

Motoring focus



Chrysler people carrier slammed in latest Euro NCAP tests

Voyager crashes out

CAR SAFETY

The latest version of Chrysler's large MPV, the Voyager (right), has been heavily criticised in Euro NCAP crash tests. It's the least safe large MPV tested since 2003, and only marginally better than the earlier Voyager, tested in 1999.

For a family-oriented car, its two-star score (with one star struck through to indicate a 'high risk of serious or fatal injury') is simply unacceptable. This is because in the frontal crash test, despite the presence of an airbag, the driver's chest hit the steering wheel with a force likely to cause serious or fatal injuries.

As the UK version of the Voyager tested has fewer safety features than left-hand-drive models in Europe (notably, it doesn't have a driver's knee airbag), Euro NCAP bosses have called on Chrysler to show much greater commitment to safety.

At the other end of the scale, three cars were awarded the maximum five-star safety rating in the latest wave of results,



including two medium cars – the Volvo C30 and Toyota's Corolla replacement, the Auris (see right). The other is the Skoda Roomster (opposite), demonstrating that the bar has been raised to five stars even for smaller models. But we've yet to see a small off-roader achieve five stars and the two here don't break the trend.

	CLASS	EURO NCAP SCORE
		ADULT SAFETY (out of five)
SKODA Roomster	Mini-MPV	★★★★★
TOYOTA Auris	Medium car	★★★★★
VOLVO C30	Medium car	★★★★★
VW Eos	Medium car	★★★★★
KIA Magentis	Large car	★★★★★
CHRYSLER Voyager	Large MPV	★★★ ^a
CHEVROLET Captiva	Off-roader	★★★★★
HYUNDAI Santa Fe	Off-roader	★★★★★

^a Second star struck through to indicate a 'high risk of serious or fatal injury'

Aur-inspiring?

FIRST DRIVE

TOYOTA AURIS

£11,995 TO £18,795

If the new Auris does half as well as its predecessor, the Corolla, it will be a big success. The Corolla racked up 31.6 million sales worldwide (90 cars an hour) over 40 years before being pensioned off to make way for Toyota's all-new medium hatch.

Picking up the baton, the Auris 2.0 D-4D T-Spirit we drove does admirably well in most areas. It's quick enough to give you confidence when overtaking and, for a diesel, it's smooth and quiet. The suspension took most things in its stride and is set up for comfort instead of sporty handling.

Inside, there's an easy-to-read dash display and plenty of room for four adults. The position of the gear stick, raised up on the centre console, feels natural, but the steeply angled handbrake takes some getting used to. But at least it's a talking point in an otherwise bland, if practical, cabin.

VERDICT The Auris will keep the Corolla faithful happy, despite its lack of pizzazz. It should run like clockwork, too.

Your say



Research supervisor Wayne Laws, 29, compared the Auris 2.0 diesel with his 2003 VW Golf 1.9 TDI. Despite thinking the Auris would be a good town runner he wasn't tempted by it overall: 'There are lots of reasons why I wouldn't buy this car, but the boot is the main one – it's too small for my golf clubs and an odd shape because of the rear wheel arches.'

Spot the deference



Looks the same but is better to drive

FIRST DRIVE

MINI

£11,595 TO £19,075

BMW knows not to change a good thing – hence the new Mini looks virtually identical to the outgoing model. But the bodywork and engine range are all new, and the interior's had a sympathetic makeover as well.

Engines in the original car could feel a bit unrefined and noisy, but now there are two new units developed jointly by

BMW and Peugeot. The spirited 1.6 Cooper we drove benefits from more power (up to 120bhp) and much lower fuel use (Mini claims 48.7mpg).

Overall, the new Mini is better to drive, thanks to its more compliant suspension (although things can still get rough at times). Handling is excellent, and the direct steering maintains the sporty impression.

VERDICT Still expensive and cramped, but few can match its fun drive and cool image.



37,594

complaints about used cars sold by independent dealers last year

CONSUMER DIRECT



6.6%

of drivers breathalysed during December 2006 tested positive

ASSOCIATION OF CHIEF POLICE OFFICERS

What government plans to limit congestion will mean for you

Road pricing on the way

ROAD CHARGING

The UK transport system supports a phenomenal 6.1 billion journeys each year, and with a 30 per cent growth in traffic predicted by 2015, managing networks effectively is crucial to economic success. Sir Rod Eddington, who headed a study for the Department for Transport in December, has backed the introduction of a national 'road user charging' scheme – a view since endorsed by Transport Secretary Douglas Alexander. So what does that mean for you? Here are some clues.

When will it happen? The government would like a national scheme by 2015.

Why do we need it? The main aim is to ease road congestion or limit its growth. However, the government also wants to cut carbon emissions, so it's possible that high-polluting vehicles will pay more.

Is it a stealth tax? It would be a tax but, by law, revenue raised from local congestion schemes (such as in London and Durham) can be spent only on improving local transport. A UK scheme would probably



We could have a national scheme by 2015

follow the same principle but it's unclear what will happen to our existing road and fuel taxes.

Where will it operate? Initially, we're likely to see more local charging schemes for cities, and for motorways and trunk roads in between. Many rural roads may remain free.

How will drivers be tracked? Three systems are likely to play a part: automatic numberplate recognition cameras (ANPR), satellite tracking (GPS) and in-car 'tag' and roadside 'beacon' systems. Policymakers talk of these being 'interoperable'.

Roadside cameras are one of the systems likely to be used

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

Road pricing certainly divides opinion. We want to hear your thoughts on it, so please email letters@which.co.uk or write to Letters, PO Box 44, Hertford X SG14 1SH

Roomster finds its niche

FIRST DRIVE

SKODA ROOMSTER
£9,920 TO £14,050

The Roomster is Skoda's attempt to take on mini-MPVs such as the Renault Modus. It's unusually styled, with a deliberate contrast between the front and rear ends.

The 1.9 diesel we tried delivers plenty of pull and effortless cruising in this fairly lightweight car. But the 1.4 TDI (80bhp) is probably more suitable: it's £600 cheaper, and Skoda claims a 2.9mpg economy advantage over the larger diesel (54.3 versus

Buyers will go for its utilitarian interior



51.4mpg). Three petrol versions are also offered, but we'd avoid the weak 1.2 engine. The Roomster isn't special to drive, but then most buyers will be wooed by its utilitarian (basic but very spacious) interior.

Trim levels are refreshingly simple – 1 is base spec, 2 adds heated door mirrors and air conditioning, and 3 includes cruise control and rear parking sensors. Electronic stability control is, sadly, a £340 option on all models.

VERDICT It should prove as popular as one of the original mini-MPVs, the Toyota Yaris Verso. Well worth a look.

In brief

Which? Car survey 2007

Thank you to everyone who has told us about their car in this year's Which? Car survey – we've had an amazing response. We'll reveal the results in Which? Car in July, and the lucky winner of a Best Buy car soon.



New mobile phone law

If you're caught using a handheld mobile phone while driving, you'll now face a fixed £60 fine and three points on your licence. The new law, introduced on 27 February, aims to curb the number of drivers undeterred by the previous penalty (£30 and no points).



BMW gets greener

The face-lifted BMW 1 Series, which includes a three-door version, goes on sale this month. Exterior tweaks are minor, but the engines now use a manual stop-start gearbox and 'recycled' braking energy to deliver a claimed 24 per cent uplift in fuel economy (up to 60mpg in the 118 diesel).



New arrivals

Major new cars coming your way: BMW X5 (large 4x4, now, from £39,540); Kia C'eed (medium hatch, now, from £10,995); Land Rover Freelander 2 (compact 4x4, now, from £20,935); Nissan Qashqai (medium car/4x4, now, from £13,499 – pictured); BMW 3 Series convertible (four-seat convertible, April, from £30,630); Mercedes-Benz C-class (large car, June, £TBA).

