

# DRIVE

CAR OF THE YEAR 2024

## KIA'S EV9-OLUTION

The future of family transport has arrived



### The best cars in Australia in 2024

The most electrifying results we've ever seen



# Awards fit for fresh era in motoring



**James Ward**  
Director of content

There is no denying the automotive world is changing. New rules, new brands, new technology and even new energy options, making new cars even more relevant to a whole new audience of buyers.

To that end, this, the 18th running of the Drive Car of the Year awards, also needed some changes to move with the times. Yes, we still present the most comprehensive, market-wide new car awards program, but we've done so with a clean sheet of paper and quite a few fresh eyes.

For the 2024 awards, we've normalised both hybrid and electric-powered vehicles and made them eligible in every category. That we still have four specific awards for electric vehicles speaks to the newness of the technology, and that many buyers start with an EV as their primary focus, and decide the use case from there.

You'll note too that all categories now have a price cap. This means we can speak to buyers at varying budget levels about the best cars for their particular spend. It means that some model ranges were cut in half, which is why for each winner we have recommended a specification the Drive team feel demonstrates the best of the winner's capability.

Testing and assessment was changed too. The team spent time in over 700 vehicles throughout the course of 2023, and it was data and consideration from all of that seat time that took the initial list of some 400 new cars available on the Australian market, through the 18 categories, to a group of finalists and then ultimately one winner.

It's an enormous task, one that spreads far beyond Drive's experienced editorial, production and publishing teams, and involves nearly everyone in the business. Some cars immediately stood out. Some cars... didn't make the cut. Some cars were re-tested just to make sure.

We talked. We voted. We drank lots of coffee and are now proudly able to present 18 of the best cars you can buy in Australia today - everything from compact city-friendly runabouts, through high-tech EVs to large off-road capable utes and SUVs.

This is Drive Car of the Year 2024.



Down and dirty in off-road judging (above); Every feature is tested (below); Last minute thoughts from the judges (main). Photos: Sean Foster, Mathieu Riva



## What makes a winner?

**James Ward**

While it may be said that all new cars are quite good these days, there are plenty of things that separate the 'good' from the truly great cars on sale today.

With 310 trophies awarded over the past 18 years, Drive Car of the Year continues to be the most comprehensive new car awards program in Australia, but just what are the judges looking for to find a winner?

As a starting point, all the DCOTY categories are defined around a buyer type and usage intent. We'd love to say a Porsche 911 is the best car for every family, but the cramped rear seats may have passengers feeling otherwise. This categorisation allows us to consider how well a car delivers on its 'fit for purpose' status, and is the first filter used to create a shortlist.

Value is the second crucial consideration point. How much car do you get for your money,

and what is the cost of ownership? The team factor in servicing, insurance and fuel/energy costs in deciding on a car's true value proposition.

Judges look at build quality as well as choice of materials and consideration in the way technology is implemented. All the features in the world don't matter if they are too hard to use!

And of course, the way a car performs on the road is of prime importance. Here the judges consider the way the car is categorised and intended to be used, and assess for ride comfort and quality, both with and without a load, then driveline performance and efficiency within the car's expected use case.

But to find a real winner there is always an element of intangible quality. Style, form, function, even a few surprise-and-delight features will go a long way toward recognising a good car and selecting one as a bona fide Drive Car of the Year.

## Buy. Own. Drive. Sell.

Find your next award-winning car on Drive.com.au

- Thousands of new and quality cars listed daily
- Handpicked dealers only
- All cars under warranty
- Sell your car fast and hassle-free



Explore Cars for Sale on Drive.com.au



DRIVE

# And the winner is – Kia EV9

The future of Australian family motoring has arrived! Congratulations to the 2024 Drive Car of the Year.

**James Ward**

The Kia EV9 Air is the first electric vehicle to win the coveted Drive Car of the Year in the 18-year history of the award.

This year, like no other, has cemented electrification in its various forms as a key discussion point for buyers looking to make a new car purchase decision. In fact, of our 18 finalists, 12 have a model in the range that offers some form of electric power. Possibly more telling is that every one of the six Drive Car of the Year overall finalists includes electrification of some kind in their range.

We know that family buyers are looking for ever-more functionality and technology from their new cars, and that households are increasingly interested in the lower running costs that new-energy vehicles offer. To see both of these narratives combine into one vehicle makes the Kia EV9 a very worthy winner and a timely example of what the future of Australian family motoring will look like.

This fully-electric, seven-seat, family-oriented SUV draws a line in the sand between what was and what can be.

True, not everyone is ready to move to electric and nor is every family shopping in the EV9's price bracket, but even if you aren't ready for what the EV9 offers today, it's worth taking a look at the car as it sets the tone for what to expect from the modern family car of tomorrow.

The Kia EV9 presents the future that families are looking for – it remains highly functional and practical as a seven-seat SUV, but offers cutting edge electrification for silent, clean and cost-effective long-term ownership.

As an electric car, the EV9 Air offers a 76kWh battery with 160kW/350Nm output that provides up to



With comfortable seating for seven, the electric Kia EV9 won over the judges, who praised its refined cabin. Photos: Mathieu Riva

443km of driving range. The class-leading E-GMP electric platform utilises the long wheelbase for battery positioning and the EV9 has the capability to charge from 10-80 per cent in around 20 minutes on a 350kW charger.

It features the convenience of

Vehicle-to-Load (V2L) functionality to power external devices and drivers can adjust the amount of energy regeneration, including a one-pedal drive function, while on the move.

As a family car too, the EV9 packs a full suite of driver

assistance and safety technologies including autonomous emergency braking with pedestrian and cyclist detection, and curtain airbags for all three rows.

The driver and front passenger score heated and ventilated seats, there are six USB ports to keep family devices charged while on the go, plus a staggering 13 cupholders should anyone feel thirsty enough to be double- or even triple-parked.

That the car was designed to be used by families who are looking for a modern motoring edge is what makes the EV9 stand out.

Whether you are shopping for

an EV or family SUV, there are simply no compromises.

As we noted, we know not every buyer is ready for electric, and not every family is shopping at this price point – but the EV9 is worth the attention of every new car buyer for what it brings to the market and for the potential it shows for what will come next.

The Kia EV9 clearly moves the game forward for Australian new car buyers and in many ways. This is the car that will set the tone for the next generation of Australian family cars, making it a true game changer for our roads.

## Electric vehicles for the masses

**Rob Margeit**

The last 12 months have seen electric vehicles in Australia enter a new paradigm. No longer the playthings of the rich, EVs have entered the mainstream, with a number of models available under \$50,000 and some even sneaking in under the \$40,000 threshold.

And they're all from Chinese manufacturers. Say what you like about Chinese-built cars, but the fact remains that without the likes of MG Motor, BYD and GWM, fewer Australians would have access to electric cars.

Whether the onslaught of relatively affordable EVs entering Aussie showrooms in the past 12 months continues unabated, and whether the rest of the automotive manufacturing world takes notice and starts offering EVs for the masses in their line-ups, remains to be seen.

But it will be hard to ignore buyers' appetites in this growing segment. Last year, around 16,000 EVs priced under our \$50,000 cut-off for affordable electric car Drive Car of the Year category found new homes in Australia.

It's a testament to buyers' thirst for zero-emissions motoring and to

those manufacturers who have recognised and catered to that thirst.

And buyers will have more choice this year, with around half a dozen "affordable" models – from manufacturers such as Hyundai, Kia, Mini and Chery – slated for dealerships around Australia.



## Electrification is here whether you like it or not

That almost 70 per cent of our Drive Car of the Year 2024 finalists offer some form of electrification within their model ranges (mild hybrid, hybrid, plug-in hybrid or full-electric) was not an outcome of design, but one of reality.

Last year, Australia's silent-running road fleet grew by almost 100,000 vehicles (87,217 electric and 11,212 plug-in hybrid), which was just 10 vehicles fewer than the 98,439 hybrids finding new homes.

This makes a total of 16.2 per cent

of 2023 new car sales using a form of electrification for propulsion, a figure that was just 3 per cent only five years ago. If that number doesn't seem very high, perhaps consider that 2023 also marked the first year in history where petrol vehicle sales made up less than 50 per cent of the market (48.4 per cent).

Electrification in its various forms is already filtering into the cars we buy, regardless of your decision to adopt it as a buyer.

Hybrid sales have already started strongly for 2024, with 11 per cent of the almost 90,000 vehicles delivered in January blending combustion with electrons.

The technology makes perfect sense for Australian drivers, affording better economy and lower emissions in urban settings, with long-distance touring capability there when you need it for expansive regional trips.

Will your next car feature some electrification beneath the skin? Probably, and it's a decision that you may not even need to make.

# New cars better value than ever before

Glenn Butler

Interest rates are up, inflation is a problem, and cars have never been more expensive. What if we told you that only two of those three statements were true?

In reality, cars have never been better value than they are today.

On the surface, our claim appears to have more holes than a politician's promise. For example, back in 2004 you could buy a brand-new Toyota Corolla for less than \$20,000, whereas today you'll need at least \$29,610, plus a few grand for on-road costs.

The same goes for family SUVs. Twenty years ago, the Ford Territory three-row family SUV retailed for \$42,990 whereas a contemporary Ford Everest with three rows starts at \$60,990.

So, how can we say that cars have never been better value? Two reasons: the technology revolution and salaries. Let's look at the second one first.

The average Australian working a full-time job in February 2004 earned \$948 a week, according to the ABS. The latest data from August 2023 puts that at \$1600 per week today, a 69 per cent increase. So on that basis alone, the humble Toyota Corolla from 2004 should carry a \$33,600 price if it were to command that same portion of our annual income.

To be fair, smartphones didn't



The 2024 Honda CR-V, which took out best medium SUV under \$50,000, is a major step up from its 2004 counterpart (inset). Main photo: Mathieu Riva

exist back then, nor did streaming TV, UberEats, Amazon or Spotify. So we could spend proportionally more of our 2004 salary on our cars and clothes.

As for the second part of our argument — the dramatic evolution of cars — let's first take a look at what we were driving in 2004, and this may shock you.

For starters, Holden still

existed, and was in a ding-dong battle with Toyota for market leadership. Passenger cars large and small dominated the landscape, with 63 per cent of the market. SUVs, by contrast, had just 18 per cent market share and 4x4 utes were barely holding on for five per cent, or one-in-twenty.

Now, what about the cars themselves? How have they grown

in value and equipment since then? Let's take a look at this through the eyes of our new Medium SUV champion, the reborn Honda CR-V.

Over the last 20 years the CR-V mid-size SUV has grown in all dimensions and it now has room for three rows of seats.

The old car's adequate 2.4-litre petrol engine and four-speed automatic transmission has been

replaced by a turbocharged 1.5-litre engine and continuously variable transmission that produces 30 per cent more power yet consumes 30 per cent less fuel.

As for safety, the old CR-V had two airbags compared to today's nine, its active safety suite consisted of antilock brakes and... that's it. Not even traction control.

Today's CR-V has an active safety suite that can handle all kinds of treacherous conditions, manage vehicle speed relative to traffic around it, read the road ahead, alert straying drivers, and even correct them. Nothing on sale in 2004 could do even a tenth of what the majority of new cars can today.

Okay, what about creature comforts? Forget CD players and four-speaker sound systems, today's CR-V has full Bluetooth smartphone streaming, flawless digital radio and an eight-speaker sound system. It also has dual-zone climate control, dusk-sensing LED headlights and a nine-inch touchscreen infotainment system. By comparison, the 2004 CR-V cost extra with fan-speed adjustable air-conditioning, required the driver to turn on the halogen headlights and didn't even boast a trip computer.

So, the next time grandpa says, "They don't make 'em like they used to", you really should agree. And be thankful because our hard-earned dollars have never bought better.

DRIVE  
CAR OF THE YEAR 2024

BEST MEDIUM SUV  
UNDER \$50K

"It's a car that ticks all the right boxes for Australian families in 2024".



HONDA

AWARD-WINNING  
CR-V

## BEST EV UNDER \$50,000

# Electric for the people

**Rob Margeit**

MG fired the first salvo in the battle of 'Australia's most affordable electric car' when it released the MG 4 late last year. The first EV under the psychological \$40,000 barrier, the MG 4 has gone on to be a success for the Chinese brand, racking up 3134 sales to the end of 2023 since hitting local dealerships last August.

And it's easy to see why; the MG 4 is a capable, comfortable and compelling electric car that, when it went on sale initially, was priced at \$38,990 before on-road costs. That's for the entry-level Excite 51 model.

Prices have crept up since then, MG confirming the base Excite 51 model now costs \$39,990 plus on-road costs, a \$1000 increase but still well under our \$50,000 threshold for this category. Pricing for the rest of the MG 4 range remains unchanged.

Where the MG 4 makes its case is in its simplicity. It is, first and foremost, a humble hatchback. There's no bamboozling EV bling.

## MG 4

### Why it won

- Affordable electric vehicle for the masses.
- Well-equipped for the money.
- Good driving range.

### Key facts

- Priced from \$39,990 to \$59,990 (range)
- Seven-year warranty
- Driving range: 350km to 530km

Instead, the MG 4 is a hatchback first, an electric car second.

At its most basic level, the MG 4 Excite 51 (and, for that matter, the Excite 64) is still nicely equipped. Standard kit includes 17-inch alloy wheels, LED headlights, a 10.25-inch touchscreen with Apple CarPlay and Android Auto, four speakers, a reversing camera, fabric seat upholstery, and safety features such as autonomous emergency braking and lane-keep assist.



The MG 4 beat a competitive field.  
Photo: Mathieu Riva

But, Excite models miss out on additional safety features like blind-spot monitoring and rear cross-traffic alert which are only available in the more affordable Essence models.

And it's for this reason our pick of the range is the MG 4 Essence 64. It's priced at \$47,990 before on-road costs which is nudging the upper ceiling of this category.

It's well-equipped for the money, however. As well as a

bigger battery (64kWh, hence the name) and greater driving range (435km against the Excite 51's 350km) and a more powerful electric motor (150kW against the Excite 51's 125kW), the Essence trim also brings some nice appointments inside and out.

Standard are 18-inch alloy wheels, a black roof, leather-look seat trim, native satellite navigation, a 360-degree camera, wireless phone charging, and a six-speaker stereo.

Its performance is zippy without being outrageous (0-100km/h in a claimed 7.2s), while ride comfort is acceptable, if a little fussy over rougher surfaces.

It's not perfect by any stretch. Quibbles run to an over-reliance on the infotainment touchscreen for basic car functions while some of the MG 4's advanced driver systems could use a little fine-tuning. But these are relatively minor blots on an otherwise compelling package.

## BEST MEDIUM SUV UNDER \$50,000

# Return to form for family favourite

**Alex Misoyannis**

It was a close battle, but the new Honda CR-V is a return to form for the Japanese car maker.

Entry into the CR-V range has climbed by \$8600, but for the extra spend buyers are getting a larger family SUV with more space, technology, comfort and safety than its predecessor.

Three of the seven CR-V variants slide under the \$50,000 mark. Drive's pick of the range is the VTi L, which at \$48,800 drive-away – with five seats and front-wheel drive – offers the best value under this category's limit.

Features such as 18-inch alloy wheels, leather-appointed upholstery, power-adjustable heated front seats and a hands-free power tailgate make it feel worthy of the price, and it's the cheapest five-seat model with the full suite of advanced safety technology – including blind-spot monitoring and rear cross-traffic alert, which are absent on the entry-level \$44,500 VTi X.

Buyers who need the flexibility of a third row can opt for the \$46,800 VTi X7 seven-seater. It's not as well equipped as our VTi L pick, but it's good to see Honda offering it as an option for less than \$50,000.

A highlight of the value-for-money equation is the cost of scheduled servicing,

which runs to \$995 over five years or 50,000km, one of the lowest in the market.

The new Honda CR-V's bigger external dimensions open up more space inside, with a stylish cabin up front, spacious and comfortable seating front and rear, and a capacious boot offering 589L of space with the rear seats up in our five-seat VTi L pick, or 1072L with the seats folded.

A snappy 9.0-inch infotainment touchscreen is bright and easy to use – with the convenience of Apple CarPlay, Android Auto and embedded satellite navigation – and judges were glad to see Honda has stuck with physical dials and buttons for air conditioning, volume and key vehicle

functions, rather than the increasingly touch-sensitive controls of rivals.

All models are fitted with 11 airbags, although the CR-V is yet to be put through a crash test by safety organisation ANCAP.

The VTi L's 1.5-litre turbocharged four-cylinder petrol engine is only mildly revised from the previous CR-V, but it delivers ample performance for buyers' needs, matched with a smooth continuously variable automatic transmission.

The suspension delivers a respectable balance between comfort and control, it's quiet at motorway speeds, and well-tuned steering and brakes make for a confident drive on the open road.

Fuel economy runs to 7.1L/100km for the VTi L petrol, and up to a quoted 7.7L/100km for all-wheel-drive variants, all tested to Australian government standards.

Overall, the Honda CR-V VTi L is a well-rounded, good-value, easy to drive family SUV that is a great fit for Australian families.

## Honda CR-V

### Why it won

- Well-equipped for the money
- Affordable servicing costs
- Spacious and contemporary interior

### Key facts

- Priced from \$44,500 to \$59,900, drive-away
- Five-year warranty
- 5.5L-7.7L/100km consumption (claimed)



Photo: Sean Foster

**BEST MEDIUM SUV UNDER \$80,000**

# Heavenly hybrid

**Susannah Guthrie**

The new-generation Lexus NX landed in 2022, improving upon an already impressive offering by enhancing the driver experience, boosting the cabin space, overhauling the infotainment system and packing the car full of impressive technology.

Under this category's price threshold, you can choose from a two-wheel-drive or all-wheel-drive NX with petrol or hybrid power and a litany of standard features. Our pick of the bunch is the hybrid NX350h, with a 2.5-litre petrol engine continuously variable transmission, plus integrated electric assistance offering combined outputs of 179kW and 239Nm.

If you have \$80,000 to spend you can choose from a high-grade front-wheel-drive NX350h Sport Luxury

## Lexus NX

**Why it won**

- Elevated ownership experience
- Ultra-refined on the road and in the cabin
- Economical hybrid options

**Key facts**

- Priced from \$62,275 to \$90,948
- Five-year warranty
- 1.3L-8.1L/100km consumption (claimed)



Photo: Sean Foster

or F Sport, or a more affordable all-wheel-drive NX350h Luxury. Both will check crucial boxes for safety, with an upmarket feel to the cabin.

Lexus's hybrid tech and famed refinement are a match made in heaven. Not only is the NX's hybrid system a fuel and emissions saver (5-6L/100km on a combined cycle), it has the added benefit of smooth, electric power at city speeds that only serves to enhance the sleek behind-the-wheel experience.

What really seals the deal on the NX, however, is Lexus' commitment to the ownership experience. The NX is offered with relatively affordable capped-price servicing – \$495 a year for the first three years.

Arguably the most visually striking car in our medium SUV line-up, the Lexus NX is a capable, practical family car that still allows its owner to feel special, right from the front-seat experience through to the service centre.

**BEST SMALL SUV UNDER \$50,000**

# Value-packed

**Glenn Butler**

The new-generation Hyundai Kona debuted in 2023 with eye-catching styling and a sizeable jump in standard equipment, safety and space that more than offset a \$5100 price rise. This realignment reflected buyers' demands for higher specification in 'base' model small SUVs and their preparedness to pay more for the finer things.

Even in its most affordable grade, the \$32,000 Hyundai Kona is impressively well-equipped with LED headlights, 18-inch alloy wheels, keyless entry and start, smartphone mirroring for both Android and Apple devices, a wireless phone charger, leather steering wheel, climate control with rear seat air vents, a 12.3-inch infotainment touchscreen, Bluelink connected car tech, digital radio, parking sensors, adaptive cruise control, and reversing camera.

With all that kit, it's no surprise that the Hyundai Kona's cabin

## Hyundai Kona

**Why it won**

- Smooth and polished driving experience
- Comfortable cabin with stylish design
- Long list of safety technology

**Key facts**

- Priced from \$32,000 to \$46,500 (petrol range)
- Five-year warranty
- 3.9L-7.6L/100km consumption (claimed)

makes a very strong first impression aided by some classy and contemporary lines and material choices.

The Kona's safety game is strong, too. Seven airbags are standard along with autonomous emergency braking with pedestrian and cyclist detection, adaptive cruise control, lane-keep assistance, blind-spot and



Photo: Sean Foster

rear cross-traffic alert, and traffic sign recognition.

Shoppers wanting more will find it in the Kona Premium. With a price tag of \$39,500 plus on-road costs, it offers compelling value and still comes in well under this category's \$50,000 price ceiling.

Those after a more dynamic drive than the base model's 110kW 2.0-litre petrol engine can upgrade to the 1.6-litre turbocharged petrol all-wheel drive which brings 33 per cent more power and almost 50 per

cent more torque for an altogether more exciting drive.

And Hyundai offers an economy option too, with the Hyundai Kona hybrid which combines a 1.6-litre non-turbo petrol engine with a small battery and 77kW/144Nm electric motor for a claimed fuel consumption figure of 3.9L/100km. We saw 4.3L during our real-world testing. That's why we believe the Hyundai Kona Premium Hybrid is the standout for value and efficiency and the best buy in the Kona range.

**BEST LARGE SUV UNDER \$80,000**

# The fuel-sipper

**Glenn Butler**

Securing this category for the third time is no small feat, and Toyota's Kluger has not only defended its crown but has done so in the face of fresh competition and updates across the field.

Kluger is renowned for being one of the most cost-effective and practical large SUVs on the market, a crucial attribute as petrol prices spiral ever upwards. Its economical profile seamlessly aligns with a comfortable and pragmatic design, ticking all the right boxes for everyday use.

The Kluger spans nearly five metres in length so it generously caters to occupants in the first two rows with ample space and amenities, while the third row, leans towards shorter humans or shorter journeys. Toyota's powertrain line-up embraces a new entrant this year in the 2.4-litre turbocharged four-cylinder which replaces the old V6 and gives the Kluger a much-needed boost in performance. Even so, the Kluger's petrol-electric hybrid is the powertrain to have.

This hybrid configuration, featuring a 2.5-litre four-cylinder petrol engine, front and rear electric motors, and a small battery pack, offers a smooth and seamless driving experience through the CVT automatic gearbox. Real-world fuel consumption impressively hovers at just 6.6 litres per 100 kilometres.

A 2023 upgrade to the Kluger's infotainment is a dramatic improvement.



Photo: Sean Foster

## Toyota Kluger

**Why it won**

- Fuel-efficient hybrid options for all budgets
- Spacious and practical interior
- Well-priced for the equipment and safety features

**Key facts**

- Priced from \$51,790 to \$80,230
- Five-year warranty
- 5.6-8.7L/100km consumption (claimed)

The 12.3-inch touchscreen with colour graphics brings the Kluger in line with some of its more modern rivals, offering wireless Apple CarPlay connectivity, plus Android Auto through a wired connection.

While there might be more budget-friendly entry points into seven-seat ownership, the Kluger's consecutive wins underscore its effectiveness and purpose-fit. The hybrid powertrain is its trump card, further cementing the Kluger's status as a standout choice for Australian families.

**BEST SMALL SUV UNDER \$80,000**

# One, two, three, four...

**Trent Nikolic**

With a fourth win on the trot, the Volvo XC40's legacy as a giant killer is well and truly cemented.

Volvo's small SUV is value-packed, built to a high standard, matches all-round driveability with cabin practicality and comfort, is safe (five-stars) and remains at the head of the class in terms of technology that is easy to use.

Falling well beneath the \$80,000 threshold, our pick of the range is as much XC40 as you can buy – Ultimate B4. There is no SUV in this segment that can match it.

You can even sneak into a fully electric XC40 beneath the cap, so XC40 really does offer something for every small SUV buyer.

To say it's well-equipped is an understatement. Even the entry-level model features a lengthy list of standard equipment. Highlights include LED headlights, 18-inch alloy wheels, a suite of active and passive safety assistance, 12-inch driver's display, tyre pressure monitoring, adaptive power steering, 9.0-inch infotainment screen, adaptive cruise control, and front, rear and side parking assistance.

Even the most affordable XC40 makes an impression when you take a seat.

The combination of luxury and effortless driving enjoyment is why the range-topper is our pick.

It's also efficient, using a claimed 7.1L/100km on the combined cycle. It's tough to pick a weakness. The

## Volvo XC40

**Why it won**

- High quality cabin
- Comfortable around town or on the highway
- Chassis balance is exceptional

**Key facts**

- Priced from \$54,990 to \$85,990
- Five-year warranty
- 6.9L-7.1L/100km consumption (claimed)



cabin is excellent and it's always felt half a size larger than the segment in terms of room and comfort. There's space for four adults on board, while three young passengers will fit comfortably across the second row for family buyers.

Boot space expands from 460L with the second row in use, out to 1336L when you fold that row down.

When you factor in the premium aspiration of the intended buyer, the Volvo XC40 is the undisputed winner of this tightly contested award. On paper, plenty have come close, but none have dethroned the now four-time winner.

# Winners through the years



**2024**

Kia EV9



**2023**

Ford Ranger



**2022**

Kia Sportage



**2021**

Kia Sorento



**2020**

Toyota RAV4



**2019**

Toyota Camry



**2018**

Hyundai i30



**2017**

Volkswagen Tiguan



**2016**

Ford Everest

## BEST FAMILY CAR UNDER \$80,000

## Peak people mover

Kez Casey

Kia's Carnival has set the benchmark for ultimate family motoring once again in 2024, backing up its 2023 win.

With a starting price from as low as \$47,480 plus on-road costs, the eight-seat Carnival remains a budget-friendly choice and doesn't compromise on flexibility for the price. Even the entry-level model provides configurable full-size seating in all three rows, and a huge amount of cargo space.

No matter which seat you claim, the Carnival's tall dimensions and long wheelbase ensure there's room for adults in all three rows or enough space to make installing child seats a much, much easier process.

With 627 litres of cargo space behind the third row, or 2785 litres to the second row, the Carnival offers more cargo space than the other cars in its segment.

The interior is where you'll find the most to explore. From second-row seats that are individually



Photo: Sean Foster

adjustable to the availability of five ISOFIX child seat mounts, the Carnival can grow with your family and stay practical.

Sliding side doors that don't need much space to open, a cavernously deep boot, seats that are easy to fold and stow, and a range of practical storage nooks up front aren't features you might prioritise, but they soon become hard to live without once you get familiar with all the Carnival offers.

The crowning piece of the puzzle is a five-star ANCAP safety rating

from 2021 that provides impressive levels of protection for adults and children, along with driver-assist systems that may keep you out of harm's way in the first place.

As the entire Carnival range fits in under the category's \$80,000 price cap, there's no bad choice in the range, but the judging panel leans towards the Carnival SLi diesel which pampers with leather trim, a powered driver's seat, power sliding doors and tailgate, a 12.3-inch infotainment system, and a slew of family-friendly features.

## Kia Carnival

## Why it won

- Unbeatably versatile interior space
- Peace of mind from 7-year warranty
- Priced with family budgets in mind

## Key facts

- Priced from \$47,480 to \$67,580
- Seven-year warranty
- 6.5-9.6L/100km consumption (claimed)

## BEST URBAN CAR UNDER \$50,000

## One for everyone

Alex Misoyannis

The Volkswagen Golf – the reigning Drive Car of the Year Best Small Car – has claimed this year's Urban Car under \$50,000 award. But that would undersell how close this category was, and how long judges deliberated over which of the three finalists should win this award.

In the end, it was the same refinement, class, style and all-around excellence that had previously won over Drive judges that drove the Volkswagen Golf – now in its eighth generation – to victory once again.



Photo: Sean Foster

## Volkswagen Golf

## Why it won

- Smooth and polished driving experience
- Comfortable cabin with stylish design
- Long list of safety technology

## Key facts

- Priced from \$39,190 to \$70,590
- Five-year warranty
- 5.8L-7.8L/100km consumption (claimed)

At a touch over 4.2 metres long, the Golf hatchback is the right size for urban living – not too small for the occasional weekend away, but not too large for tight spaces on city streets – with light steering, a compact turning circle, and plenty of parking sensors and cameras to assist with city driving.

Yet inside there's enough room to transport adults, kids, and their cargo in comfort.

The Golf line-up has been simplified with just two models in the core range: the \$39,190 plus on-road costs 110TSI Life hatch, and \$42,190 plus on-road costs 110TSI R-Line hatch.

Drive's pick is the Life, which offers plenty of equipment for the money – twin 10.25-inch interior screens, tri-zone air conditioning, satellite navigation, LED headlights, and a full roster of safety technology along with a willing engine and a comfortable ride over bumps, and confident handling that delivers on what urban buyers expect.

There's also a five-star safety rating thanks to a comprehensive suite of advanced safety technologies.

## BEST URBAN CAR UNDER \$30,000

## Cheerfully premium

Tom Fraser

Volkswagen is known for its refinement compared to its price-point rivals and it's evident from the cheapest car in its broad line-up.

The Volkswagen Polo was last updated in 2022 which upped its price close to the \$30,000 mark.

Its styling only received a minor update, but its level of equipment shot up with automatic LED headlights, LED tail-lights, an 8.0-inch digital instrument cluster, 8.0-inch infotainment screen, wireless charging, auto wipers, front and rear parking sensors, and new safety technology. It's reassuring to see such a healthy level of items on the spec sheet in an entry-level model.

The Polo pairs a turbocharged 1.0-litre three-cylinder engine with a seven-speed dual-clutch gearbox. Power outputs are 85kW and 200Nm, which are sent to the front wheels.

It doesn't just impress on a spec sheet either. The Polo leans towards 'premium' in terms of interior feel and finish, while its driving experience is as polished as they come.

It also impresses with sturdy-feeling fabric seats, hard-wearing plastics for the dash and door cards, as well as soft-touch leather. The 8.0-inch infotainment system is free from fuss, and comes with wireless Apple CarPlay and Android Auto.

It's also surprisingly spacious in the back despite its dimensions. Notably, it stocks a 351-litre boot and a temporary spare wheel.

On the road, the Polo is perky,



## Volkswagen Polo

## Why it won

- Interior fit and finish borders on premium
- Perky turbocharged engine
- Frugal on fuel and ongoing servicing costs

## Key facts

- Priced from \$29,490 to \$40,390
- Five-year warranty
- 5L-6.5L/100km fuel consumption (claimed)

composed, and engaging. The 85kW/200Nm engine outputs enough grunt for overtaking and pulls up to the speed limit swiftly. Its ability to dispatch potholes and drive over speedhumps without upsetting the cabin ambience is a key highlight. The light steering makes it a cinch to navigate into a tight parking space.

To top it off, it's affordable. Pairing a real-world fuel economy of around 6.0 litres per 100km and flexible servicing packages, ongoing Polo ownership needn't break the bank.

## BEST DUAL-CAB UTE UNDER \$50,000

## The underdog

Ben Zachariah

The SsangYong Musso is a ute that surprises us every time we get behind the wheel, and it's a vehicle that has been improved each year, to add up to something that is astonishingly good for its price tag.

Released roughly six years ago, the current-generation Musso ute is a clear and worthy winner of this category, boasting a very long list of standard features, excellent build quality, good on-road manners, and great off-road capability.

Despite increasingly fierce competition from Chinese newcomers like LDV and GWM, SsangYong keeps shovelling new technology into the Musso, making the South Korean a real stand-out.

The entire Musso range is powered by a 2.2-litre four-cylinder turbo-diesel engine developing 133kW and 400Nm (SWB) or 420Nm (XLV), exclusively mated to a six-speed automatic, and offering claimed fuel-consumption of 8.6 to 9.0 litres per 100 kilometres.

For those heading off-road, buyers get part-time four-wheel drive with low range and an automatic-locking rear differential as standard.

At the top of the range, features include a 12.3-inch digital instrument cluster, a 12.3-inch touchscreen for the infotainment, Apple CarPlay and Android Auto, 360-degree cameras, a heated leather steering wheel, heated and ventilated electric front leather

## SsangYong Musso

## Why it won

- Bigger than most dual-cabs
- Heaps of tech and features
- Seven-year/unlimited-kilometre warranty

## Key facts

- Priced from \$40,000 to \$49,500
- Seven-year warranty
- 8.6-9.0L/100km consumption (claimed)



Photo: Sean Foster

seats, dual-zone climate control, a sunroof, proximity key, cruise control, and 18-inch alloy wheels.

While the Musso remains untested by ANCAP, it comes with six airbags, and a comprehensive suite of active safety technologies.

A key selling point, the Musso is bigger than most other dual-cab utes on the market. It's not approaching a full-size US pick-up, but it's bigger than you'll find elsewhere. Its size doesn't come at the cost of driving manners, and our judges have been surprised at how it performs on and off the highway.



2015

Mercedes-Benz C-Class



2014

Mazda 6



2013

Toyota 86



2012

Mercedes-Benz C-Class



2011

Volkswagen Polo



2010

Volkswagen Golf



2009

Honda Accord



2008

BMW M3



2007

Audi TT

**BEST URBAN EV UNDER \$100,000**

# The benchmark

Tom Fraser

Updates Tesla has made to its Model 3 have made an already accomplished electric vehicle much better. It's the most comprehensive update the car maker has introduced since its launch. Key visual enhancements for the facelifted Model 3 include refreshed exterior styling, new materials and a brighter touchscreen for the cabin, revised suspension, and comfortable new seats.

Underneath that sleek exterior, a bigger battery equates to improved driving range, now rated at 629km in the Long Range variant, which is our pick of the Tesla Model 3 line-up. Other key upgrades include a quicker all-wheel drive powertrain, and bigger battery capacity, plus a punchy 17-speaker sound system. It can sprint from zero to 100km/h in a scant 4.4 seconds.

We've always levelled praise at how light and bright the interior of a Model 3 presents, and the cabin quality feels even better with this new update. Touch points are either covered in soft synthetic leather, rubberised grips, or a nice-feeling felt-like fabric. Odds and ends are catered to with copious storage spots, while the expansive 15.4-inch touchscreen is brighter and snappier than ever before.

It might not have Apple CarPlay or Android Auto capability, but the infotainment system offers all manner of apps, maps, and streaming services.

Safety-wise, the Model 3 last scored a full five-star rating in

## Tesla Model 3

**Why it won**

- Real improvements in ride and comfort
- Plush new interior surfaces
- Incredible real-world energy efficiency

**Key facts**

- Priced from \$61,900 to \$71,900
- Four-year warranty
- Range: 513km to 629km

2019, and the model continues with the 'Autopilot' package, which includes adaptive cruise control, lane-keep assist, and lane-centring assist – plus autonomous emergency braking, blind-spot cameras, blind-spot monitoring lights, traffic sign recognition, a driver attention warning, and individual tyre pressure monitors.

To drive, the Model 3 is quick, comfortable, and quiet – the three greatest attributes any EV-maker strives for. You can still feel slight bumps and imperfections making their way through to the cabin, but ride comfort is hugely improved and overall refinement is high. It's also relatively dynamic through corners without becoming difficult to manoeuvre in town and parking.

Judges were not fans of the new gear selector on the touchscreen or the button-press indicators but these two minor missteps do not overcome what is the Best Urban Electric Vehicle Under \$100,000.



Photo: Mathieu Riva

**BEST LUXURY EV UNDER \$150,000**



# Uncompromising

The imposing presence adds to its high-end vibe; the cabin is a blend of luxury and technology.  
Photos: Mathieu Riva (main); Sean Foster (below)

## BMW iX

**Why it won**

- Uncompromising luxury
- Hot-hatch like straight-line performance
- Composed and comfortable ride

**Key facts**

- Priced from \$136,900 to \$233,400
- Five-year warranty
- Range: 420km to 620km



Rob Margeit

BMW took its time entering the luxury SUV EV fray but when it did, it arrived with an imposing and undeniably luxurious large SUV.

The BMW iX has all the hallmarks needed to take out this high-end category. From its sumptuous yet cutting-edge cabin design, to its healthy performance and supple and comfortable ride, the iX epitomises what the judges are looking for in a luxury electric car.

With a real-world driving range of 425km, and enough power and torque (240kW/600Nm) to hustle the 2.5-tonne SUV from 0-100km/h in a hot hatch-like 6.1 seconds, the iX never feels underdone in terms of performance.

The ride comfort too is excellent, despite sitting on 22-inch alloys, a testament to BMW's chassis engineers and the refinement they've built into what is otherwise a heavy SUV.

The cabin is where the iX really lays its luxury cards on the table, a stunning interpretation of the modern post-petrol driving experience. There is no minimalism, as has seemingly become the norm in electric vehicles of all shapes and sizes and at all price points.

Instead, the iX's cabin takes everything that is good about BMW and then ups the ante. It's luxury written in leather and walnut, avant-garde design flourishes, and a sweeping infotainment screen featuring the

latest smartphone connectivity and everything we've come to expect from today's cars, electric or otherwise. Inside, it feels like money well spent.

Safety, too, is at the forefront of the BMW iX. A five-star ANCAP safety rating on the strength of good crash testing along with what BMW claims is the most extensive list of advanced driver assist systems ever bundled into a single BMW model brings peace of mind.

It's not all bouquets, however, the iX's cargo capacity on the small side for the segment, especially considering its overall proportions.

It's a minor brickbat though and ultimately outweighed by the iX's unquestionable luxury, the defining quality of this category.

# Really love the car... but love the Drive more?

Drive TV season 7 "Drive Car of the Year 2024 Winners" coming to Nine in March 2024.

Stream Drive TV seasons 1 to 6 and the all-new Drive Review series on 9Now.





## BEST OFF-ROAD SUV UNDER \$80,000

## Great all-rounder

Sam Purcell

The authentic take on an SUV has always included some form of off-road capability.

Some think a slightly raised ride height and some exterior cladding are enough to claim the SUV moniker. But in this segment, we are a little more serious.

Good off-road performance can present a problem, though. Historically, some of the best off-road vehicles were the worst for ride comfort and refinement.

To take out the off-road SUV under \$80,000 gong in this year's Drive Car of the Year, the best in the segment must perform well off-road without neglecting the manners.

Developed in tandem with the award-winning Ford Ranger ute, the Everest impressed our judging team into a unanimous victory.

This boils down to Everest's ability to be a comfortable and practical family hauler – with plenty of nice touches for everyday use – while also being a confident and capable off-roader.

## Ford Everest

## Why it won

- Loaded with quality technology and infotainment
- Refined, easy driving experience, especially diesel V6
- Comfortable, practical interior

## Key facts

- Priced from \$53,990 to \$79,490
- Five-year warranty
- 7.1-8.5L/100km consumption (claimed)

The cabin of the Ford Everest is effective as a seven-seater, squeezing in a useable third row that benefits greatly from the sliding and spacious second row. There are lots of practical touches in the interior of the Everest, along with power outlets, storage and technology.



A practical family SUV capable of off-road adventures.  
Photo: Sean Foster

Ride quality is good, bump absorption is excellent, and the trick selectable four-wheel drive system can also be used on-road in inclement conditions.

Two diesel engines run through a 10-speed automatic transmission providing good levels of pliable torque and overall performance.

If your budget allows it, we reckon the Everest Sport V6 – which costs just shy of \$71,000 before on-road costs – is the sweet spot in terms of performance, equipment, and value in the range.

Off-road, a combination of a decent tyre diameter, good overall ground clearance and an

effective traction control system means the Everest is a capable off-roader.

And with a locking rear differential and good reduction through the low-range transfer case, the Everest is as good off-road as it is around town, giving families the best of both worlds.



Photo: Sean Foster

## BEST DUAL-CAB UTE OVER \$50,000

## You beaut ute

The appeal and popularity of utes in Australia is showing no sign of slowing, with the top three selling cars in 2023 a utility vehicle.

Along with being a workhorse, they have also become a de facto family car in double-cab format. But this also means they are being pulled in different directions: comfort and payload, refinement and capability.

Last year's winner of this segment, the Ford Ranger, went on to win overall honours in Drive Car of the Year 2023. It's popular with buyers as well, being Australia's most popular new car in 2023.

The biggest threats to the Ranger this year are surprisingly close to home, with the platform-sharing Volkswagen Amarok, offering tough competition. So too, the Ranger's bigger sibling, the US-built and locally RHD-converted Ford F-150 leans heavily on the Ranger's recipe for success.

Testament to the high level of Australian-based engineering and development that went into this generation of Ford Ranger, it has

## Ford Ranger

## Why it won

- High levels of safety and technology
- Refined driving experience for the segment
- Loads of smart, practical touches for everyday use

## Key facts

- Priced from \$36,880 to \$89,190
- Five-year warranty
- 7.6-11.5L/100km consumption (claimed)

successfully defended its title in 2024.

One standout of the new Ranger is the high level of technology. Along with a five-star safety rating, the Ranger is bristling with just about every safety acronym one could want.

And while there are healthy payload levels available across the

range, the Ranger is one of the better in the segment for the overall driving experience.

Loaded performance is good, and the amount of stability and control you get on dirt roads is quite impressive.

The Ranger gets a 3500kg braked towing capacity and good standard off-road capability, with a locking rear differential standard on all four-wheel-drive models. There is also a well-tuned (and selectable, in some grades) off-road traction control system.

Some models get a more rudimentary part-time four-wheel drive system with shift-on-the-fly capability, the clutch-based selectable 4x4-auto system on higher grades of Ranger is of great benefit for driving on slippery surfaces.

The pick of the range for us would likely be the Sport V6 variant, but those with a healthier budget will also be eyeing closely the loaded Wildtrak variant for extra bells and whistles.

## BEST OFF-ROAD SUV UNDER \$150,000

## Rugged luxury

Sam Purcell

If you're spending up to \$150,000 on a big family SUV, you are going to have big expectations.

And in the current climate of the Australian car buyer's psyche – which has certainly picked up an adventurous edge in recent years – a big family four-wheel drive is as appealing as ever.

Being a big, simple and lumbering beast doesn't cut it any more. Along with providing plenty of space for family and gear, the modern-day large four-wheel drive also needs to provide plenty of comfort and refinement, as well as a big dose of technology and safety.

But at the same time, they need to be supremely capable and competent off the beaten track.

Since debuting as a brand new model in 2020, the Land Rover Defender is nothing short of a technological off-road powerhouse, using computer-controlled air suspension, active differentials and a sophisticated aluminium platform.

The result is a vehicle that rides beautifully on rough roads and dirt, and is impressively capable when it comes to crossing technical and tough terrain.

At the same time, the combination of highly advanced powertrain options, sharp off-road traction control systems and loads of ground clearance means the Defender packs a punch off-road.

The simplified yet luxurious interior is another standout, which has plenty of elegant storage solutions for your (and everyone else's) gear.

While dizzying and sometimes confounding to wade through, the wide array of price points, sizes and applications help to underpin the appeal of the Defender for a variety of tastes and budgets.



Photo: Sean Foster

## Land Rover Defender

## Why it won

- Best-in-class ground clearance and off-road control
- Classy, quality interior execution
- Impressively refined and enjoyable on-road

## Key facts

- Priced from \$88,870 to \$240,270
- Five-year warranty
- 3.4-12.8L/100km consumption (claimed)

There are three different body styles to choose, along with a half-dozen powertrains and a wide range of trim levels. And that's before you start going through the options list.

Regardless of the spec level, the inherent engineering brilliance of the Defender is evident through the driving experience, ride quality, interior design, and off-road capability.

Our pick in the range is the Defender 110 D300 X-Dynamic SE, which has silky six-cylinder diesel power, excellent air suspension, and a good level of standard equipment, but also keeps pricing somewhat in check at \$106,720 plus on-road costs.

# Badges that keep hitting the marquee

James Ward

While 2024 marks the first ever trophy to adorn a SsangYong mantelpiece (SsangYong Musso Best Dual-Cab Ute under \$50K), many brands and their models keep coming back for more, underscoring the right notes that many of these vehicles continue to hit in market.

With the EV9 win this year, Kia has won the outright Drive Car of the Year award three of the past four years, making a total of 18 trophies for the South Korean manufacturer – equalling Mercedes-Benz.

Here's how the top-10 trophy cabinets now sit across the automotive marketplace.

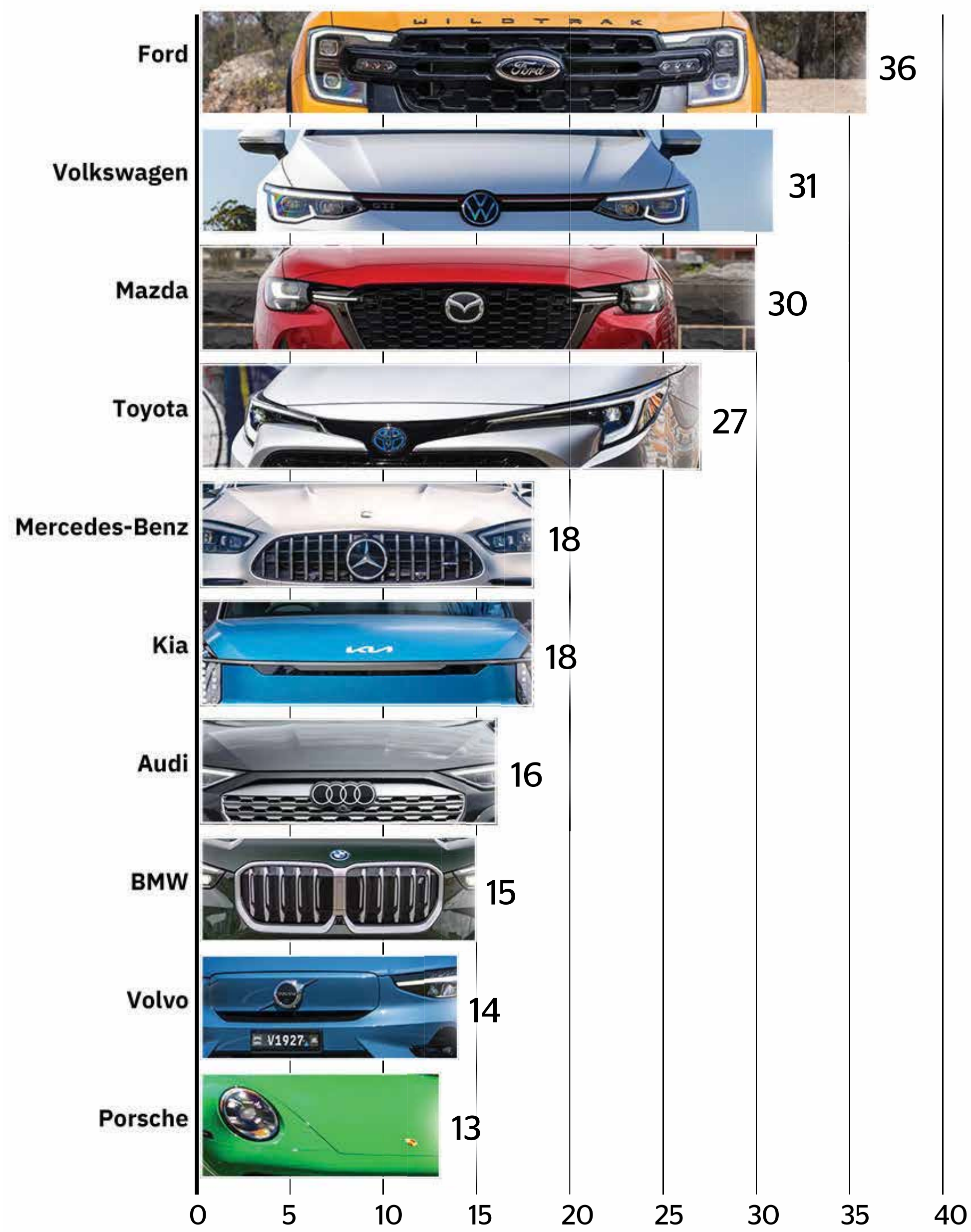
## THE BIGGEST WINNERS

Ford is the most awarded brand in DCOTY's 18-year history with 36 category wins including being crowned overall winner in 2016 (Everest) and again 2023 (Ranger).

Volkswagen's 31 category wins include two overall victories (Golf in 2010, and Polo in 2011) while Mazda has claimed 30 category wins, including the overall win in 2014 for the Mazda 6.

## 'WINNINGEST' MODEL

The Volkswagen Golf is Drive Car of the Year's most awarded model, taking 11 category wins including the overall victory in 2010 for the Golf.



That win was the first of two straight overall wins for the German brand, which again claimed top honours. Just behind the Volkswagen

Golf, the Mercedes-Benz C-Class has claimed 10 category wins, including winning overall Drive Car of the Year twice; in 2012 and again in 2015.



The Land Rover Defender's Best Off-Road SUV under \$150,000 victory this year is its fourth straight gong; (below) Volkswagen's 2011 overall winner.

## MOST SUCCESSIVE

The Kia Carnival, the South Korean brand's venerable people mover, has won its category the last five years in a row. Making its most recent win all the more remarkable, it faced renewed competition in 2024, now up against SUVs and people movers in the new-for-2024 category, Best Family Car Under \$80,000.

The Volvo XC40 also faced a category realignment along the way to snaring its fourth-straight category win. Shifting to the Best Small

SUV Under \$80,000 category meant the XC40 no longer went up against only its rivals in the premium category, but also faced stiff competition from more mainstream brands like Hyundai and Volkswagen.

Land Rover's Defender also chalked up its fourth straight category win in 2024, this year crowned the Best Off-Road SUV



Under \$150,000, adding to its three successive Best Off-Road SUV titles from 2021-23.




# THE iX



**THE FIRST-EVER FULLY ELECTRIC BMW iX.**

The first-ever fully electric BMW iX is the 2024 Drive Car of the Year Best Luxury Electric Vehicle under \$150K. Experience the addictive rush of new driving pleasure. Explore the thrill of range that pushes envelopes and boundaries. And, be exhilarated by the quest for sustainable perfection. The BMW iX is a new ultimate.

**Visit [BMW.com.au](http://BMW.com.au) to find out more.**



**BEST LUXURY ELECTRIC VEHICLE UNDER \$150K**

## BEST LUXURY CAR UNDER \$100,000

## A class above

Trent Nikolic

Last year's reigning luxury car champion has returned with another triumph in 2024. Against undeniably high-quality competition, the Mercedes-Benz C-Class lays down a marker as the best luxury car under \$100,000.

Two models are available in the mainstream C-Class range, meaning buyers can shape their budget to suit. But the verdict is clear as to which way the Drive Car of the Year judges would spend their hard-earned money.

The judges agreed unanimously the smartest way to spend your luxury sedan money is to opt for the entry-point, the well-equipped C200. We often state that more isn't necessarily more, and that is very much the case with the C200 where the entry grade is feature-packed, luxurious to drive, and premium in every sense.

Mercedes-Benz has had a category leader on its hands in the C-Class for some time, and that remains the case here. It is, say the judges, "a properly mature executive saloon". The C200 is, first and foremost, built to the expectation of a luxury car and is as stylish as it is practical.

## Mercedes-Benz C-Class

## Why it won

- Impressively premium equipment list
- Comfortable ride
- High-tech, user-friendly infotainment

## Key facts

- Priced from \$89,900 to \$95,900 (range)
- Five-year warranty
- 6.9-7.3L/100km consumption (claimed)

The C200's supremacy here is immediately evident inside the cabin, where signature Mercedes-Benz luxury and attention to detail abounds. The C-Class cabin is a premium place to be whether you are a driver or a passenger. The technology included, like the slick infotainment screen and control centre, looks fantastic but is also easy to use even for first-timers.

The C-Class also carries a full five-star rating by safety body ANCAP, awarded in 2022.

Despite the small 1.5-litre four-



The cabin of the Mercedes-Benz C-Class is unashamedly luxurious. Photo: Mathieu Riva



cylinder, turbocharged engine, the addition of 48-volt mild-hybrid starter-generator technology adds some spice. It's connected between the motor and gearbox, and there's

150kW and 300Nm on offer as well as a smooth nine-speed automatic. Fuel consumption is claimed to be 6.9L/100km on the combined cycle, and we have used as little as

mid-sevens in real-world testing.

Ride comfort is typical of a premium European offering, firm rather than magic carpet in terms of bump absorption in other words, but the C200 doesn't crash over the usual urban road network.

The key to this category is delivering on the promise of all-round luxury. A classy exterior, luxury cabin, quality inclusions, high-tech equipment and a premium driving experience are all non-negotiable, and that's why the Mercedes-Benz C-Class has trumped its rivals yet again.

## BEST LUXURY SUV UNDER \$150,000

## A convincing winner

Tom Fraser

The Mercedes-Benz GLC has convincingly taken out the Drive Car of the Year Best Luxury SUV Under \$150,000 award.

A new-generation GLC landed in Australia midway through last year, bringing new styling, a host of technology updates, and more space in just about every dimension.

As is tradition with lower-down-the-ladder Mercedes-Benz models, the new GLC reissues hallmark additions first presented on the S-Class limousine flagship of a few years ago. There's a well-presented MBUX infotainment system with integrated augmented reality, sumptuous materials covering just about every interior surface, and a high-tech engine with 48-volt mild-hybrid technology for fuel-saving benefits.

Making life easy for buyers, the new-generation GLC only comes in

a single variant – the GLC300, although there are option packs buyers can choose from to up-spec their vehicle.

Regardless, the GLC300 comes packed with equipment as standard and its impressive array of features, comfort, and technology will leave no buyer wanting for more.

It's difficult to keep a straight face after sliding inside the sumptuous cabin for the first time – it's so well presented no matter where you look, while the dominating 11.9-inch infotainment touchscreen really sets the technological pace for the cabin.

Operation of the big touchscreen is intuitive and quick, plus its functionality contains all manner of features and tricks to impress passengers.

A full-suite of active and passive safety systems ensures the car received a five-

star ANCAP crash result midway through 2023.

The basics aren't forgotten – there's still copious storage around the front row and every controllable aspect falls ergonomically to hand – and there's plenty of space to get comfortable in too.

The luxury experience extends to the second row. The leg room is sizeable and head room is unimpeded by the sunroof. There is no diminishment in the quality of materials in the second row either, not always a given, even at this premium level.

But arguably, the way the Mercedes-Benz GLC300 drives is

## Mercedes-Benz GLC

## Why it won

- Cabin wows with technology and luxuriousness
- Powerful and refined engine
- Customisability and connectivity of infotainment software

## Key facts

- Priced from \$104,900 to \$113,900
- 5-year warranty
- 7.7L/100km consumption (claimed)

its greatest asset. It's powered by a 2.0-litre turbocharged four-cylinder engine that outputs 190kW and 400Nm. That's a punchy set of outputs coming from

a 2.0-litre powertrain, and it certainly feels as such in practice.

The all-wheel-drive system puts power down to the ground faithfully and allows a nimble feeling through corners, while the car remains easy to manoeuvre in town.

Ride quality is buttery smooth despite pockmarked and potholed roads – the way the suspension is able to shield passengers from too much upset is commendable.

Ultimately, the new Mercedes-Benz GLC delivers every aspect buyers demand from a prestige car purchase – cabin technology, sophisticated looks, high-end materials, and a cracking powertrain.

A refined driving experience is the GLC's biggest asset. Photo: Sean Foster



CAPABLE OF GREAT THINGS

DEFENDER

