

Top Picks

Best models of the year in 10 categories

SIX NEW MODELS made our Top Picks this year: the Chevrolet Silverado and Traverse, Mazda5, Nissan Altima, Subaru Forester, and Volkswagen GTI. This marks the first time in six years that two domestic models earned spots or that a European car made the list.

Two of last year's picks, the Toyota Highlander and RAV4 SUVs, were passed over this year. At the time of publication, sales of certain versions had been halted. We have suspended our recommendation until a potentially unsafe part that could cause unintended acceleration is fixed (see page 5).

Our Top Picks are the best all-around models in their categories, based on their performance, reliability, and safety. They are chosen from the more than 280 vehicles we've recently tested and must meet our criteria in three areas:

Road test. Each must rank at or near the top of its category in our overall test score, which is based on more than 50 tests and evaluations.

Reliability. Each must have an average or better predicted-reliability Rating, based on the problems CR subscribers reported in our latest Annual Auto Survey.

Safety. Top Picks must perform adequately in overall safety if tested by the government or the insurance industry. (For some models, we do not have enough crash-test data to assign an overall safety Rating.) In addition, electronic stability control, a proven lifesaving safety feature, must be readily available. All of our Top Picks provide standard ESC and curtain air bags.

Each model's report card shows its Rating in each area, if available. Prices are the suggested retail amount for our tested cars.

Videos of the 2010 Top Picks are available free at www.ConsumerReports.org/april.



SMALL SEDAN

Hyundai Elantra SE

The Elantra SE made our Top Picks for the third time. It's a solid, all-around car that's relatively comfortable, quiet, and roomy, and provides good fuel economy and plenty of features for the money. The SE also comes with standard ESC, a critical safety feature that's absent on other small cars (including lower-end Elantras). The Honda Civic EX is more fun to drive but offers ESC only on pricier versions. Price: \$18,695.

REPORT CARD

Test score: ● | Reliability: ● | Overall safety: ●



FAMILY SEDAN

Nissan Altima

The Altima has been one of our top-rated family sedans for years, and a freshening for 2010 made it better. It now gets improved gas mileage and provides standard ESC in all trim lines. The Altima offers an appealing balance of comfort and performance, while getting some of the best fuel economy in its class: 26 mpg overall for four-cylinder models and 24 mpg with a V6. The cabin is roomy, well finished, and quiet. And the secure handling, comfortable ride, and spirited acceleration make the car enjoyable to drive. The four-cylinder model earned an above-average reliability Rating, while the V6 model is average. Price: \$23,970 to \$30,335.

REPORT CARD

Test score: ● | Reliability: ○-● | Overall safety: ●



SPORTY CAR

Volkswagen GTI

Freshened for 2010, the GTI is the sporty version of the Volkswagen Golf (formerly called the Rabbit). This impressive package is exhilarating to drive and easy to live with. It delivers the agile handling, spirited acceleration, and responsive steering of a true sports car, along with a decent ride, a well-finished interior, and the cargo-carrying practicality of a hatchback. Good fuel economy of 27 mpg overall is another plus, although premium fuel is required. Price: \$27,504.



REPORT CARD

Test score: ● | Reliability: ○ | Overall safety: -



SMALL SUV

Subaru Forester

The Forester provides one of the most carlike driving experiences of any SUV. It combines agile handling with the most comfortable ride in its class. Passengers are treated to a spacious cabin, with a roomy rear seat and excellent visibility. The 2.5X provides an impressive 22 mpg overall with an automatic, 24 mpg with a manual. And the turbocharged 2.5XT delivers effortless acceleration and 20 mpg, but it takes premium fuel. The 2.5X has had excellent reliability, while the 2.5XT's is average. Price: \$20,972 to \$28,860.

REPORT CARD

Test score: ● | Reliability: ○-● | Overall safety: ●



BEST CAR OVERALL

Lexus LS 460L

The LS scored an outstanding 99 out of 100 in our road test, making it our highest-rated vehicle. This large cruiser pampers its passengers with a comfortable ride and luxurious driving environment, including a roomy, well-crafted, and exceptionally quiet interior. It offers a plethora of electronic amenities, including an optional self-parking system. Yet, its controls are easy to use. Although the LS isn't exactly fun to drive, its efficient 380-hp V8 and eight-speed automatic transmission deliver smooth, brisk acceleration and a relatively good 21 mpg overall, the same as a Honda Accord V6. All-wheel drive and a hybrid version are available. Price: \$76,572.

REPORT CARD

Test score: ● | Reliability: ● | Overall safety: -



FAMILY SUV

Chevrolet Traverse

The Traverse stands out as an impressive overall package with a quiet, spacious cabin that can comfortably seat up to eight adults and leave room for cargo. It provides a pleasant ride, communicative steering, and responsive handling. Our Traverse returned 16 mpg overall, which is respectable for its size. Rear visibility isn't great, but clever convex side mirrors and an optional rear-view camera help. The GMC Acadia is a twin of the Traverse, but its reliability is below average. Price: \$39,920.

REPORT CARD

Test score: ● | Reliability: ○ | Overall safety: ●



SPORTS SEDAN

Infiniti G37

The G sedan, which joins our list for the fourth straight year, is one of the highest-rated sedans we've tested, with a score of 95 out of 100. It provides an appealing combination of agile handling, blistering acceleration, a refined powertrain, a fairly comfortable ride, and a high-quality, luxurious interior. The G37 is as inviting to drive on a twisty road as it is on the highway. But compromises include a snug cabin and small trunk. Rear-wheel drive is standard; all-wheel drive is optional. Coupe and convertible versions are also available. Price: \$37,225.

REPORT CARD

Test score: ● | Reliability: ● | Overall safety: ●

GREEN CAR

Toyota Prius

The Prius received a redesign for 2010. It's still the most fuel-efficient car in our Ratings, getting 44 mpg overall. That distinction helped it earn our pick in this category for the seventh straight year, the longest of any current model. In addition, the Prius is a pleasant car to drive, with a roomy interior, a steady ride, hatchback versatility, and excellent reliability and crash-test results. The 2010 redesign also gave it a more solid feel and a dedicated EV mode that allows it to run longer on electric power at low speeds, an advantage mainly in slow, congested traffic. Price: \$23,150-\$26,950.

REPORT CARD

Test score: ● | Reliability: ● | Overall safety: ●



FAMILY HAULER

Mazda5

The Mazda5 microvan offers a lot of practicality in a compact, affordable package. With three rows of seats and sliding rear side doors, it combines the convenience of a minivan with the maneuverability and stingy fuel economy—24 mpg overall—of a wagon. The interior is airy, with good fit and finish. Plus the Mazda5 is fun to drive, with a nimble feel and a comfortable ride. The addition of standard ESC for 2010 improved its emergency handling. If you need more room, consider the Honda Odyssey minivan. Price: \$23,805.

REPORT CARD

Test score: ● | Reliability: ○ | Overall safety: -

PICKUP TRUCK

Chevrolet Silverado 1500

The Silverado 1500 returns as our top choice after a year off. The crew-cab 4WD model is a well-rounded pickup with a roomy cabin, generous payload capacity, decent ride quality, available full-time 4WD, and, on higher-end models, very good interior fit and finish. The GMC Sierra is a twin of the Silverado. The reliability of last year's pick, the Chevrolet Avalanche, dropped to below average in our latest Annual Auto Survey, keeping it from repeating. Price: \$37,235.

REPORT CARD

Test score: ● | Reliability: ○ | Overall safety: ○



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