



Off-roaders

What you should look for



Fuel economy

Environmentalists loathe 4x4s' use of natural resources – with good reason, judging by our test economy figures for some 4x4s. A hybrid or a diesel is the most sensible choice.



Pedestrian safety

Off-roaders' threat to pedestrians is another reason they're unpopular in some quarters. The Honda CR-V and Toyota RAV4 are the most 'pedestrian-friendly' 4x4s on sale.



Off-road credentials

For serious off-road driving, you'll need a 4x4 with lots of grip (summer tyres won't cut it), good ground clearance, long suspension travel and low-range gearing.



On-road handling

If most of your driving is of the on-road variety, then choose with care. Due to their suspension settings, some off-roaders wallow in corners, while others are tuned for tarmac.



Seat space

Off-roaders are a popular alternative to MPVs for family transport, so again there's the choice of five- or seven-seat models. Check all seats will suit their intended occupants.

Insider information

'Off-roaders are a compromise between off-road utility and on-road refinement. Compact off-roaders compete with medium cars and small MPVs on space and offer limited off-road capability. At the other end of the class, luxury 4x4s, such as the Land Rover Range Rover Sport, have all the creature comforts, refined on-road cruising and some rough-terrain ability – but very high running costs.'



David Evans
Senior researcher,
Motoring



Off-roaders are despised by many but often adored by their owners, according to the results of our reader survey. Even the latest Land Rover Discovery – a 4x4 which has sent nearly half of its owners back to their dealer for repairs in the last year – has a staggering 92 per cent 'recommend to a friend' score. Other 4x4s are also very popular, often with 75 per cent or more of owners prepared to recommend them.

There are lots of reasons people love off-roaders – not least their raised driving position (which affords a good view of the road); their extra four-wheel-drive grip in tricky conditions; their space and versatility, and their perceived status. But whether you fall into the love 'em or hate 'em camp, it would be unfair to tar all 4x4s with the same brush – some are much more sensible than others.

A-Z model index

New off-roaders

BMW X5 **p92**
Honda CR-V **p92**
Land Rover Discovery **p93**

Land Rover Freelander **p93**
Land Rover Range
Rover Sport **p94**
Lexus RX **p94**

Mercedes-Benz M-class **p95**
Nissan Murano **p95**
Nissan X-Trail **p96**
Toyota RAV4 **p96**

WHICH? CAR 2006/2007 NEW OFF-ROADERS

BMW X5

The BMW X5 is a 4x4 that is more suited to the road than the rough. It's a big car, and spacious inside even for those well over six feet tall. Boot space is about average at 465 litres with the rear seats up, and you can fold them down or remove them completely.

The 3.0 diesel auto we tested has loads of pulling power, accelerates well and is refined. However, it is quite thirsty for a diesel (we got 26.9mpg versus the official 30.1). It handles well on the road, feels stable, has excellent braking power and is fun to drive. Body roll in corners isn't a problem despite the height of the car, while steering is smooth and precise and gives the driver good road feel. Ride comfort over most roads and bumps is good but you do feel small road imperfections.

The quality of the build and materials is very high. Luxurious touches include wood panelling as standard on all models and leather upholstery on some. The X5 is expensive to buy and insure, but it holds its value well.

Which? Verdict

It's been around for a while but the X5 is still one of the best luxury 4x4s. Its handling and poise are superb, and owners seem to love it.

Engines 3.0, 4.4, 4.6 and 4.8 petrol; 3.0 diesel **Gearbox options** 5- or 6-speed manual, 5- or 6-speed semi-automatic **Body styles** 5-door off-roader **Dimensions** 4.67m x 1.87m (not inc mirrors) **Insurance groups** 17 to 20 **Running costs (per mile)** 70p to 127p

Evaluation

Reliability

Overall, BMWs are average for reliability.

Troublespots

There were too few survey replies for us to name the troublespots.

£36,775 to £62,640

Production dates: From Oct 2000

WHICH? ROAD TEST SCORE **81%**



Safety Which? safety score **n/a** Euro NCAP crash test **★★★★★**

Security Theft from **n/a** Theft of **n/a**

Ownership Recommend to a friend **84%** (57 owners responded)

Honda CR-V

A powerful diesel engine and smooth six-speed manual gearbox are among the selling points of the Honda CR-V.

We liked the strong performance of the 2.2 diesel, although failed to match the official economy figures (we saw 34.4mpg to Honda's 42.2). Its brakes could be more powerful, though – it takes longer to stop than some rivals.

On the whole, the CR-V delivers a comfy ride, although very bad surface bumps make themselves felt strongly. Cornering is hampered by quite a high level of body roll but the car does feel secure and handles well otherwise.

Build quality is good inside and out, as we've now come to expect from Honda. Boot space is better than some larger off-landers, at 628 litres. You can also slide back or recline the 60/40 split/fold rear seats.

Space in the front is about average but back-seat passengers should find plenty of room. There are numerous cubbyholes around the cabin to help compensate for the small glovebox.

Which? Verdict

A 4x4 you can drive without pangs of guilt. It scores well for pedestrian safety, is incredibly reliable, and employs sensibly sized engines.

Engines 2.0 petrol; 2.2 diesel **Gearbox options** 5- or 6-speed manual, 4-speed automatic **Body styles** 5-door off-roader **Dimensions** 4.61m x 2.05m (inc mirrors) **Insurance groups** 11 to 12 **Running costs (per mile)** 46p to 55p

Evaluation

Reliability

Age group	98-00	01-03	04-06
Petrol/Diesel Breakdowns	—	★★★★★	★★★★★
Faults	—	★★★★★	★★★★★
Niggles	—	★★★★★	★★★★★

Troublespots

2001-2003 None
2004-2006 None

£18,075 to £23,850

Production dates: From Dec 2001

WHICH? ROAD TEST SCORE **70%**



Safety Which? safety score **n/a** Euro NCAP crash test **★★★★☆**

Security Theft from **n/a** Theft of **n/a**

Ownership Recommend to a friend **85%** (255 owners responded)

KEY: Reliability ★ = poor; ★★ = average; ★★★ = good Security 0 to 19% = very poor; 20 to 39% = poor; 40 to 59% = fair; 60 to 79% = good; 80 to 100% = excellent Safety Which? score Cross-sector rating. Euro NCAP Sector-specific rating. The more stars, the safer the car.

Land Rover Discovery

The latest version of the Land Rover Discovery is one of the few 4x4s that copes well with rough off-road terrain. However, it isn't the most enjoyable off-roader on tarmac. It soaks up all types of unevenness with aplomb but there's considerable body roll in corners, especially when you change direction quickly. This makes the Land Rover feel unsteady at times.

Steering is smooth and responsive but gives little road feel. The 2.7 diesel we tested is refined at all speeds and the interior is a quiet place to be. We liked the spontaneous and smooth six-speed automatic gearbox that is standard on the top-of-the-range diesel and all petrol models.

On the downside, the diesel engine isn't quick and it's thirsty – we managed 24.8mpg, well below the 36.7 claim.

Most versions of the Discovery come with seven adult-sized seats and are roomy. The five seats in the rear fold down to create plenty of practical load space – 2,558 litres all told.

Which? Verdict

It's a genuine mud-plugger, but the new Discovery doesn't drive so well on the road. Owners love it, but say too many have already gone wrong.

Engines 4.4 petrol; 2.7 diesel **Gearbox options** 6-speed manual, 6-speed automatic **Body styles** 5-door off-roader **Dimensions** 4.83m x 2.19m (inc mirrors) **Insurance groups** 13 to 16 **Running costs (per mile)** 58p to 110p

£27,040 to £48,540

Production dates: From Nov 2004

WHICH? ROAD TEST SCORE **76%**



Evaluation

Safety Which? safety score **n/a** Euro NCAP crash test ★★★★★

Security Theft from **n/a** Theft of **n/a**

Ownership Recommend to a friend **92%** (36 owners responded)

Reliability	Age group	98-00	01-03	04-06	Troublespots
Petrol/Diesel	Breakdowns	—	—	★★★	2004-2006 Suspension
	Faults	—	—	★	
	Niggles	—	—	★	

Land Rover Freelander

The Freelander has always been a big seller in the small 4x4 market, but this version has almost had its chips and is making way for an all-new model.

Since 2005, it's only been sold with one engine, the 2.0 diesel, although petrols are available second-hand if you want them. The diesel lacks power and struggles a bit, although off-road performance is still better than in some of its competitors. The on-road driving dynamics are mixed. The Freelander soaks up bumps with great ease, but in corners there's a lot of body roll and it generally doesn't feel as stable as it should. And, disappointingly, there is no stability control, even as an option.

Steering is smooth but doesn't give the driver much road feel, while manoeuvring in tight spaces is tricky.

Inside, there's good elbow- and legroom, although headroom isn't great and six footers will struggle to get comfy. The boot is average for a small 4x4 but practically shaped and easy to access via the side-hinged rear door.

Which? Verdict

On its way out as the all-new Freelander arrives, so you may find some good deals. It's not much fun to own or drive, though.

Engines 1.8 and 2.5 V6 petrol; 2.0 diesel **Gearbox options** 5-speed manual, 5-speed automatic **Body styles** 5-door estate, 3-door softback, 3-door hardback **Dimensions** 4.38m x 2.07m (inc mirrors) **Insurance groups** 10 to 13 **Running costs (per mile)** 48p to 67p

£18,825 to £25,895

Production dates: From Oct 1997 to autumn 2006

WHICH? ROAD TEST SCORE **61%**



Evaluation

Safety Which? safety score **n/a** Euro NCAP crash test ★★★★★

Security Theft from **n/a** Theft of **n/a**

Ownership Recommend to a friend **33%** (189 owners responded)

Reliability	Age group	98-00	01-03	04-06	Troublespots
Petrol/Diesel	Breakdowns	★	★★★	★★★	1998-2000 Exhaust system, cylinder head, electric windows, some other interior equipment, some non-engine electrics, clutch, some other gears/clutch components 2001-2003 Some engine electrics, cylinder head, clutch 2004-2006 None
	Faults	★★★	★★★	★★★	
	Niggles	★	★★★	★	

WHICH? CAR 2006/2007 NEW OFF-ROADERS

Land Rover Range Rover Sport

£35,545 to £63,045

Production dates: From Jun 2005

WHICH? ROAD TEST SCORE **82%**

This large 4x4 is a good drive but it gulps down fuel, and running costs are high.

Launched last year, the confusingly-titled model is actually based on the latest Discovery, not the Range Rover. It's not as tall, long or wide as the 'full-sized' Range Rover but still has lots of space, a luxurious interior and plenty of equipment, especially on SE models and above. Prices range from around £35,500 for the 2.7 TDV6 S up to more than £63,000 for the top-spec 4.2 V8, which offers on-road pace and off-road ability. There are plenty of options, too.

It's a pleasure to get behind the wheel of the Sport and enjoy a very good, quiet, comfortable drive. But in our tests the supercharged version managed just 16.8mpg – so an £80 tankful will cover just 311 miles. The 2.7 diesel should be better for your pocket and the planet (it claims to do 28.3mpg).

Insurance is less than for its key rivals, the BMW X5 and Porsche Cayenne. However, Land Rover's brand reliability is still poor overall.

Which? Verdict

Very capable prestige 4x4 to rival the BMW X5. But petrol versions cost a fortune to run and Land Rover's reliability tends to be poor.

Engines 4.4 V8, 4.2 supercharged V8; 2.7 V6 diesel **Gearbox options** 6-speed auto **Body styles** 5-door off-roader **Dimensions** 4.80 x 2.17m (inc mirrors) **Insurance groups** 13 to 18 **Running costs (per mile)** 65p to 131p

Evaluation

Reliability

Overall, Land Rovers are poor for reliability.

Troublespots

There were too few survey replies for us to name the troublespots.



Safety Which? safety score **n/a** Euro NCAP crash test **n/a**

Security Theft from **n/a** Theft of **n/a**

Ownership Recommend to a friend **n/a** (too few owners responded)

Lexus RX

£31,908 to £45,233

Production dates: From May 2003

WHICH? ROAD TEST SCORE **74%**

The RX comes as a conventional petrol or, like the RX400h model we tested, with hybrid petrol/electric power (a 3.3 petrol coupled with two electric motors).

These electric motors can propel the car smoothly and quietly to up to 30mph. But put your foot down and the V6 engine thrusts the RX forward with an unobtrusive throaty burble. It's a shame that the light steering has poor feedback and is sensitive to strong power inputs, so beware of the car drifting if you're too heavy-footed away from the lights.

Overall, the hybrid's economy is on a par with an equivalent-sized diesel 4x4 (we managed 30.7mpg), but its 'green' benefits are most noticeable in city use, where it helps minimise local pollution.

The RX is put together well and nicely equipped. The main controls are clearly laid out and easy to use, but there are lots of similar-looking buttons for minor functions on the centre console. There's good space and comfort all-round for even the tallest people. The boot's 900 litres grow to 1,500 with the seats down.

Which? Verdict

The RX is certainly more of a luxury car than an off-roader, but it's good in that role. The hybrid model helps reduce emissions, especially in town.

Engines 3.0 and 3.5 petrol; 3.3 hybrid (petrol/electric) **Gearbox options** 5-speed manual, 5-speed automatic, CVT automatic **Body styles** 5-door off-roader **Dimensions** 4.76m x 1.85m (not inc mirrors) **Insurance groups** 16 to 17 **Running costs (per mile)** 69p to 96p

Evaluation

Reliability

Overall, Lexus cars are excellent for reliability.

Troublespots

There were too few survey replies for us to name the troublespots.



Safety Which? safety score **n/a** Euro NCAP crash test **n/a**

Security Theft from **n/a** Theft of **n/a**

Ownership Recommend to a friend **n/a** (too few owners responded)

KEY: Reliability ★ = poor; ★★ = average; ★★★ = good Security 0 to 19% = very poor; 20 to 39% = poor; 40 to 59% = fair; 60 to 79% = good; 80 to 100% = excellent Safety Which? score Cross-sector rating. Euro NCAP Sector-specific rating. The more stars, the safer the car.

Mercedes-Benz M-class

The M-class was originally launched in 1998, but this latest version came out in late 2005. Unlike in some rivals there is no seven-seat option; however cabin room is extremely spacious both front and rear – even people up to 6'6" tall can easily get comfy on the firm, well shaped seats. The boot is also better than most with 833 litres of space, or 2,050 litres with the rear seats folded.

On the road, the M-class grips well and feels very stable, although road feel through the steering wheel is no better than adequate – keen drivers might feel a little let down by this. The more powerful of the two 3.0 diesel engines, badged ML 320 CDI, is terrific. It's fast and hushed at all speeds, which makes this 4x4 a very relaxed motorway cruiser. The seven-speed semi-auto box also reacts quickly and is smooth.

Build quality was criticised on the old M-class, but it's right up to the expected high standards this time around. And, although it's pricey, the M-class holds its value well – especially diesel models.

Which? Verdict

A big improvement on the old M-class, with powerful and refined diesel engines. But Mercedes' brand reliability still raises questions.

Engines 3.5 and 5.0 petrol; 3.0 diesel (190/224bhp) **Gearbox options** 7-speed semi-automatic **Body styles** 5-door off-roader **Dimensions** 4.78m x 2.13m (inc mirrors) **Insurance groups** 16 to 20 **Running costs (per mile)** 70p to 105p

£35,370 to £50,430

Production dates: From Sep 2005

WHICH? ROAD TEST SCORE **83%**



Evaluation

Reliability

Overall, Mercedes-Benz cars are poor for reliability.

Troublespots

There were too few survey replies for us to name the troublespots.

Safety Which? safety score **n/a** Euro NCAP crash test **n/a**

Security Theft from **n/a** Theft of **n/a**

Ownership Recommend to a friend **n/a** (too few owners responded)

Nissan Murano

The eye-catching Murano makes the look of other 4x4s appear dated. It's more of a 'soft roader' than a true mud-plugger, but it's well specified and not slow either, with a 3.5-litre V6 engine (a detuned version of the one used in the Nissan 350Z sports car).

The Murano does have something of a drink problem (we measured 21.4mpg versus Nissan's 23mpg) but, that apart, would be a good choice as an off-roader exclusively for on-road duties. It's keenly priced at £29,995 and the only options are metallic paint and a security tracking system. Everything else in this roomy and comfortable car is standard fit including satellite navigation, a Bose sound system, leather upholstery and a built-in camera to help with parking.

The smooth engine is easy to control but the standard automatic transmission can respond slowly when accelerating. That said, once into its stride, the Murano's performance impresses and four-wheel drive provides good traction on slippery roads or loose terrain.

Which? Verdict

One model, one price, lots of kit – the Murano's approach is simple and refreshing. A serious thirst for fuel is its principal drawback.

Engines 3.5 V6 **Gearbox options** Automatic only (CVT) **Body styles** 5-door off-roader **Dimensions** 4.77m x 1.88m (not inc mirrors) **Insurance groups** 15 **Running costs (per mile)** 72p

£29,995

Production dates: From Mar 2005

WHICH? ROAD TEST SCORE **74%**



Evaluation

Reliability

Overall, Nissans are average for reliability.

Troublespots

There were too few survey replies for us to name the troublespots.

Safety Which? safety score **n/a** Euro NCAP crash test **n/a**

Security Theft from **n/a** Theft of **n/a**

Ownership Recommend to a friend **n/a** (too few owners responded)

WHICH? CAR 2006/2007 NEW OFF-ROADERS

Nissan X-Trail

Nissan offers its small off-roader in two-wheel drive as well as four-wheel drive form. The two-wheel-drive versions are cheaper to buy and have slightly lower running costs.

We tested the four-wheel-drive 2.2 dCi diesel, which has plenty of power and is fairly fuel efficient (35.8mpg in our tests versus the 37.2 official figure). But refinement falls short – at low revs and when the engine is cold, it makes itself felt and heard. The six-speed manual box also dislikes the cold, so engaging first and reverse gears can feel stiff.

The X-Trail's ride is mostly good and it soaks up all but the largest of bumps with aplomb. It also hugs the road well, feeling stable and secure in corners, although the brakes could do with more power. Steering feels easy but the self-centring action is quite strong, making the car feel heavier than it really is.

Interior space is reasonably good – four six-footers fit in with ease – but it's not quite as spacious as in some. Boot space is about average at 410 litres.

Which? Verdict

Nissan's small 4x4 isn't bad to drive and owners seem impressed. But it can't match the peerless reliability of Honda's rival, the CR-V.

Engines 2.0, 2.5 petrol; 2.2 (112/136bhp) diesel **Gearbox options** 5- or 6-speed manual, 4-speed automatic **Body styles** 5-door off-roader **Dimensions** 4.46m x 1.77m (not inc mirrors) **Insurance groups** 9 to 12 **Running costs (per mile)** 48p to 57p

Evaluation

Reliability	Age group	98-00	01-03	04-06
Petrol/Diesel Breakdowns	–	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★
Faults	–	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★
Niggles	–	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★

£16,825 to £23,345
Production dates: From Oct 2001

WHICH? ROAD TEST SCORE 69%



Safety Which? safety score n/a Euro NCAP crash test ★★★★★
Security Theft from n/a Theft of n/a
Ownership Recommend to a friend 74% (165 owners responded)
Troublespots
2004-2006 Engine management system/ECU, some other main engine components

Toyota RAV4

We tested the range-topping 2.2 diesel (177bhp) with a six-speed gearbox. It's quite sluggish unless you rev it hard, but, if you do, it packs plenty of punch.

The gear change is quite notchy and the engine feels unrefined as you move through the rev range. Although noise is generally low, both engine and wind noise become apparent at high speeds.

The four-wheel drive system copes with gentle off-road driving, but the limited ground clearance and high-ratio gears dent any real off-road ambition.

On tarmac, the RAV4's more natural habitat, the steering is responsive and stability good, but poorer surfaces show up the firm seats and stiff suspension.

The RAV4 is nicely put together with a pleasant cabin and intuitive controls. Front space is plentiful, even for taller people, but the back is more cramped, especially in the middle seat. Taller passengers may find the head restraints too low. The decent 586-litre boot grows to 1,469 litres with the seats down, but there's an inconvenient step in the floor.

Which? Verdict

Well made and cheap to run, but refinement isn't all it could be in the diesel. We want Toyota to recall early RAV4s – see p16 for more.

Engines 2.0 petrol; 2.2 diesel (136/177 bhp) **Gearbox options** 5- or 6-speed manual, 4-speed automatic **Body styles** 5-door off-roader **Dimensions** 4.40m x 1.82m (not inc mirrors) **Insurance groups** 11 to 13 **Running costs (per mile)** 44p to 56p

Evaluation

Reliability
Overall, Toyotas are excellent for reliability.

£19,040 to £27,015
Production dates: From Feb 2006

WHICH? ROAD TEST SCORE 68%



Safety Which? safety score ★★★★★ (11.5) Euro NCAP crash test ★★★★★
Security Theft from 50% Theft of 79%
Ownership Recommend to a friend n/a (too few owners responded)
Troublespots
There were too few survey replies for us to name the troublespots.