Chery on top

CHERY TIGGO 4 PRO

Key facts

- Priced from \$23,990 to \$26,990 (drive-away)
- Seven-year warranty
- 7.3L/100km consumption (claimed)

Why it won

- Excellent value for money in an SUV package
- Interior presentation belies its price
- Comfortable and easy to drive

By Alex Misoyannis

Australian family budgets are under more pressure than ever, yet over the past few years the list of truly affordable, good-value cars has been getting shorter, not longer.

The Chery Tiggo 4 Pro is proof new cars can be affordable without compromising on equipment and safety. Few cars in recent years have reset the benchmarks for value in their segment like this Chinese brand’s smallest model, offering a list of equipment for which rivals charge well over \$30,000 – in a vehicle priced from \$26,990 drive-away in its top-of-the-range Ultimate form.

For that price buyers are treated to a sunroof, a power-adjustable driver’s seat, synthetic leather-look upholstery, heated front seats, a 360-degree camera, 18-inch alloys and dual-zone climate control.

There’s a full list of standard safety equipment too, including autonomous emergency braking, adaptive cruise control, lane-keep assist and blind-spot monitoring.

The value extends beyond the purchase,



with a seven-year/unlimited-kilometre warranty providing peace of mind from what remains a new face in the Australian market – and reasonably-priced servicing that adds up to just over \$2000 across five years.

Buyers are not left short-changed on outright metal, either. There’s plenty of room inside – including space for a 183cm (six-foot) tall adult to sit behind a driver of the same height, and ample interior storage for small items.

The 380-litre boot is about as big as cargo areas get at this price – enough for the weekly shop or a weekend away.

On the road, the Chery Tiggo 4 Pro delivers an easy-going driving experience buyers expect in this segment.

The 1.5-litre turbo-petrol engine (108kW/210Nm) has enough punch for city driving, the suspension is supple over bumps, and the feather-light steering is ideal for tight car parks.

For new-car buyers on a tight budget, few other vehicles can offer as much metal for the money as the Chery Tiggo 4 Pro, backed by a long warranty, well-featured cabin, and comfortable driving behaviour.

BEST ELECTRIC VEHICLE UNDER \$50,000

Sealed the deal

BYD SEAL DYNAMIC

Key facts

- Priced from \$46,990 plus on-road costs
- 460km of claimed driving range
- Six-year/150,000km warranty

Why it won

- Interior design and equipment feel lavish
- Relatively small battery yields impressive driving range
- Comfortable on-road demeanour

By Rob Margeit

The BYD Seal certainly made an impact when it landed in Australia just over 12 months ago. As the closest rival to the popular Tesla Model 3, the Seal brought a level of features and ability that had, until then, been missing from the sub-\$50,000 price bracket in the electric vehicle market.

At the time of judging, at \$49,888 before on-road costs, the BYD Seal Dynamic slipped in just under our \$50,000 price cap for this category. However, in good news for buyers, BYD has since then slashed the price, and by quite some margin for the 2025 model year, now \$46,990 before on-road costs.

The BYD Seal Dynamic might be the entry-level model in the range but it doesn’t lack for equipment or creature comforts. And it certainly doesn’t feel “cheap”.

Inside, it is well-designed with plenty of leather-like materials and soft touchpoints. It doesn’t feel like an entry-level car, especially once you dig through its features.



Standard equipment includes 18-inch alloy wheels, LED headlights, a 15.6-inch rotating touchscreen with wireless Apple CarPlay and Android Auto, a 10.25-inch instrument display, power-adjustable heated and ventilated front seats, a 12-speaker stereo, glass roof, power tailgate, and a suite of advanced safety systems that contribute to a five-star ANCAP safety rating.

It’s not just about features, though. The BYD Seal Dynamic also performs commendably on the road. With a single electric motor and outputs of 150kW and 310Nm, the Seal Dynamic proved more than capable in most driving situations.

Acceleration is perky while ride comfort is also good, the suspension tune erring on the softer side of comfort. That results in a composed ride in most daily driving situations, the Seal ironing out lumps and bumps with comfortable ease.

The BYD Seal Dynamic slots nicely into today’s electric car landscape – a spacious and comfortable sedan, with a refined interior, and plenty of modern technology today’s buyers expect from a new car.

BEST URBAN CAR UNDER \$50,000

Civic duty

HONDA CIVIC

Key facts

- Priced from \$54,900 to \$80,900 plus on-road costs
- Five-year warranty
- 4.2L/100km consumption (claimed)

Why it won

- Excellent real-world fuel consumption
- Smooth and refined powertrain
- Low-cost servicing

By Tom Fraser

The market for passenger cars (as opposed to SUVs) might be in gradual decline but, there are still plenty of options below a \$50,000 price point.

In a market where it seems a new badge hits the road every week, it’s almost refreshing to be able to reward a model that has over 50 years and 11 generations of experience with Australian drivers.

Honda launched the updated Civic late last year and immediately took the judges by surprise, impressed by the substantial updates to an already impressive car.

Now, it’s the best car in its segment by a long shot.

The driving dynamics stand out as one of the Civic’s best attributes. It’s a sharper driving experience than you’ll find from a Volkswagen Golf or Hyundai i30 Sedan.

Add in Honda’s smooth and refined hybrid system for a quiet and frugal driving experience and the Honda Civic hybrid shapes up as a brilliant package that hits all the high points.



The hybrid system is a peach too. Honda claims a fuel number as low as 4.2L/100km and that’s easily achievable in the real world.

Inside, there is a surprising amount of space given its compact exterior dimensions. It’s a return to the Civic’s sporty form too, with subtly aggressive bodywork, smart alloy wheels and fun rear “lip” spoiler adding to its on-road character.

Sure, it’s a bit bigger than it once was – the new car is a whole metre longer than the original 1973 model – but it is packing a lot more in.

The Civic might only come to us in sedan body style this time around, but it offers the right balance between interior packing and exterior dimensions.

There is only one variant that slots below our \$50,000 cut-off for this Urban-buying category. But, the e:HEV L variant offers a great spread of equipment and technology.

And it’s affordable to own, Honda offering five low-cost services priced at \$199 each and there’s a five-year warranty that buyers can count on into the future.

Simply, the Honda Civic represents the best of its segment in 2025.



BEST FAMILY CAR UNDER \$80,000

Eight up with a hybrid option

KIA CARNIVAL

Key facts

- Priced from \$50,300 to \$76,360 plus on-road costs
- 5.8-9.6L/100km claimed fuel consumption
- Seven-year warranty

Why it won

- Unrivalled practicality
- High-end cabin
- Fuel-saving hybrid powertrain

By Tung Nguyen

Last year saw the Kia Carnival take out the top honours in this family-focused category, and it returns again this year after the brand introduced a more fuel-efficient hybrid powertrain.

Without competition from heavy hitters like the Toyota Tarago and Honda Odyssey – both now discontinued for the Australian market – the Kia Carnival has been left to dominate the people-mover market for some years now.

But Kia has not rested on its laurels or become complacent as the segment-leading model in terms of sales and interest.

In the past 12 months, the manufacturer has brought in its facelifted Carnival, introducing minor tweaks to ride and handling, as well as styling, but the headline change is now a petrol-electric hybrid option.

Sure, the new engine might only be available to the top-of-the-tree GT Line grade that pushes pricing to \$76,210 before on-road costs, but the cutting-edge hybrid powertrain has tangible benefits.

Not only is fuel economy in this eight-seater comparable to (and even better than some) light hatchbacks, but it also provides smoother power delivery that keeps the cabin quiet and serene.

Families who might not want to drop nearly \$80,000 on the top-spec Carnival also have options equipped with a 3.5-litre petrol V6, or a 2.2-litre turbo-diesel four-cylinder for those on a budget.

The benefits of ground-up development as a passenger-centric people mover, rather than a “van with seats” are what continues to see the Carnival stay so far ahead of its competition. The 2025 category win signifies five Drive Car of the Year awards in a row for the big Kia, a feat matched but not beaten by any other car.

A slick redesign of the front end has kept the Carnival looking modern and aligned to some of the newer models in the Kia line-up, and arguably positions the minivan as a “cool” alternative to some large SUVs. That’s right, the Carnival is a minivan with street cred, something that although strange to say, helps understand the Carnival’s continued appeal with both buyers and the *Drive* judges.

With pricing starting from \$50,300, buyers thinking that a three-row large SUV is the right option for their growing families need to seriously consider looking at a Kia Carnival instead.



BEST SMALL SUV UNDER \$80,000

A Mini in name only

MINI COUNTRYMAN

Key facts

- Priced from \$49,990 to \$77,990 plus on-road costs
- 1.5L and 2.0L petrol or single- and dual-motor electric
- 460L to 505L boot capacity

Why it won

- Surprisingly large interior space
- Customisable and configurable styling options
- Wide range of models to suit a wide range of lifestyles

By Kez Casey

Mini’s evolution from a niche enthusiast brand to a more balanced and accessible range sees the Countryman deliver an impressive mix of features, interior versatility, and smart powertrain solutions.

Rather than pigeonhole itself with a single solution, the Countryman offers a range of three- and four-cylinder petrol engines, and fully electric options.

Plus, Mini’s focus on dynamics means that both the petrol and the electric models also come with the option of performance variants.

Where the Countryman C provides an efficient option for buyers who rarely venture beyond the suburbs, the Countryman S turns up the heat with willing performance, while the Countryman JCW wraps hot-hatch performance handling in family SUV disguise.

On the electric side, the Countryman E delivers 422km of claimed range to easily dispatch the daily commute. The Countryman SE delivers performance rivalling that of the JCW flagship, mixing silent running with sharply honed handling.

The judges were far and away most impressed with the Countryman’s spacious and versatile interior. While its external dimensions have grown slightly, it’s inside that the small Mini has truly grown, with interior space to rival larger SUVs.

Practical boot space, spacious rear seats, and easily accessible front seats all scored points for the Mini Countryman. The typical Mini design flair also helps, with bold styling, playful colour and trim options, and clever integration of technology.

The scene-stealing circular infotainment display may look like a gimmick on the surface, but Mini has included a wide-ranging array of features, from essential vehicle monitoring to media and navigation, and even some fun game-style features to remind you that not everything needs to be serious.

Not everyone loved Mini’s chunky steering wheel, a design point that divided opinion and was often frustrating in terms of long-distance driving comfort.

The Countryman range offers a right fit in the premium small SUV class, and the Countryman SE stands out as the star of the range thanks to its dynamic prowess and smooth, silent running.



BEST URBAN ELECTRIC VEHICLE UNDER \$100,000

Setting the standard

TESLA MODEL 3

Key facts

- Priced from \$87,990 to \$109,990 plus on-road costs
- Four-year warranty
- 13.2-16.7kWh/100km consumption(claimed)

Why it won

- Class-leading energy efficiency and charging network
- Spacious cabin with smartphone-quick technology
- Comfortable over bumps yet sharp in the corners

By Alex Misoyannis

It isn’t the newest electric vehicle on sale, but a substantial update in late-2023 means that, for the second year running, the Model 3 was impossible to beat as the Best Urban EV Under \$100K.

The car’s interior is as minimalist as ever, with a 15.4-inch touchscreen that’s as intuitive and snappy as any smartphone.

Although it lacks Apple CarPlay and Android Auto, Tesla’s in-house software puts other brands to shame, with navigation, music streaming, video playback and over-the-air updates.

Judges felt Tesla had taken minimalism too far in some areas, with no dedicated instrument display, indicators that are now fiddly buttons on the steering wheel, and a gear shifter that’s now a slider on the touchscreen.

To its credit, recent software updates have made the gear selector’s operation easier, including tech that partially automates gear changes in three-point turns. The longer you live with the Model 3, the less its quirks take away from its excellence elsewhere.

A well-finished cabin is home to leather-like materials, comfortable power-adjusted front seats with heating and ventilation, plenty of space for rear-seat passengers, a large boot, and more storage under the bonnet.

The equipment list is long, from leather-look upholstery and a glass roof to a full suite of advanced safety systems.

Recent price cuts have made Tesla ownership more affordable, and it’s the mid-tier \$64,900 Long Range that’s our pick of the line-up for a \$100,000 budget.

The \$10,000 premium over the base model buys you all-wheel drive for quicker acceleration, plus a longer 629km claimed range.

The Model 3’s 2023 update brought a softer ride without ruining its sharp handling, while energy efficiency remains class-leading, and it gets full access to Tesla’s reliable Supercharger network. Servicing is “condition-based”, so it’s generally the car that determines when it needs maintenance, but the four-year warranty is shorter than the industry average of five.

Despite a broad field, the Model 3 is so far ahead on value, space, performance, technology, efficiency and charging that the vote in this category wasn’t difficult.

Rivals will need to seriously up their game if they are to defeat Tesla next year.

BEST LUXURY CAR UNDER \$100,000

Flaunting its star power

POLESTAR 4

Key facts

- Priced from \$78,500 to \$88,350 plus on-road costs
- Five-year warranty
- 590-620km claimed range (WLTP)

Why it won

- Stunning interior design and materials
- Isolated outside noise and vibrations
- Generously proportioned seating space

By Kez Casey

Arriving as a breath of fresh air, the Polestar 4 managed to do the almost impossible and made minimalism strikingly bold. The exterior design is dramatic without being overwrought, and the interior uses its carefully considered finishes to provide sophistication of the highest order. Breaking with tradition in the segment, the Polestar 4 blends elements of traditional sedans, high-riding SUVs, and classic coupe proportions to create a spacious and welcoming interior. Easy access and roomy accommodation prove that practicality can be a luxury commodity. The fine detail in the interior won universal acclaim. Delivering on the luxury promise with carefully selected materials, and soft supportive seating create an interior that looks and feels incredibly sophisticated. It's not just the front seats that get the premium experience either with



the second row featuring sculpted and supportive seating, generous head, shoulder, and leg room, and excellent visibility from the standard panoramic roof. Ultimately, its impressive electric powertrain was the deciding factor. All electric vehicles deliver smooth and quiet performance, but Polestar's experiences in EVs and attention to detail mean that road and wind noise are minimised to reduce outside interruptions. The judges also praised the Polestar 4's sure-footed handling, no easy feat with the instant torque of the electric powertrain delivering up to 400kW in dual-motor guise. Effortless performance plays a role here, too. The Polestar 4 Single Motor offers 200kW and a 0-100km/h sprint of 7.1 seconds, which is more than adequate. The elephant in the room was Polestar's controversial windowless rear. As effective as the Polestar 4's network of 360-degree and rear-view cameras is, the lack of true depth and ability to change the driver's field of view feels a little like a high tech solution to a problem that didn't exist.

BEST LUXURY ELECTRIC VEHICLE UNDER \$150,000

Tomorrow's best, today

PORSCHE MACAN

Key facts

- Priced from \$128,400 to \$184,400 plus on-road costs
- Three-year warranty
- 18.8-20.7kWh/100km consumption (claimed)

Why it won

- Scintillating driving dynamics
- Tech-heavy and premium cabin
- Phenomenal driving range and ultra-fast charging

By Tung Nguyen

Blending all-electric motoring with a premium cabin, cutting-edge technology, engaging driving dynamics, and a desirable badge, the new Porsche Macan is the Best Luxury EV Under \$150,000 winner. Everyone's definition of luxury can be different, but when it comes to electric cars it means style and status without compromise. The Porsche badge has been synonymous with luxury for decades now, but moving the Porsche Macan mid-size SUV to an all-electric line-up was a risky move. The gamble has paid off though, because even with an electric powertrain, the Macan still delivers on the thrills and upmarket attention-to-detail worthy of the Porsche name. Four variants are available, with all but the top-spec Turbo coming in under \$150,000.



Our pick of the bunch is the Macan 4, which scores a dual-motor, all-wheel-drive set-up that punches out a sizeable 300kW/650Nm for a zero-to-100km/h sprint in a claimed 5.2 seconds. While those outputs aren't supercar level by any stretch, the Macan 4 arguably balances pace, panache and pricing (at \$134,400) perfectly, with the practicality you would expect from a car this shape and size. Family buyers won't have many problems fitting children in the second row, or a pram in the boot, and there is also a small front storage compartment, too. All owners, however, will appreciate the WLTP-certified 613km of driving range that is more than enough for the average Australian weekly commute. Charging is also convenient, thanks to the Macan's new-generation architecture that affords it a maximum 270kW input for a 10-80 per cent top up in as little as 21 minutes. Ultimately, the Porsche Macan EV offers the best of tomorrow, today.



BEST SMALL SUV
UNDER \$80K





AVAILABLE IN PETROL.



AVAILABLE IN ELECTRIC.

THE MINI COUNTRYMAN.
SPACIOUS. BOLD.
AWARD-WINNING.



BEST MEDIUM SUV UNDER \$80,000

Punching above its weight

GENESIS GV70

Key facts

- Priced from \$78,500 plus on-road costs
- Five-year warranty
- 10.5L/100km fuel consumption (claimed)

Why it won

- Luxury belying its price point
- Brimming with latest technology
- Refined driving manners



driver, and an infotainment control centre on the left. If that's not enough, there's also a head-up display projecting driving information onto the windscreen.

In fact, the whole interior impressed our judging panel, exuding luxury and quality while remaining practical and attractive – and silent. It's a relaxing place to spend time; whether on the daily commute or the weekly shop, the GV70 feels like a reward each time you drive it.

The 2.5L turbocharged four-cylinder petrol engine delivers 224kW and 422Nm to all four wheels via a smooth eight-speed automatic transmission, allowing for a 0-100km/h sprint time of 6.1 seconds.

The steering is direct and provides a nice amount of feedback. It also matches well to its handling capabilities – another area in which the GV70 surprises.

The Genesis GV70 2.5T enjoys a full five-star safety rating, thanks to its long list of both passive and active safety features.

Another tick for the GV70 is its after-sales experience, thanks to a five-year/unlimited-kilometre warranty, and five years/50,000km of free scheduled servicing.

By Ben Zachariah

This was one of the most hotly contested categories in the Drive Car of the Year 2025 awards, but there was a clear and worthy winner for our judges this year: the Genesis GV70 Advanced.

Despite being the entry-level option in the range – it just slid in under the \$80,000 cap after a price rise following a recent update – the Genesis still thoroughly impressed, offering a driving atmosphere that feels like a luxury SUV from a much high price bracket, and a driving experience on par with something from Germany.

Though there was still a lot of love for the Lexus NX – the defending category winner – the interior of the Genesis feels a generation newer and comes across as more luxurious.

Part of the update includes wireless Apple CarPlay and Android Auto that connects quickly to the double-wide high-definition OLED screen. The latter serves as a digital instrument display directly ahead of the

BEST LUXURY SUV UNDER \$150,000

Porsche's game-changer

PORSCHE MACAN

Key facts

- Priced from \$128,400 to \$184,400 plus on-road costs
- Three-year warranty
- 18.8-20.7kWh/100km (claimed)

Why it won

- Up to 654km of driving range
- Sports car-like performance
- Refined and luxurious cabin



acceleration performance for most daily driving duties.

And so too its 624km claimed driving range from its 100kWh battery – which can handle a 270kW maximum charging rate for a 10-80 per cent recharge in just 21 minutes. It's those numbers that ensure the Macan 4 a practical and easy to live with.

Ride comfort hasn't been compromised either, with adaptive dampers that do a tremendous job ironing out road nasties.

But it's inside where the Macan 4 plays its luxury trump card, with a thoughtfully designed cabin that oozes class and refinement – and, yes, luxury.

Porsche hasn't scrimped on safety either, with the full complement of advanced driver assist and safety technologies on board.

There are some downsides. The second row isn't as spacious as we'd like it to be and a three-year warranty is well under par.

But they don't detract greatly from what the Porsche Macan electric is, and that's not only an accomplished electric car but also one that looks and feels premium and has an engaging driving experience that remains true to the Porsche brand's DNA.

By Rob Margeit

Porsche's all-new electric Macan moves the game on for the brand and the Macan itself. It's a gutsy move for what has been – in petrol and diesel form – the German brand's best-seller around the world.

But the switch to electric has not diluted its inherent quality, which takes the well-trodden template of the outgoing model and imbues it with modernity and freshness.

The judges lauded how the Macan stacked up as an electric vehicle, and praised its refined and sporty driving characteristics which live up to the Porsche badge.

Three variants come in under our \$150,000 category threshold. The judges opted for the \$133,400 Macan 4 as the pick of the range, its blend of equipment and performance hitting the right luxury notes.

With two electric motors and total outputs of 300kW and 650Nm, the Macan 4 can complete the sprint from 0-100km/h in just 5.2 seconds, which is more than enough

DRIVE
CAR OF THE YEAR 2025
BEST LUXURY SUV &
BEST ELECTRIC VEHICLE
UNDER \$150K



The new Macan.

EXPERIENCE IT AT YOUR OFFICIAL PORSCHE CENTRE.

PORSCHE



BEST LUXURY OFF-ROAD SUV UNDER \$150,000

Defending its crown

LAND ROVER DEFENDER

Key facts

- Priced from \$92,696 to \$317,592 plus on-road costs
- 3.0L diesel, 3.0L petrol, 5.0L and 4.4L V8 engines available
- 8.1-13.1L/100km consumption (claimed)

Why it won

- Excellent on-road refinement and off-road ability
- Your choice of silky, punchy engines
- Four, five and seven-seat body styles

By Sam Purcell

For those who want a bit of go-anywhere ability and do anything poise rolled into one neat choice, then it's hard to go past a big, well-appointed and comfy four-wheel drive.

Cue the Land Rover Defender, now a three-time champion in this segment.

Make no mistake, going three-in-a-row is a rare and major feat. Launching back in 2019, the Defender doesn't feel like it has taken a backward step over the past half-decade.

This is for a few reasons. Firstly, development hasn't slowed down over the years and this year sees some important updates for the Defender range.

The D350 engine choice – new for 2025 and our pick from the range – produces 258kW and 700Nm, beating the 300 Series LandCruiser for power and matching it for stump-pulling torque.

A plug-in hybrid, with a claimed 43km of electric-only range is available, and the 294kW/550Nm six-cylinder P400 engine continues to impress, for those who want straight petrol power.

The recently introduced Defender 130 provides a proper three-row choice for larger families as well, trading in some departure angle for a decent third row. And for those who want the shorter wheelbase and footprint, the three-door four-seat Defender 90 remains an interesting option.

There's a range of new technologies and adjustments to specification included for the Defender in 2025, but the bones of height-adjustable independent suspension, smart driving technology and a modern unibody chassis underpins the appeal of a vehicle that is both a highly capable off-roader and refined urban cruiser.

These are normally two things at odds with each other, but the smart adoption of air suspension technology, along with one of the best off-road traction control systems in the business, makes the Defender a beast off-road.

Instead of having to cop some kind of major compromise around town, the Defender also impresses on-road. Bump absorption is good, and body control also rates well considering its size and weight.

As good as it is around town, the Defender is also an excellent highway cruiser, tow vehicle and load-lugger. Throw in a pleasing, high quality and practical interior, and you'll struggle to find an area where the Defender comes up short.



BEST OFF-ROAD SUV UNDER \$80,000

Climb every mountain

FORD EVEREST

Key facts

- Priced from \$59,240 to \$81,200 plus on-road costs (4x4 models)
- 2.0L twin-turbo or 3.0L V6 diesel power
- 7.2-8.5L/100km consumption (claimed)

Why it won

- Comfortable and well thought-out cabin
- Gutsy V6 with refined road manners
- Enough off-road performance for most buyers

By Sam Purcell

Even though new and interesting options landed and threatened to take down the Ford Everest, the Blue Oval offering has gone back-to-back in this competitive off-road segment.

Why? Because the Ford Everest still impresses most across the board. While the Toyota LandCruiser Prado has a slight edge off-road, and the GWM Tank 500 offers better value for money, the Everest has no standout weakness overall.

The gutsy V6 diesel impresses with its 184kW and 600Nm, which matches well to the pragmatic but nice mid-range Sport spec.

The interior is another strong point, combining good technology, smart use of space and plenty of storage nooks. The third row is better than you might think as well, while also offering good storage space both in seven-seat and five-seat mode.

Driving around town, the combination of a torquey diesel engine, well weighted throttle response and a well-behaved 10-speed automatic transmission puts the Everest in good stead. There's good tuning and feel to the steering, and the ride quality is also very good.

All-wheel drive, which is garnered through a sophisticated clutch-based system, gives decent levels of confidence on slippery surfaces, like wet bitumen and dirt.

And of course, you have proper four-wheel drive ability with a low-range transfer case, locking rear differential and off-road driving modes.

Where the Everest isn't a segment leader is out-and-out off-road capability, where it lacks the same advanced polish through the off-road driving modes and stable suspension feel compared to what you get in the new LandCruiser Prado. But the Everest is still strong enough on the rough stuff, with good capabilities.

And while it's not as value-laden as the Tank 500, it offers a more polished driving experience, and certainly better bang-for-buck than the LandCruiser Prado.

Like the Ranger it shares showroom space with, the local Australian design and development expertise that underpins the Everest really helps the big Ford shine in all Aussie conditions and environments.

The Ford Everest, for the second year in a row, brings high levels of refinement, comfort, and family-friendly practicality, on top of good off-road capability and a 3.5-tonne towing capacity.



BEST DUAL-CAB UTE UNDER \$100,000

Ranger alert

FORD RANGER

Key facts

- Priced from \$47,980 to \$90,440 plus on-road costs (4x4 models)
- Five-year warranty
- 7.2L/100km consumption (claimed)

Why it won

- Refinement and finesse ahead of rivals
- Practical and clever features integrated throughout
- Comprehensive driver-assist features that work in the real-world

By Tom Fraser

The Ford Ranger's momentum can't be stopped as the country's best dual-cab ute.

You only have to spend a few minutes on our roads around the country to realise the impact that this model is having – they're found in every nook and cranny of our country for a reason.

The Ford Ranger's off-road prowess is a force to be reckoned with. With multi-mode driving settings to play with, impressive clearance angles, and an overall go-anywhere ability that feels unstoppable, the Ranger shines on as a bush-bashing powerhouse.

The technology on offer is by far and away still the best you can buy in the segment. The portrait-mounted screen has a ton of features to cycle through and the standard wireless Apple CarPlay and Android Auto displays effortlessly on the big display.

Don't forget – this model is also chock-full of safety gear. You don't want for any extra safety acronyms out of the Ford Ranger and, what's better, they don't intrude on the driving experience either.

There are healthy levels of payload capability and a strong headline 3500kg towing capacity, but the impressive thing about this ability is the fact that it doesn't render the Ford Ranger useless for the everyday commute.

Engineers have been able to refine the Ranger's powertrain vibrations and noise to a quiet hush, which is an incredible achievement for a dual-cab ute.

There's a great spread of powertrains on offer from the entry-level XL's single-turbo four-cylinder, right up to the Raptor's powerful 3.0-litre twin-turbo petrol V6.

The smaller engines – which are either single-turbo or twin-turbocharged – perform well, but it's the more muscular V6 that feels the best and is our pick of the range. It's more comfortable as a long-range highway cruiser but also feels much better when loaded up and put to work.

The Ford Ranger Wildtrak V6 is our pick for the best specification in the line-up. This high-spec variant (and all the kit it affords) makes it far easier to live with a dual-cab ute as a daily-driver.

However, every variant in the range offers something unique and it goes to show that there really is a Ranger for everyone.

DEFENDER

EMBRACE THE IMPOSSIBLE



DRIVE
CAR OF THE YEAR **2025**

DEFENDER 110

2021-2025
5 X CATEGORY WINNER

Model shown is Defender 110 25MY Global Specification in Tasman Blue with Explorer Pack and optional features and accessories.



BEST DUAL-CAB UTE UNDER \$50,000

Budget-friendly fun

KGM SSANGYONG MUSSO

Key facts

- Priced from \$40,000 to \$47,500 drive-away
- 133kW/400-420Nm 2.2L turbo diesel engine
- Standard and long-tray models available

Why it won

- Incredible value
- Roomy interior with SUV-like appointments
- Long warranty with no conditions for commercial use

By Ben Zachariah

For the second year in a row, the KGM SsangYong Musso Ultimate Luxury XLV has won the Drive Car of the Year Best Dual-Cab Ute Under \$50K category, successfully defending its title against an increasingly competitive field.

Ultimately, it was the build quality, a long list of standard features, its on-road manners and off-road capability, and the excellent seven-year/unlimited-kilometre factory warranty that won us over.

Frankly, nothing in the sub-\$50,000 price bracket gets close.

And if you ignore the Musso badge and the price tag, you could be forgiven for thinking it competes at a much higher level.

Perhaps not quite with the current Ford Ranger, but in many ways the SsangYong is on par with the more expensive variants of the Isuzu D-Max and the Mitsubishi Triton – and has, frankly, overtaken the some other more expensive utes.

Consider that, for less than \$50,000 on-road, you get a spacious dual-cab ute with a 12.3-inch digital instrument cluster, a 12.3-inch touchscreen for the infotainment, Apple CarPlay and Android Auto,

360-degree cameras, a heated leather steering wheel, heated and ventilated electric front leather seats, (outer) heated rear leather seats, dual-zone climate control, a sunroof, keyless entry and start, cruise control, LED daytime running lights, LED front fog lights, a tyre-pressure monitor system, and 18-inch alloy wheels.

Under the bonnet, the Musso is powered by a 2.2L four-cylinder turbo-diesel engine putting out 133kW and 400Nm (short wheelbase) or 420Nm (XLV option), matched to a six-speed automatic.

Claimed fuel consumption is between 8.6L and 9.0L per 100 kilometres. Not industry-leading – or even category-leading – but enough performance to get you where you need to go comfortably.

Those venturing off-road also get part-time four-wheel drive with low and high range, hill-start assist, hill descent control, and an auto-locking rear differential for increased traction.

While the Musso is unrated by ANCAP, the vehicle comes with six airbags, blind-spot warning, lane-departure warning, lane change collision warning, rear cross-traffic alert, active rollover protection, safe exit warning, front vehicle take-off alert, AEB with forward collision warning, rear cross-traffic alert, and driver attention warning.

But it's not just what's on paper that counts when it comes to our decision. The Musso has consistently impressed our judges with how it drives – both in the bush and when visiting the local shops.

And compared to some of the recent designs entering the market over the past 12 months, the Musso's styling is downright subdued and inoffensive, while also offering a much larger cabin – and larger tub, in the case of the XLV – than its competitors.

It's not as big as US pick-ups like the Ford F-150 and Ram 1500, but the extra leg- and headroom are a step up from other utes at this price point.

There's no doubt South Korean cars are now on par with those from Japan.



BEST LARGE DUAL-CAB UNDER \$150,000

American invasion

CHEVROLET SILVERADO 1500

Key facts

- Priced from \$130,500 to \$138,000 plus on-road costs
- Three-year/100,000km warranty
- 12.9L/100km (claimed)

Why it won

- Premium cabin appointments
- Effortless performance from V8 engine
- Technology integration makes for simple operation

By Trent Nikolic

A few short years ago, full-sized American trucks in right-hand drive form were the domain of smaller, local companies willing to take the risk on a costly conversion.

Then Ram Trucks Australia changed the game with a comprehensive remanufacturing program as well as a dealer and service network. And now, the segment is significant enough to justify its own DCOTY award.

This category is all about capability – touring and towing, specifically – with comfort and practicality as important as outright ability.

Put simply, nothing tows a heavy trailer as safely and effortlessly as a full-sized truck, and buyers on the rural fringe love the long-range capability of this segment.

With the RAM 1500 in the midst of a model change, the two key combatants in this segment are the Chevrolet Silverado and Ford F-150, along with the slightly left-field newcomer, the Ineos Quartermaster.

It's worth noting here that the Toyota Tundra pushes beyond the \$150,000 price cut-off and therefore was not eligible for this year's award.

The Silverado wins this category thanks to its distinct two-model range (LTZ or ZR2)

with both on-road and off-road focus, incredible cabin comfort and space, and effortless long-range touring capability thanks to the relatively efficient V8 petrol engine under its hood.

The appeal of the trucks in this segment is easy to understand once you spend time with them in their natural environment. Yes, they are big and probably too cumbersome for the inner city, but that's not the point of them. If you need to tow, tour or carry large items around regularly, nothing does it as easily as the Chevrolet Silverado.

The engine is exceptionally smooth and powerful, with the 6.2L petrol V8 mated to an excellent 10-speed automatic transmission. Its claimed fuel use is 12.9L/100km and we saw that or lower on the highway, with mid-13s to 14s around town in traffic.

Ride quality is excellent on any road surface, and the cabin space means even long distance touring is comfortable for five adults. There's an incredible amount of space and flexibility inside the cabin, such that even large 4WDs like Patrol and LandCruiser are put to shame.

Chevrolet's integration of technology, the reliability of it, and the ease of the user experience is also superior to the other combatants in this segment. The controls – both in terms of layout and inclusion – are sensibly placed and easy to access.

The capability, comfort and quality of the Silverado is as good as it gets if you need a vehicle of this size.

The ability of the V8 engine, the ease with which it can tackle any task, and the general drivability ensure you'll enjoy every experience behind the wheel, and understand why this segment has been the backbone of the American countryside for so many years.

It's not all roses and sunlight, though. We'd like to see a longer warranty for starters. Three years or 100,000km was acceptable not that long ago, but we'd argue that five years/unlimited kilometres is the new industry standard in Australia.



BUYING ADVICE

Add an award-winner to your driveway

By James Ward

Taking the step from recognising the best cars in Australia to buying one can be a lot of fun, but how can you make sure that your journey to an award-winning new car is going to be as successful as possible?

With plenty of choice still available from the various trim grades of this year's winners, we'll shortly be publishing our perfect "award-winning" specification of all 19 categories, but in the meantime, here are some tips to guide you to your best next new car.

CHOOSE HYBRID IF IT IS AVAILABLE

Demand and interest in hybrid models is increasing, so as a way to better protect the future value of your car, always sample the hybrid driveline, especially if the majority of your driving is in an urban environment.

ASK ABOUT SERVICE PLANS

With capped-price servicing available on nearly all new cars, many brands have bundled this into pre-paid service packages that can be added to the new car purchase contract. These can often be included as part of the deal negotiation, so be sure to ask.

SHOP AROUND

Make sure you check stock and pricing between a couple of local dealers. It can not only help validate the pricing you've been communicated, but may also offer the chance to find your perfect car already in stock, which can often translate to a better negotiation on price.



You might find your ideal car in stock if you shop around, which can help with negotiations on price.

CHOOSE ANY COLOUR YOU LIKE

While black and white cars will always be popular, never be afraid to select a colour that you really like. The days of significant differences in future value based on a car's colour are long gone, so make a choice that you will love. It is your car after all!

ACCESSORIES AS A BONUS

Most manufacturers will offer a selection of genuine accessories for new models. Have a look to see if there is anything you may need, and whether they can be bundled into the price negotiation. A word of warning though, you pay your stamp duty on the total purchase price of the car, so be sure to check the implications of having expensive accessories, like tow bars, factored into the contract.

FINANCE AND INSURANCE

Ask about the brand-backed finance and insurance product. These can often provide better rates or benefits than third party offers, but as always, check the details before you commit and never be afraid to step away to speak to a financial advisor.

TAX BENEFITS

Does your new car qualify for any tax benefits or rebates? This can be a complex area that is tied to your personal circumstance, but speak to a financial advisor to see if you are eligible for any additional benefit in buying a new car.

TRY BEFORE YOU BUY

Make sure you take a test drive and try the car in ways that you will use it. Make sure the family fits, check it in your garage, load the dog into the boot – think about everything you need to know before you make an award-winning car your own.

PLAY AROUND

Remember too, many brands offer detailed online configurators so that you can see what colours, interiors and other options may look like before you visit a dealer. From our winners' list, the Porsche, Defender and Genesis ones are a standout!

If you ever want to know more or simply ask a question, you can always reach out to our editorial team at askdrive@drive.com.au

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