

Stress-Free SUVs That Won't Drive You Crazy

These SUVs scored highly in our evaluations for quietness, visibility, easy-to-use controls and rear seat comfort

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An SUV shopper can't discover every flaw in a car during a brief test drive. Even if you take the vehicle home for a weekend, there are certain problems that will become apparent only after living with it. Sometimes the flaw isn't noticeable until you bring along a passenger or two, run some errands, and travel on varying roads.

That's why Consumer Reports' auto experts drive each car, SUV, and truck for a lot of miles—2,000, in fact—before we even begin to test it. By doing this, we live with and use the cars in everyday situations, just like you do. Add partners, spouses, and children into the mix, and each CR expert comes away with a unique take on what works and doesn't work for him or her when driving and living with a vehicle.

After that, we use a jury of testers to evaluate every vehicle in more than 50 objective and subjective tests. The results are tabulated to create composite scores that are presented on the

car model pages, where CR members can find our complete road tests and survey results.

Through this process we've identified four categories where there can be big deal-breaking flaws that will make a buyer regret a purchase: how the controls work, visibility, rear-seat comfort, and cabin noise. These are things that can be easy to overlook on a test drive but become a true annoyance over time that could have been avoided.

To steer you in the right direction, we have identified the compact and midsize SUVs that perform best in each category, along with alternatives in rank order. All featured SUVs are CR-recommended, meaning they've scored well in our road tests, have good reliability, have key active safety features, and performed well in crash tests.

We also note the SUVs with the worst performance in our evaluation.

Best Usability and Controls

Compact SUVs

CR QUICK TAKE

77

✓ RECOMMENDED

2021 Hyundai Kona

CR MPG: Overall 26 mpg / City 18 / Hwy 34 mpg

#3 of 13: Subcompact sport-utility vehicles

⊕ PREDICTED RELIABILITY

⊙ PREDICTED OWNER SATISFACTION

The Kona has the clear, easy-to-use controls that Hyundai owners have come to expect. The manual climate control and audio system is a breath of fresh air in an age of complicated controls; everything worked as expected and was well-labeled. The temperature switch is the exception, with its loud action and cheap feel. The location of the standard 7-inch screen is placed appropriately at the top of the center stack, where it's easily viewable by the driver for audio and phone interactions. A larger 8-inch touch screen with navigation, a Qi standard wireless charging pad, and an eight-speaker Infinity system with a subwoofer are available.

Other good choices: Subaru Crosstrek, Subaru Forester, Kia Sportage
Ones to skip: Volvo XC40, Mercedes-Benz GLA, Mercedes-Benz GLB, Mercedes-Benz GLC

Midsized SUVs

CR QUICK TAKE

97

✓ RECOMMENDED

2021 Kia Telluride

CR MPG: Overall 21 mpg / City 14 / Hwy 30 mpg

#1 of 13: Midsized sport-utility vehicles 3-row

⊕ PREDICTED RELIABILITY

⊕ PREDICTED OWNER SATISFACTION

The Telluride's touch screen is easy to read and intuitive to operate. There are also big, easy-to-use buttons for climate functions and prominent knobs for adjusting the audio volume or station tuning. Most tasks can be performed using the steering-wheel buttons, and Android Auto and Apple CarPlay come standard and put the driver's familiar smartphone interface on the center screen. One complaint: The text on some of the dashboard buttons can be difficult to read in daylight because of the lack of contrast.

Other good choices: Hyundai Palisade, Ford Edge, Nissan Murano
One to skip: Mercedes-Benz GLE

Best Visibility

Compact SUVs

CR QUICK TAKE

89

RECOMMENDED

2021 Subaru Forester

CR MPG: Overall 28 mpg / City 20 / Hwy 38 mpg
 #1 of 15: Compact sport-utility vehicles

- PREDICTED RELIABILITY
- PREDICTED OWNER SATISFACTION

The Forester may look like a box on wheels, but that shape gives it several advantages: good headroom, plenty of cargo room, and incredible visibility. In fact, it has one of the best outward views of any vehicle we've tested. Every roof pillar is slim, and the windshield and side glass are large. The side mirrors sit low, so it's easy to see pedestrians and cars at traffic intersections. The rear window is also large, but head restraints can block the view somewhat.

Ones to skip: GMC Terrain, Nissan Rogue Sport

Midsized SUVs

CR QUICK TAKE

86

RECOMMENDED

2021 Subaru Outback

CR MPG: Overall 24 mpg / City 16 / Hwy 32 mpg
 #1 of 9: Midsized sport-utility vehicles

- PREDICTED RELIABILITY
- PREDICTED OWNER SATISFACTION

The Outback delivers one of the most airy outward views of any vehicle on the market. It starts with the SUV-like raised ride height and slightly elevated seating position, both of which contribute to the generous view out over the hood. But it's the slim pillars all around combined with long and tall side windows that grant the Outback excellent outward visibility. Other helpful elements include the front triangle windows, which make it easier for the driver to see around the side mirrors to spot vehicles or pedestrians at intersections, along with a very large third side window to alleviate rear three-quarter blind spots. And finally, the rear window is quite large.

Another good choice: Honda Pilot

Ones to skip: Jaguar I-Pace, Nissan Pathfinder

Best Rear-Seat Comfort

Compact SUVs

CR QUICK TAKE

84

RECOMMENDED

2021 Subaru Crosstrek

CR MPG: Overall 29 mpg / City 20 / Hwy 39 mpg
 #1 of 13: Subcompact sport-utility vehicles

- PREDICTED RELIABILITY
- PREDICTED OWNER SATISFACTION

The Crosstrek is a wellrounded SUV that treats rear-seat passengers very well. It's reliable and quiet, and has easy-to-use controls and doors that swing open wide, making it incredibly easy to get into. The back seat offers plenty of room—even for long-legged passengers—along with ample headroom, a nicely shaped seat, and good thigh support. There's more than enough space for two adults to travel comfortably on extended trips.

Other good choices: Honda HR-V, Subaru Forester, Honda CR-V

Ones to skip: Mazda CX-3, Lexus UX, Mercedes-Benz GLB

Midsized SUVs

CR QUICK TAKE

85

RECOMMENDED

2021 Hyundai Palisade

CR MPG: Overall 21 mpg / City 15 / Hwy 29 mpg
 #2 of 13: Midsized sport-utility vehicles 3-row

- PREDICTED RELIABILITY
- PREDICTED OWNER SATISFACTION

The rear seats are not only comfortable, they're roomy and adjustable. These seats slide fore and aft, and the seatback angle can be adjusted. Larger passengers will find there's plenty of room all around. The third row is best suited for children. In a pinch, two adults can sit there with some adjustments to the second row to give a little more kneeroom. The seat itself is quite low to the floor and flat. It isn't too challenging to get back there, even for adults, because the second-row seats fold and spring forward at the touch of a button.

Other good choices: Kia Telluride, Toyota Highlander, Mazda CX-9, Honda Pilot, Ford Edge

One to skip: Infiniti QX60

Best Cabin Quietness

Compact SUVs

CR QUICK TAKE



✓ RECOMMENDED
2021 Mazda CX-5

CR MPG: Overall 24 mpg / City 17 / Hwy 33 mpg
#2 of 15: Compact sport-utility vehicles

- ⊕ PREDICTED RELIABILITY
- ⊕ PREDICTED OWNER SATISFACTION

The CX-5 is among the quietest in the class. The engine note is subdued, and road and wind noise are kept at unobjectionable background levels, creating an upscale experience. In addition, the suspension effectively absorbs bumps and ruts, preventing them from loudly punching through to the cabin.

Other good choices: Subaru Crosstrek, Chevrolet Equinox, Honda CR-V

Ones to skip: Fiat 500X, Ford EcoSport, Honda HR-V, Kia Seltos

Midsized SUVs

CR QUICK TAKE



✓ RECOMMENDED
2021 Hyundai Palisade

CR MPG: Overall 21 mpg / City 15 / Hwy 29 mpg
#2 of 13: Midsized sport-utility vehicles 3-row

- ⊕ PREDICTED RELIABILITY
- ⊕ PREDICTED OWNER SATISFACTION

The Palisade is truly well-rounded, and noise suppression is just another area where it excels. It's pleasantly quiet with good road and wind isolation, and a mild but unobjectionable engine hum in the background. The sound character is very similar to the Telluride and more serene than several competing models. The suspension and the 20-inch tires do a decent job of absorbing bumps without allowing them to noisily invade the quiet cabin.

Other good choices: Kia Telluride, Ford Edge

One to skip: Jeep Wrangler