

Sports cars

What you should look for



Great handling

Apart from aesthetic appeal, sports cars also need to deliver a thrilling drive. You could take our word for which do, but you may have more fun trying them out!



Ride quality

Although practicality tends to go out the window in this class, make sure you can handle the car's (probably quite firm) ride on longer journeys – it could be a real pain in the bum.



Fuel economy

Think carefully about your choice of engine. That 5.0 petrol might offer blistering pace but a smaller engine can be almost as much fun (legally) without such ruinous fuel bills.



Folding hard-top roof

Electrically-powered folding metal roofs are the in thing, as they feel more civilised and secure in cold weather and are still great for sunny days. The Mercedes SLK started it...



Manual gearbox

Although some sports cars offer automatic, or semi-auto, gearboxes, a manual shift is still the best choice for those who love driving and want to feel really involved with the car.

Insider information

'Convertibles are all the rage at the moment – Britain is the biggest market in Europe for drop-tops, despite our dodgy climate. Clearly, we like to enjoy the sun on the occasions we get to see it. Due to their fashionable nature, used-car prices are very strong for all sports cars – you'll have no shortage of buyers if you're selling a Mazda MX-5 or Mini Convertible, for example.'



George Marshall-Thornhill
Senior researcher,
Motoring



From £13k to £86k, there are new sports cars to tickle most people's fancy on the following pages – and a few popular used models as well. They are loosely grouped together here for the thrill-seekers among you and, although aspects of their performance are scored in a similar way, we're not suggesting these cars are all direct rivals – for example, although the Mini Convertible and 6 Series are both built by BMW, the similarities end there.

Running costs vary enormously, but it's interesting that you can run the cheapest Mazda MX-5 for less than you can some powerful superminis. Even a smaller-engined BMW Z4 can be gentle on your wallet. So if practicality isn't an issue, one of these could be just the ticket.

A-Z model index

New sports cars

Alfa Romeo Brera	p98
BMW 6 Series	p98
BMW Z4	p99
Mazda MX-5	p99
Mazda RX-8	p100

Mercedes-Benz SLK p100

Mini Convertible	p101
Nissan 350Z	p101
Used sports cars	
Audi TT	p102
Mazda MX-5	p102

Mercedes-Benz CLK p102

Mercedes-Benz SLK p102

WHICH? CAR 2006/2007 NEW SPORTS CARS

Alfa Romeo Brera

With head-turning looks, the new Brera is a welcome entrant to the sports car market. It has pace, too – the 3.2 petrol engine dispatches 0-60mph in less than seven seconds. The 2.2 is also pretty swift and the six-speed box is slick – but you need to rev the engine hard to get the best performance from this fairly heavy coupé. Our fuel figure of 29.7 isn't far off Alfa's 30.1mpg.

Suspension comfort is adequate at best and bumps make themselves felt. However, handling is excellent and makes the Brera great fun. Body roll is subdued and corners can be taken at speed without trouble. The steering feels responsive, light and direct.

Interior space is poor, so if you're well over six-feet tall you'll find it hard to get comfy. Forget completely about sitting in the back – there's no legroom.

The sense of style continues inside the smart cabin. Quality seems good, and there are no creaks or rattles, even when on bumpy roads. It remains to be seen how the Brera fairs longer term.

Which? Verdict

The Brera certainly looks the part and is lots of fun to drive. But it's pretty cramped inside and will need to buck Alfa's poor reliability record.

Engines 2.2 and 3.2 petrol; 2.4 diesel
Gearbox options 6-speed manual **Body styles** 3-door coupé **Dimensions** 4.41m x 1.83m (not inc mirrors) **Insurance groups** 15 to 18 **Running costs (per mile)** 55p to 71p

Evaluation

Reliability
Overall, Alfa Romeos are poor for reliability.

£22,800 to £29,850

Production dates: From Apr 2006

WHICH? ROAD TEST SCORE 77%



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

BMW 6 Series

With love-it-or-hate-it looks, BMW's first 6 Series for two decades was launched in 2004 as a two-door coupé and convertible. Both are expensive to buy (the coupé starts at £47,000) and to run.

For your money you get a fast, lavishly equipped car, and one that should keep at least half its list price over the first three years. But with rivals including the Porsche 911 and the new Jaguar XK, competition is tough.

The 6 Series impressed us with its performance – this car shifts. It's a relaxed cruiser, too, with good build quality and smooth engines, although the ride isn't comfortable on bad roads. It handles well, is secure in corners and has a great steering feel.

There are some token back seats but this is really a car for two adults and their luggage. The boot's not bad, however – you get 450 litres in the coupé and 300 in the convertible.

Although running costs aren't cheap, we were close to BMW's 25.9mpg claim for the 645i coupé, returning 25.2mpg.

Which? Verdict

BMW's 6 Series is a true successor to the brawny original 1980s model. Fast, comfortable and expensive – form a queue behind the rock stars.

Engines 3.0, 4.4 V8, 4.8 V8 and 5.0 V10 petrol **Gearbox options** 6-speed manual, 6-speed automatic, 6-speed semi-automatic (SMG) **Body styles** 2-door coupé and convertible **Dimensions** 4.82m x 1.86m (not inc mirrors) **Insurance groups** 18 to 20 **Running costs (per mile)** 92p to 156p

Evaluation

Reliability
Overall, BMWs are average for reliability.

£47,050 to £86,400

Production dates: From Mar 2004

WHICH? ROAD TEST SCORE 85%



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

BMW Z4

The striking Z4 is the successor to the Z3 sports car and, like that model, is a two seater.

It now comes as a coupé as well as the previous soft-top. New for the soft-top is an electrically powered hood for £710 – a great party piece for the traffic lights. Despite the trickery, there's still room for a 260-litre boot.

Handling is fun, safe and predictable, and stability control comes as standard in case you get carried away. Thanks to the supportive seats and relatively compliant suspension, the Z4 is a reasonably comfortable long-distance cruiser. Getting in and out with dignity is a challenge, though.

Prices start at £22,945 and there's a huge list of options including the useful (xenon lights at £415) and the not so useful (wooden trim at £160).

We tested the 2.0-litre engine, which is powerful enough for most tastes. The official figure of 37.7mpg seems optimistic, but our test result of 34.4mpg is still pretty good for a sports car.

Which? Verdict

A big improvement on the old Z3, the Z4 is quick and reasonably refined for an open-top car. It's a pretty safe investment, too.

Engines 2.0, 2.2, 2.5, 3.0 and 3.2 petrol **Gearbox options** 6-speed manual, 6-speed auto, 6-speed semi-auto **Body styles** 2-door coupé and convertible **Dimensions** 4.09m x 1.78m (not inc mirrors) **Insurance groups** 17 to 20 **Running costs (per mile)** 48p to 92p

Evaluation**Reliability**

Overall, BMWs are average for reliability.

Troublespots

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

£22,945 to £42,795

Production dates: From Jun 2003

WHICH? ROAD TEST SCORE 78%**Safety** Which? safety score ★★★★★ (10.5) Euro NCAP crash test ★★★★★**Security** Theft from 47% Theft of 76%**Ownership** Recommend to a friend n/a (too few owners responded)**£15,650 to £18,950**

Production dates: From Oct 2005

WHICH? ROAD TEST SCORE n/a**Safety** Which? safety score ★★★★★ (8.5) Euro NCAP crash test n/a**Security** Theft from 39% Theft of 77%**Ownership** Recommend to a friend n/a (too few owners responded)**Which? Verdict**

Mazda's seminal sports car is now into its third generation. It's a bit heavier than before, but still looks great value and should be reliable.

Engines 1.8 and 2.0 petrol **Gearbox options** 5- or 6-speed manual **Body styles** 2-door convertible, 2-door folding hard-top (coming soon) **Dimensions** 4.00m x 1.72m (not inc mirrors) **Insurance groups** 12 to 13 **Running costs (per mile)** 36p to 45p

Evaluation**Reliability**

Overall, Mazdas are excellent for reliability.

Troublespots

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

Mazda MX-5

At the time of going to press we're still testing the MX-5, but first impressions are good. In common with other new models, the MX-5 has put on a bit of weight, but Mazda has tried to combat this with bigger engines. In the case of the 2.0, it works – performance is up on the outgoing model. So is safety – stability control is now available for the first time, though sadly on 2.0-litre models only. Mazda has also tried to improve crash safety, resulting in a Which? safety score of 8.5 – on a par with many superminis. The 1.8 models don't have side or head airbags.

The car sits further off the ground, which can affect handling, but the MX-5 still hits the mark in this respect. The ride has been improved, so longer journeys are more realistic in this version. The boot is bigger (by six litres) and it's a more practical shape – it will take two squashy weekend bags. The jury's still out on the looks, but otherwise Mazda has done a good job updating the world's number one sports car.

WHICH? CAR 2006/2007 NEW SPORTS CARS

Mazda RX-8

£21,400 to £25,995

Production dates: From Aug 2003

WHICH? ROAD TEST SCORE **74%**

Mazda continues to stick with the oddball rotary engine for its premium sports car but this time has dressed the vehicle in a unique four-door body. The rear doors are hinged at the back, and there's no central pillar – so access is good. Headroom is tight but the 290-litre boot means you can just about run an RX-8 as a family car and there are Isofix mounts for child seats in the rear.

There are two states of tune for the engine; the lower-powered one has more pull, makes more sense for everyday driving, and is cheaper, too. However, both versions have a thirst for fuel. Mazda claims a realistic 26.2mpg for the 192bhp car – we managed 26.6.

Limited visibility can make parking difficult, but the seats are comfortable and the driving position well designed. The standard Bose stereo is powerful, adding to the RX-8's capabilities as a long-distance tourer. In normal use the engine is quiet; when worked hard it makes a distinctive buzzing noise, which is not unpleasant.

Which? Verdict

Unique among coupés for having four doors, the RX-8 is lots of fun yet still quite practical. But it's thirsty and has a high breakdown rate.

Engines 1.3 twin rotor (192/231bhp) petrol **Gearbox options** 5- or 6-speed manual **Body styles** 4-door coupé **Dimensions** 4.43m x 1.85m (inc mirrors) **Insurance groups** 15 to 17 **Running costs (per mile)** 55p to 61p

Evaluation

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



Safety Which? safety score ★★★★★ (10) Euro NCAP crash test n/a

Security Theft from 70% Theft of 77%

Ownership Recommend to a friend 80% (46 owners responded)

Troublespots

2004-2006 None

Mercedes-Benz SLK

£28,525 to £51,030

Production dates: From Jul 2004

WHICH? ROAD TEST SCORE **80%**

If you fancy the feel of the wind in your hair as you're driving, but are worried that you might get chilly, this two-seater roadster could be the answer.

The SLK has a £350 Airscarf option – a hot-air vent around the neck area to keep you and your passenger warm when the top's down.

The options list doesn't stop there, though. Among other things, you can go for Chromaflair paintwork at £3,740 and an AMG body kit for £2,605 (you may want to put that money towards the real thing, the £51,030 SLK AMG 55, instead).

The SLK is a joy to drive. Steering and handling are in keeping with its sporty image, and the cabin is well designed and easy to use.

The interior is short of elbowroom, but the seats slide back a long way to accommodate people up to 6ft 6in tall. The basic 1.8 supercharged (200K) engine is more than powerful enough to have some fun, and economy isn't too bad either. We recorded 30.4mpg, a bit below the claimed average of 32.5.

Which? Verdict

The clever folding roof is no longer unique, but the latest SLK is much better to drive. Low-spec versions have little equipment, though.

Engines 1.8 supercharged, 3.0 V6, 3.5 V6 and 5.5 V8 petrol **Gearbox options** 6-speed manual, 7-speed semi-automatic **Body styles** 2-door convertible **Dimensions** 4.08m x 1.97m (inc mirrors) **Insurance groups** 16 to 19 **Running costs (per mile)** 54p to 96p

Evaluation

Reliability
Overall, Mercedes-Benz cars are poor for reliability.



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)

Troublespots

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

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.

Mini Convertible

It's popular and desirable, so be prepared to pay for the BMW-built Mini Convertible. The entry-level model starts at £13,595 – and that's before you've thought about adding options such as air-con and alloy wheels. It's certainly worth adding the useful £150 TLC five-year servicing pack.

The lowest-powered 1.6 petrol engine produces 90bhp – which isn't capable of shifting the 1.5-tonne body too quickly. BMW claims 39.2mpg is possible, but our tests returned 35.8. If you want performance to match the heritage, it has to be the supercharged Cooper S, which costs an eye-watering £17,960 or more.

This is a Mini, so there's little space inside. It's one of the few four-seater cabriolets, but there's limited headroom in the back with the roof up. With the roof down it's pretty windy beyond 40mph. The 120-litre boot is tiny.

This drop-top is so desirable that it should retain nearly two thirds of its original value over the first three years.

Which? Verdict

Despite its diminutive dimensions the Mini Convertible will take four people, although the rear is cramped. Resale values are very strong.

Engines 1.6 (90/115/163/170/210bhp) petrol **Gearbox options** 5- or 6-speed manual, 6-speed semi-auto, CVT **Body styles** 2-door convertible **Dimensions** 3.65m x 1.93m (inc mirrors) **Insurance groups** 6 to 18 **Running costs (per mile)** 32p to 51p

Evaluation

Reliability

Overall, Minis are good for reliability. The Convertible should have similar reliability to the standard Mini (see p30).

Troublespots

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

£13,595 to £23,060

Production dates: From Jun 2004

WHICH? ROAD TEST SCORE 71%



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 350Z

An update of the Nissan 350Z this summer saw all models get the 300bhp engine previously reserved for the range-topping GT4 version.

There's little other change – mainly because there wasn't much wrong in the first place. There are two trim levels: standard and GT, which adds heated leather seats, cruise control and a high-quality stereo. The standard coupé is cheapest, at £26,345.

Handling could be better but it feels safe, and electronic stability control comes as standard. In a straight line this is a quick car. Add to that the 350Z's precise gearbox and it feels outstanding to drive. It's well built, too, with some stylish touches around the cabin. But the Nissan lags behind rivals in practical matters. It's strictly a two-seater, cabin space isn't generous, and the boot is tiny (just 130 litres in the convertible).

Prices, insurance and servicing are expensive compared with rivals'. Fuel economy is poor, too, but we bettered Nissan's claim of 24.8mpg by 1.4mpg.

Which? Verdict

A brawny sports car with plenty of power. It's not exactly practical but there are some nice touches inside. A bit pricey to buy and costly to run.

Engines 3.5 V6 petrol **Gearbox options** 6-speed manual **Body styles** 2-door coupé and convertible **Dimensions** 4.31m x 1.82m (not inc mirrors) **Insurance groups** 18 to 19 **Running costs (per mile)** 61p to 64p

Evaluation

Reliability

Overall, Nissans are average for reliability.

Troublespots

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

£26,345 to £30,345

Production dates: From Oct 2003

WHICH? ROAD TEST SCORE 76%



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 USED SPORTS CARS

Audi TT

Up to £26,500 Production dates: From Feb 1999 to Sep 2006



Which? Verdict

Possibly a victim of its own success, the outgoing Audi TT is now a common sight. Let's hope the new model is more reliable and offers a few more thrills.

Engines 1.8 (150/161/180/187/225bhp) and 3.2 petrol **Gearbox options** 5- or 6-speed manual, 5- or 6-speed auto **Body styles** 2-door convertible, 3-door coupé **Dimensions** 4.05m x 1.77m (not inc mirrors) **Insurance groups** 17 to 19

Evaluation	Reliability	Age group	98-00	01-03	04-06
	Petrol	Breakdowns	—	★★★	—
		Faults	—	★★★	—
		Niggles	—	★	—
Safety					
Which? score	n/a				
Euro NCAP crash test	★★★★☆				
Security					
Theft from	n/a	Troublespots			
Theft of	n/a	2001-2003 Dashboard switches, electric windows, non-engine electrics, suspension			
Ownership					
Recommend to a friend	73%				
(62 owners responded)					

Mazda MX-5

£3,600 to £14,800 Production dates: From Apr 1998 to Sep 2005



Which? Verdict

The evergreen MX-5 took the successful Lotus Elan formula and made it reliable and waterproof. Sports car ownership doesn't get much more painless than this.

Engines 1.8 (88/109/114/131/140/143bhp) petrol **Gearbox options** 5- or 6-speed manual, 4-speed auto **Body styles** 2-door convertible **Dimensions** 3.98m x 1.68m (not inc mirrors) **Insurance groups** 11 to 15

Evaluation	Reliability	Age group	98-00	01-03	04-06
	Petrol	Breakdowns	★★★★★	★★★	—
		Faults	★★★★★	★★★★★	—
		Niggles	★★★★★	★★★★★	—
Safety					
Which? score	n/a				
Euro NCAP crash test	★★★★☆				
Security					
Theft from	n/a	Troublespots			
Theft of	n/a	1998-2000 None			
Ownership		2001-2003 None			
Recommend to a friend	95%				
(113 owners responded)					

Mercedes-Benz CLK

Up to £22,200 Production dates: From Jun 1997 to Sep 2003



Which? Verdict

More of a boulevard cruiser than a true sports car, the old CLK is essentially an E-class coupé. Reliability is OK, but the car's not terribly popular with owners.

Engines 2.0 (136/163bhp), 2.2, 3.2, 4.3 and 5.5 petrol **Gearbox options** 5- or 6-speed manual, 5-speed auto **Body styles** 2-door coupé and cabriolet **Dimensions** 4.57m x 1.97m (inc mirrors) **Insurance groups** 13 to 20

Evaluation	Reliability	Age group	98-00	01-03	04-06
	Petrol	Breakdowns	★★★★★	★★★	—
		Faults	★★★	★★★	—
		Niggles	★★★	★★★	—
Safety					
Which? score	n/a				
Euro NCAP crash test	n/a				
Security					
Theft from	n/a	Troublespots			
Theft of	n/a	1998-2000 Paintwork chipped/lost shine			
Ownership		2001-2003 Interior equipment			
Recommend to a friend	57%				
(76 owners responded)					

Mercedes-Benz SLK

Up to £29,000 Production dates: From Oct 1996 to Mar 2004



Which? Verdict

Fairly comfortable for a two-seat sports car, and the folding metal roof helps keeps the rain out. But Mercedes' brand reliability is a worry if you're buying used.

Engines 2.0 (136/163bhp), 2.2, 3.2, 4.3 and 5.5 petrol **Gearbox options** 6-speed manual, 5- or 7-speed automatic **Body styles** 2-door convertible **Dimensions** 4.01m x 1.72m (inc mirrors) **Insurance groups** 16 to 19

Evaluation	Reliability
	Overall, Mercedes-Benz cars are poor for reliability.
Safety	
Which? score	n/a
Euro NCAP crash test	★★★★☆
Security	
Theft from	n/a
Theft of	n/a
Ownership	
Recommend to a friend	52%
(46 owners responded)	
	Troublespots
	There were too few survey replies for us to name the troublespots.

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.