



77% Honda FR-V £15,400 to £20,400

The FR-V takes a different tack from most rivals, by seating six people in two rows of three seats. The cabin is wide but the seat between driver and front passenger is suitable only for a child or an adult on a short journey. There's reasonable legroom front and rear and a 365-litre boot that expands to 965 litres with the rear seats folded flat. It's short and parking is easy.



Electronic stability control (which Honda calls Vehicle Stability Assist) is standard and combines with firm suspension, precise steering and little body roll to help you tackle winding lanes and bumpy roads effortlessly.

The 1.7 and 2.0 petrol engines will be replaced by a single 1.8 unit in April. We've not tested this engine fully but it seems well suited, though noisy at times. The outgoing 2.0 petrol and current 2.2 diesel versions both provide ample power and are smooth and quiet at all speeds. The 1.7 petrol can't match them for performance.

The diesel is quite frugal (40.4mpg) but petrol models will be thirsty. We managed just 32.1mpg in the 2.0 petrol. **WE LIKE** Honda's excellent reliability record and good dealer support mean the FR-V should be a trouble-free buy.

Engines 1.7 and 2.0 petrol (outgoing), new 1.8 petrol (April); 2.2 diesel **Gearbox options** 5- or 6-speed manual or 4-speed auto **Body styles** 5-door MPV with 6 seats **Dimensions** 4.29x2.12m (inc mirrors) **Insurance groups** 8 to 11 **Running costs (per mile)** 41p to 52p **Retained value (3 years/36,000 miles)** 39 to 42% **Which? safety rating** 10.5 (good)



Family favourites

Want space for six or seven, but don't want an enormous people carrier? Then a mid-sized MPV could be just the job

Multi-purpose vehicles, or MPVs, are now big business – in fact, their popularity has started to eclipse more traditional family cars. In their efforts to carve a slice of this growing family market, carmakers have developed three sub-sectors to help target a variety of possible buyers.

The original full-sized people carrier was an American import – the Chrysler Voyager, in 1983. It was closely followed in 1984 by Europe's first purpose-designed MPV, the Renault Espace. These large MPVs typically carry seven or eight people, with comfort and space for all, plus luggage. One of the first we tested was the Toyota Space Cruiser in April 1985. We were very critical of its dangerous brakes, which caused unstable handling, and we strongly advised against

buying one. Matters have improved since, though – now you can go out and buy people carriers that are relatively sporty.

Recognising that not everyone wanted such large vehicles, carmakers developed small MPVs in the mid-90s. These seat five, with some of the flexibility of larger MPVs, but with refinement, handling and running costs more akin to a car.

More recent still is the arrival of mid-sized MPVs. These have five main seats and luggage room to match but add the option to unfold ingeniously stowed third-row seats for occasional extra passengers in the boot area. These form the focus of our test. They're all available as seven seaters with the exception of Honda's six-seat FR-V. So which one is best for you?

Now you
can buy
MPVs with
relatively
sporty
handling



77% VW Touran

£14,750 to £23,310

The Touran is dull to look at, though the recent makeover has improved things a little. It's a practical workhorse, however, with versatile accommodation for four adults and up to three children – the centre-row middle seat and both third-row seats are too small for adults. The cabin has lots of cubbyholes and there's a generous 475-litre

boot when the two rearmost seats are down. With these in use, luggage space shrinks to almost zero. Fold down all except the front seats to give 820 litres, or lift out the middle row to yield 1,095 litres.

On the road, the Touran feels assured. The firm suspension soaks up most bumps well and doesn't roll too much in corners, while the responsive steering and brakes lend the driver confidence to tackle twisty roads and slippery surfaces alike.

The 105bhp 1.9 TDI we tested lacks punch and averaged 42.2mpg (somewhat short of VW's claimed 47.9mpg). The powerful 140 or 170bhp 2.0 TDI engines are much more satisfying to drive.

WORTH KNOWING A 'self-parking' version of the Touran arrives in June, which claims to parallel-park for you.

Engines 1.4 and 1.6 petrol; 1.4 TSI; 1.9 (90/105bhp) and 2.0 (140/170bhp) diesel **Gearbox options** 5- or 6-speed manual, 6-speed semi-auto **Body styles** 5-door MPV with 7 seats **Dimensions** 4.39x2.05m (inc mirrors) **Insurance groups** 6 to 12 **Running costs (per mile)** 35p to 50p **Retained value (3 years/36,000 miles)** 34 to 42% **Which? safety rating** 12 (excellent)



76% Mazda 5

£14,400 to £19,800

The Mazda 5 has seven seats, but there's really space for only four adults – albeit very tall ones. The middle seat of the middle row and the two fold-away third-row seats are for children or occasional adult use.

There's a 410-litre boot when you're carrying four or five people, which expands to 835 litres with all the rear seats folded. Sliding doors give excellent access. But with seven on board, there's just 105 litres of luggage space. Inside the cabin it feels solid but a bit cheap compared with some rivals.

The 5 handles well, with precise (if rather light) steering and a firmly sprung suspension. The 145bhp 2.0 Sport (petrol) is smooth and powerful but sounds a little harsh at the high revs needed for motorway cruising, which can become tiring. And it comes with a thirst, returning just 32.5mpg combined in our tests. Expect the 1.8 to have less power but marginally better economy.

The 2.0 diesel is a better all-round choice, returning 42.8mpg. It delivers enough power for confident overtaking and better high-speed refinement than the petrol versions.

WE LIKE The Mazda 5 is the only MPV here with sliding rear doors, which provide excellent accessibility – especially in tightly packed car parks.

Engines 1.8 and 2.0 petrol; 2.0 diesel **Gearbox options** 5- or 6-speed manual **Body styles** 5-door MPV with 7 seats **Dimensions** 4.51x1.99m **Insurance groups** 6 to 8 **Running costs (per mile)** 41p to 51p **Retained value (3 years/36,000 miles)** 35 to 42% **Which? safety rating** 11 (good)



WHICH?
BEST
BUY

Inside, the Mazda 5 feels a bit cheap compared with others



75% Ford S-Max

£16,995 to £21,995

The Ford S-Max shares its chassis with the new Galaxy but is slightly smaller and noticeably sportier. However, it's still spacious, with more width and height in the front and second rows than most mid-sized rivals – and limo-like legroom. But the fold-away third-row seats don't have enough legroom for adults, only for two kids. When they're stowed away, there's a huge 625-litre boot. Fold down the second row, too, and there's 1,120 litres to play with and a fairly flat load floor – better than any other MPV here.

It delivers strong performance on the road, too. The well-honed suspension and precise steering make it enjoyable to drive. Body roll is well controlled and the brakes are strong, with good feel.

We found the 2.0 turbodiesel smooth and quiet, but it's a little slow from a standing start. The six-speed manual gearbox feels slick and is well matched to the engine. It returned an impressive 42.2mpg in our fuel economy tests.

WORTH KNOWING The S-Max is quite an expensive mid-sized MPV – you may get better value from the larger Galaxy, considering the likely discounts and predicted depreciation rates (*Which?*, December 06, p24). But there's no denying it's a fine car.

Engines 2.0 and 2.5 petrol; 1.8 and 2.0 diesel **Gearbox options** 5- or 6-speed manual **Body styles** 5-door MPV with 7 seats **Dimensions** 4.77x2.16m (inc mirrors) **Insurance groups** 10 to 14 **Running costs (per mile)** 40p to 53p **Retained value (3 years/36,000 miles)** 36 to 40% **Which? safety rating** 12 (excellent)





75% Renault Grand Scénic £15,165 to £22,415

The Grand Scénic is longer than the five-seat Scénic and will carry two extra children in its fold-away third-row seats. There's a 495-litre boot expanding to 785 litres with the middle row folded.

It's a competent all-rounder, with precise steering and a firm ride. It tackles most bumps well but can jar on poorer roads at lower speeds.

The 1.9 diesel has plenty of oomph for smooth acceleration and confident overtaking. But the 1.6 petrol was found wanting in the standard Scénic so it will struggle more with the bigger body.

Scénic reliability isn't the best – poor for diesels, average for petrols.

WATCH OUT Bargain hard to offset this model's severe depreciation.

Engines 1.4, 1.6 and 2.0 (136/165bhp) petrol; 1.5 (80/100bhp), 1.9 (120/130/140 bhp) and 2.0 diesel
Gearboxes 5- or 6-speed manual, 4-speed auto **Body styles** 5-door MPV with 7 seats **Dimensions** 4.25x2.09m (inc mirrors) **Insurance groups** 4 to 8 **Running costs** (per mile) 43p to 55p **Retained value** (3 years/36,000 miles) 28 to 31% **Which? safety rating** 11 (good)



75% Toyota Verso £14,015 to £20,920

The car-like Verso has adept steering, a firm ride and powerful brakes, but you'll need to choose T3 specification or above to get stability control.

There's space for five adults, but the two rearmost seats are just for kids. The 400-litre boot (715 litres with all rear seats folded down) is somewhat smaller than that of key rivals. But the flat boot floor makes loading easy.

The 1.6 and 1.8 petrol engines are pretty flexible for town driving but don't offer enough power for easy overtaking. The 1.6 averaged 32.5mpg and the 1.8 34mpg. The 2.2 diesel has more power and is best overall but its 37.7mpg is still below average for a diesel MPV.

WORTH KNOWING It was the most reliable new MPV in our 2006 survey.

Engines 1.6 and 1.8 petrol; 2.2 (134/175bhp) diesel
Gearbox options 5- or 6-speed manual, semi-auto **Body styles** 5-door MPV with 7 seats **Dimensions** 4.41x2.02m (inc mirrors) **Insurance groups** 5 to 11 **Running costs** (per mile) 38p to 53p **Retained value** (3 years/36,000 miles) 34 to 40% **Which? safety rating** 11.5 (good)



72% Citroën C4 Picasso £14,995 to £21,695

This looks radical but lags behind its rivals overall. The 2.0 diesel we drove had an electronically controlled clutch, which should offer the benefits of an auto with the economy of a manual. But the gear change is slow and labourous and our measured fuel consumption of 40.4mpg is short of Citroën's 46.3mpg.

The steering feels quite vague and body roll is noticeable. Over small bumps, like cobbles, the suspension is noisy, spoiling an otherwise quiet drive.

It's very spacious, though. There are three large seats in the middle but the two rearmost seats are for kids. The boot takes 575 litres with these seats folded, or 1,080 with all seats stowed.

WATCH OUT Citroën reliability tends to be poor, while depreciation is high.

Engines 1.8 and 2.0 petrol; 1.6 and 2.0 diesel **Gearbox options** 5-speed manual or 6-speed electronic **Body styles** 5-door MPV with 7 seats **Dimensions** 4.59x2.10m (inc mirrors) **Insurance groups** 6 to 9 **Running costs** (per mile) To be assessed (TBA) **Retained value** (3 years/36,000 miles) TBA **Which? safety rating** TBA

Citroën's C4 Picasso looks radical but it lags behind its rivals overall

What else can you buy?



CHRYSLER VOYAGER

If space is your main requirement, this full-sized MPV has it in spades. But watch out: it's one of the most costly MPVs to own and Chrysler's brand reliability is poor.

SCORE 69%



CITROËN BERLINGO

This is a cheap van-based MPV with five seats and plenty of space. It's plain and low powered, with few home comforts. Safety is equally basic and Citroën's reliability is still poor.

SCORE 71%



FIAT MULTIPLA

The Multipla, like the Honda FR-V, has two rows of three seats and a large boot. But its safety ratings can't match most rivals' and there's little to recommend it beyond the purchase price.

SCORE 70%



FORD FOCUS C-MAX

The five-seat C-Max was Ford's first stab at a small MPV, based on the Focus. It drives well and offers more headroom than a Focus. It was the least reliable new MPV in our 2006 survey.

SCORE 76%



FORD GALAXY

This comes with more seating space than the smaller S-Max, at the slight expense of luggage capacity. The higher body is detrimental to driving stability but it's not bad overall.

SCORE 72%



HYUNDAI MATRIX

The Matrix will seat four adults and one child, but it lacks the flexibility of rivals. It's well liked by owners, and its good reliability and standard five-year warranty make it worth a look.

SCORE 68%



72% Vauxhall Zafira

£13,495 to £22,165

The Zafira has space for four adults, as the middle seat in the middle row and the third-row seats are really for kids. There's a reasonable boot (495 litres), which expands to 865 litres with all the rear seats folded, leaving a flat floor.

The suspension is stiff but absorbs bumps well, while precise steering and good grip mean the Zafira clings to fast bends. The brakes are safe and strong.

We tested the 1.9 diesel with a six-speed auto transmission. It pulls quite well and the gear changes are smooth and sensibly spaced. Although it's not noisy, its tone can become annoying at higher speeds. There's some irritating wind noise, too. It returned 38.2mpg in our tests – close to Vauxhall's 39.2.

WORTH KNOWING Recent Vauxhalls had average reliability in our last survey.

Engines 1.6, 1.8, 2.0 turbo (200/240 bhp) and 2.2 pet; 1.9 (120/150 bhp) dsl **Gearboxes** 5- or 6-spd manual, 5-speed semi-auto, 4 or 6-speed auto **Bodies** 5-door MPV with 7 seats **Dimensions** 4.47m x 2.03m (inc mirrors) **Insurance** 5 to 15 **Running costs (per mile)** 39p to 56p **Ret'd value (3 yrs/ 36k miles)** 31 to 35% **Which? safety rating** 11.5 (good)



MITSUBISHI GRANDIS

The Grandis offers six- or seven-seat options. Its futuristic looks mask a fairly basic car with some poor safety design (see *Which?*, Jan 2007, p23).

SCORE 65%



SEAT ALTEA

This five-seater takes four adults and a child in comfort. It drives well and scores highly in our safety ratings. But Seat's brand reliability needs to improve.

SCORE 70%

What you should look for

VISIBILITY AND PARKING

MPVs often have quite poor visibility, due to the number of occupants, headrests and thick rear pillars. Choose one with rear parking sensors to avoid parking scuffs and bumps

RIDE QUALITY

MPVs cater for carrying just the driver through to seven people plus luggage. Take the family when you test-drive. Ideally, have the car for a weekend and try it loaded and empty

SPACE AND FLEXIBILITY

Consider your needs before you buy. Make sure you're happy with adjusting and folding the seats – some stow more neatly than others

LOAD CARRYING

MPVs have many possible combinations for carrying people and luggage. Ideally there will be no 'lip' in the boot aperture to lift loads over and the floor will be flat

ENTRY AND EXIT

Big doors and high rooflines make it easy to get in and out of MPVs. A sliding door further improves access. Higher seats reduce the need to stoop when you get in



How we test

Visibility and parking

Using a special rig, we mount a camera at the average driver's eye level and rotate it 360 degrees to create a panoramic view. This shows how much window pillars and headrests obstruct the view. We also rate the field of vision offered by the interior and exterior mirrors and whether the driver can see the car's extremities.

Extreme handling – the 'elk test'

When Mercedes' first generation A-class failed this 'emergency avoidance' swerve test in 1997, it brought vehicle stability into sharp focus. Our own 'elk test' pushes the car to its handling limits, with the driver swerving first left, then right in quick succession,

without touching the brakes. The aim is to complete the obstacle course quickly while maintaining control. With a good electronic stability control system (and systems do vary) some cars can be driven through the course at more than 60mph. Without this control, you have to drive much more slowly to avoid skidding.

Space and practicality

We measure boot storage by filling the space with foam blocks of known volumes. We measure the useful storage space with the seats in place and then with them stowed, as recommended by the manufacturer. All capacities are measured up to the window line (not with the car fully loaded up to the roof).



We assess the ease and practicality of installing child seats in each car

To assess practicality, we look at how many different seating combinations there are and how easy it is to change from one to another – very important for MPVs. We also consider how well designed the car is for luggage – such as how wide the boot opening is, whether the floor is flat or whether it has any awkward steps which might make it hard to load and stow large, heavy objects.

MODEL	PRICE	WHICH? TEST PERFORMANCE										SCORE %
	STARTING PRICE (£)	SPACE IN FRONT	SPACE IN REAR	BOOT SPACE AND PRACTICALITY	VISIBILITY AND PARKING	SUSPENSION COMFORT	HANDLING	BRAKES	EURO NCAP CRASH TEST	BRAND RELIABILITY		
HONDA FR-V	15,400	★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★★	77	
VOLKSWAGEN Touran	14,750	★★★★★	★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★	77	
MAZDA 5	14,400	★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	76	
FORD S-MAX	16,995	★★★★★	★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★	75	
RENAULT Grand Scénic	15,165	★★★★★	★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★★	★★	75	
TOYOTA Verso	14,015	★★★★★	★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	75	
CITROËN C4 Picasso	14,995	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★	★★★	★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★	72	
VAUXHALL Zafira	13,495	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★	72	

USING THE TABLE**Price**

The lowest on-the-road price in the range (including registration, delivery and 12 months' road tax).

Test performance

Ratings based on our rigorous independent road test and

convenience assessments.

The more stars the better.

Euro NCAP crash test This is the rating, out of five, based on the car's ability to protect adult occupants in Euro NCAP front and side crash tests.

Brand reliability Rating is based

on owners' feedback from our 2005 car survey.

Score

This ignores price and is based on:

Driving	33.33%
Comfort	33.33%
Practicality	33.33%

WHICH? CAR 2007-2008

Look out for our bigger and better annual car guide, published in July. It's free for all Which? members.



Which should you choose?

Best for families**VW TOURAN**

The Touran offers plenty for a growing family. While it may not set the pulse racing, it's a true all-rounder with few weaknesses. It offers the flexibility to mix adults and small children, and is spacious enough that you shouldn't need to trade up until the kids reach their teens.

**Greenest choice**

MAZDA 5 2.0 MZR-CD (DIESEL) Even though the 2.0 TDCi Ford S-Max achieved the lowest measured emissions and a creditable return on fuel in our tests, the 2.0

MZR-CD offers better performance, especially from a standing start – so



you need to work it less. It returned better economy in our tests and came very close to matching the S-Max on emissions.

Best used buy

VAUXHALL ZAFIRA It can be tricky to balance the need for a low price with serving all your practical needs, including long-term reliability. Both the Renault and Citroën have practical ability and low used prices, but neither brand cuts the mustard for reliability. The Zafira is a fairly cheap used buy (low starting prices and fairly high depreciation help) and brand reliability is OK.

**Budget buy**

VAUXHALL ZAFIRA The Vauxhall has the lowest starting price of the cars in our test. You can get discounts, too – we recently

haggled 17 per cent off a 1.8 Design model (*Which?*, December 06, p24). That said, your chances of gaining this much off a bottom-spec car are lower and it may be worth haggling on a higher-spec Citroën or Renault, which both regularly offer special deals

Overall Best Buys**HONDA FR-V /VOLKSWAGEN TOURAN/**

MAZDA 5 It's a three-way split between Honda, Volkswagen and Mazda. All are strong across the range, but the FR-V and Mazda win out on their reputation for reliability, flexible space for adults, kids and luggage and ease of use – the Mazda for its sliding doors and the Honda for its ease of parking. The Touran won't excite but is still a solid car with few weaknesses. Expect the impressive Ford S-Max to become a Best Buy some time soon – as long as it proves reliable.

