

WHICH? CAR AWARDS

SAFEST



LUXURY CAR

AUDI A8

£46,927 to £77,157

It's attention to detail that makes the A8 so safe.

A great example of this is the driver's head restraint. Set it to the right position for your height and the car will remember it even after another driver alters it – simply press a button on the dashboard.

Audi has thought carefully about the layout of the leg and knee area in the front of the cabin – far too many cars still have the hard steering lock near this area, which can seriously damage your legs in a crash.

The airbags use the latest technology, adjusting the rate of inflation to the severity of the crash. And the seat belts are similarly advanced – all five sense a crash happening and remove slack from the belt in the split second before you're thrown forward; they also monitor belt tension and reduce it if it becomes dangerous.

MOST SECURE



LUXURY CAR

LEXUS LS430

£56,972 to £59,072

The Lexus LS430 is the most secure car we've seen. Its locks fought off our experts' break-in attempts for a full five minutes – by this time, even a hardened thief is likely to have moved on to easier pickings.

But perhaps the most noteworthy aspect of the LS430's security measures is the use of laminated glass in the side windows. This is much more effective than the toughened glass used in most cars; a thief will need to make a lot more noise to break in, and take a lot more time. Laminated glass can withstand an attack for around five times longer than toughened glass – around 35 seconds, as opposed to seven seconds.

Unfortunately, you have to pay about £57,000 to experience such good security. However, Lexus has set an admirable example for others to follow.

MOST LIKED



SUPERMINI

TOYOTA YARIS VERSO

£10,272 to £12,172

'It reminds me of Postman Pat's car, but I love it.' That owner's comment, from our first look at the Yaris Verso in 2000, still holds true: a whacking 92 per cent of owners would recommend it to a friend.

Much of that is down to its impressive reliability – owners report few problems with their Yaris Verso, so except for routine servicing, you can expect to spend little or no time in the garage.

It's based on a stretched version of the hatchback Yaris, so it will carry more than most superminis. But that also explains the unusual appearance – true to that original quote, it won't win any beauty contests.

Among the few criticisms is a bumpy ride. But with so much going for it – an easy drive and comfortable position, plenty of space inside – owners don't care.

SUPERMINI

RENAULT MODUS

£9,107 to £14,467

This car is the first supermini to gain the maximum five-star rating in crash tests.

When we looked at the design in detail, we could see why. Four of the five seat belts automatically tighten in a crash. And there are plenty of airbags – the front airbags deploy according to the severity of the crash; side airbags in the front are seat-mounted, so they're effective even if you move the seat; and there's a side head-protection curtain for all occupants.

Only one complaint: there's a risk of the driver's legs hitting the hard steering column in a crash.



MEDIUM CAR

VW GOLF V

£11,757 to £21,622

The Golf is the safest medium car thanks to features such as active head restraints. To reduce whiplash, these move closer to your head if the car is shunted from behind.

But it's also one of the few cars that make a serious effort to protect pedestrians. There's crushable space between the hard parts of the car, such as the base of the windscreen and the engine, and the bumpers and bonnet. This allows the bonnet and bumper to absorb more energy as they're crushed, so a pedestrian hits the hard structures beneath them with less force.



LARGE CAR

VOLVO S40

£15,115 to £26,215

The S40's design creates more safety for occupants than even the Audi A8 – the A8 wins out only because it's heavier, so it will come to a less violent halt in many crash situations.

Its front head restraints are fixed at a suitable height for most people (other cars have adjustable head restraints – but if you don't adjust them correctly, they can be worse than useless). And there's a system known as Whips, which, in the early stages of a rear shunt, rotates the seat backrest slightly to provide better support for the head and neck.



SUPERMINI

CITROEN C3 PLURIEL

£12,132 to £13,732

The Pluriel sets the standard for all small cars. It beats all its supermini competitors hands down – and is more secure than any car in the medium class we've seen, too.

The Pluriel's door locks are on a par with those on the £57,000 Lexus – good enough to resist our thieves for five minutes. And its deadlocks activate automatically when you lock the car, so you don't need to remember to set them. (Deadlocks prevent the doors from being opened, even from the inside if a thief gets in through a window.)



MEDIUM CAR

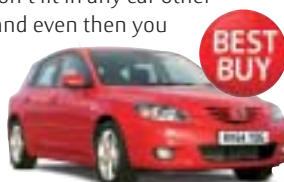
MAZDA 3

£10,467 to £15,447

The Mazda 3 just pips the Renault Mégane and the VW Beetle as the most secure medium car.

The doors have deadlocks, although they don't activate automatically when you lock the car so you have to remember to set them. But if you do, a thief won't be able to open the doors, even from inside.

And the stereo is all but worthless to anyone who steals it. It won't fit in any car other than a Mazda 3, and even then you need to enter the security code. That makes it difficult for thieves to sell on.



LARGE CAR

VOLVO S40

£15,115 to £26,215

The S40 gets a slightly lucky break with this award – the most secure large car we've ever assessed, the outgoing BMW 3 series, was phased out shortly before we went to press.

Still, the S40 is a very secure car, with automatic deadlocks which kept our thieves out for the full five minutes of our tests. The alarm sounds when air inside the car is disturbed, if the thief breaks the window, say, rather than when a door is forced. And the self-powered siren will go off even if a thief disconnects the battery.



MEDIUM CARS

SUBARU IMPREZA

£14,552 to £29,797

AND AUDI A3

£15,327 to £26,827

Two quite different cars share the most-liked medium car award, both winning a 77 per cent recommendation rate from owners.

First there's the sporty Subaru Impreza, a car for those who love driving. (However, it's noisy and there's not much luggage space.)

Then there's the handsome Audi A3 – it too is satisfying to drive, and also lacks space in the rear. It's more of a family car, though, with less noise and more luggage space.



LARGE CAR

SUBARU FORESTER

£16,497 to £24,752

Subaru knows how to please its customers. Its second award goes to the Forester: 86 per cent of owners would recommend it to a friend.

Practical load space and sound reliability make it a no-nonsense family car. But people still love driving the Forester and, unlike in the Impreza, there's room for everyone.

Apart from its looks, which owners agree aren't breathtaking, the only drawbacks people highlight are its high running costs, particularly the expensive insurance rates and its thirst for fuel.



LUXURY CAR

MERCEDES-BENZ E-CLASS

£26,797 to £65,727

Eighty-three per cent of owners tell us they just love the E-Class. They say it's an enjoyable drive, with a smooth ride, and good steering and brakes. Perhaps surprisingly for such a large car, they also say it's easy to manoeuvre.

There's considerable admiration for the engine's fuel consumption but less for the amount of noise it makes. And judging by owners' comments, you might want to check it out for space in the front. Depreciation is super-low, though people are less than happy with servicing costs.

