



MPVs

TOYOTA PREVIA

£20,192 to £24,742



SPORTS/COUPÉS

MAZDA MX-5

£14,802 to £17,802



OFF-ROADERS

HONDA CR-V

£17,002 to £23,007



ALSO WORTH CONSIDERING



SEAT ALHAMBRA

£16,017 to £22,817

If space and economy are top of your priorities, the airy seven-seat cabin and impressive running costs make the Seat Alhambra a good choice.

Owners report few breakdowns, although the Alhambra is plagued by more niggly problems with build quality. It's noisy and awkward to park, too, but people still love it.



NISSAN ALMERA TINO

£13,062 to £17,402

Not so much an MPV this, more of a pumped-up medium car designed with extra space for five people. (It's alongside medium cars in our summaries.)

But if you don't have enough bottoms to ferry around to justify a big MPV, it's a good alternative – a consistently reliable and well-liked workhorse.



VW TOURAN

£14,292 to £21,012

Another expanded medium car that's an alternative to a proper MPV. This time there's a choice of five or seven seats – but be prepared for things to be a little cramped in the back.

Early feedback was negative, but the Touran's shaping up well. It's a joy to drive, if a little noisy, reliability is OK, and safety levels are excellent.

There aren't any MPVs that meet our Best Buy criteria but some are still ahead of the others. Our favourite is the seven-seater Toyota Previa.

It gets a big vote of confidence from owners: 85 per cent would recommend buying one. We don't have enough survey replies to be certain of its reliability but Toyotas are legendarily well-built cars, so the Previa's a good bet. And it gets a fairly respectable score in crash tests, too.

Surprisingly, though, owners aren't that impressed with the space up front, and the driving position isn't as comfortable as it could be. Less surprising is the fact that a car this big is a monster to park.

OUR CHOICE	2.4 VTi £20,192
USED CHOICE	2.4 CDX (2002) £15,525

ALSO WORTH CONSIDERING



JAGUAR XK8/XKR

£49,797 to £66,597

Here's a sports car that really competes in the luxury sector – with a price and running costs to match. Its road manners are unquestionably sound; it's everything you'd expect from a great sports car.

We don't have full reliability details for this model but Jaguars tend to be average for reliability.



TOYOTA CELICA

£16,452 to £20,937

This three-door coupé comes with proven reliability and an affordable price tag. You'll get a more satisfying drive with the Mazda MX-5 but owners do find the Celica's ride smooth and its driving position comfortable.

Unusually, it has a fairly roomy boot – so if you want 'sporty with space', this is the car to go for.

There are no sports coupés with the test results to be Best Buys in this year's survey, but the MX-5 is still well worth a look. MX-5 owners praise the general drive quality, though it's beginning to show its age – it's noisy, and the cabin layout doesn't always meet with approval.

Typically for Mazda, this is a dependable car, not easily given to breakdowns. The four-star crash-test score is on a par with other cars in this class, it's among the most well-liked cars in our survey, and it's fairly economical.

A new MX-5 range is imminent but it will have a lot to live up to. So it could be worth a trip to the dealer to check it out before Mazda calls time on it.

OUR CHOICE	1.8i £15,302
USED CHOICE	1.6i (2002) £9,725

ALSO WORTH CONSIDERING



HONDA HR-V

£14,902

Here's another Honda we think is worth a look. It's smaller than its stable mate, the CR-V, especially in the rear. But it pips it on driving experience, and doesn't suffer the CR-V's weak spots – visibility and parking. It's quieter, too.

The CR-V is more suited to families; the smaller HR-V is more appropriate for singles or couples.



TOYOTA RAV4

£17,037 to £24,237

The RAV4 is pretty mean competition for the CR-V. It's a close match for reliability and well liked by owners. It matches the CR-V's driving experience, too, and it's easier to park.

However, rear space isn't as good and the back seats are difficult to fold. But if space isn't a priority, this might be the off-roader for you.



VOLVO XC90

£30,532 to £45,467

This car aims to offer similar off-road capability to the Hondas, but it's larger, and is pitted against luxury-sector competition.

Ride quality, driving position and refinement are first class, and owners love its good looks. However, the overall driving experience is marred somewhat by a slightly sluggish engine.

There are no Best Buys in this category because we haven't tested how they handle off-road. But several have good on-road credentials in our survey.

The Honda CR-V is a reliable car and owners love it, enthusing about its well-balanced engine, easy steering and stability at high speeds. There are a few drawbacks: the driving position isn't great, and poor rear visibility makes parking tricky. But there's plenty of space for you and your tackle, and getting it all onboard is easy.

It isn't an out-and-out mud-plugger but it does have some off-road capability; it should get across a wet field with a horsebox, or off the beach with boat and trailer.

OUR CHOICE	2.2 i-CTDi SE £18,407
USED CHOICE	2.0i VTEC SE Sport (2002) £12,600