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# mainstream RIDES: LESS IS (NOW) MORE

By David Fluhrer

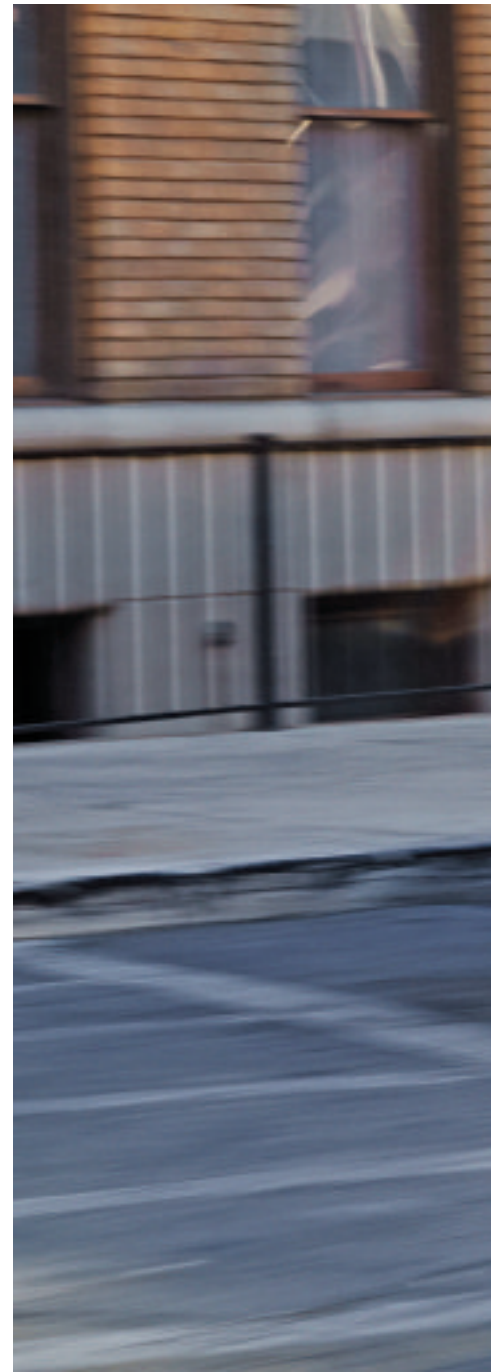
**DISCOVERING**  
*common* **CARS**  
at an *uncommon*  
**VALUE** is easier  
*than* you think.

**IF YOU HAVEN'T BEEN** to an auto showroom lately and want the bad news first, here it is: the average new vehicle price is pushing \$36,000. The good news? You can spend \$20,000 to \$33,000 for an SUV, crossover or sedan and get unprecedented value and style.

From Chevy to Volkswagen, today's mainstream models are chock full of top-quality engineering and design features well above their pay grades. Power comes from advanced engines and transmissions suitable for luxury brands. Steering and handling are precise and the ride is comfortable, quiet and solid-feeling. Fit and finish: excellent. Doors close with a thunk and spacious interiors offer elegant touches. State-of-the-art "infotainment" and crash avoidance systems are hugely popular and often standard, depending on trim. Only the premium badge is missing.

"More people are coming in and wanting Chevys than in the past because of the technology, the look and size, and because of the fit and finish," says Ronnie DeTommaso, general manager of Atlantic Chevrolet Cadillac of Bay Shore and Chevrolet of Huntington.

**Mazda CX-5 is SUV standout: the Grand Touring edition has leather interior.** Photo Credit: Mazda









“A lot of customers are shying away from the luxury brands because you get so much from what a Honda has to offer,” adds Ricky Alessi, general manager of Atlantic Honda in Bay Shore. “You’re almost getting an Acura without having to spend the extra money on the nameplate.”

Scan the field and uncover standouts, such as the Mazda CX-5 compact SUV. At \$32,600 with leather and a full electronic suite, it comports well with the hot, millennial-targeted Volvo XC40 at \$45,000 and the BMW X2 at more than \$50,000.



“We have some early adopter statistics for the newest CX-5 and CX-9 to show that we are getting Audi, BMW, Infiniti, Lexus and Acura customers into our cars,” says Mazda spokesman Jacob Brown. Other worthy competitors include Honda CR-V, Nissan Rogue, Subaru Forester and Toyota’s RAV4, as well as solid offerings from Chevrolet, Ford, GMC, Hyundai, Jeep, Kia and Volkswagen.

A current hit among midsize family sedans is the revamped Honda Accord, voted North American Car of the Year. *Motor Trend* magazine rated a top-line, \$37,000 Touring nicer to drive, more sophisticated and more rewarding to spend time in than an Audi A4.

“People come back from test drives really impressed,” says Alessi, who notes that many buyers skip unwanted frills by opting for the well-equipped, \$26,000 Sport model. Some will then add dealer-installed leather in shades as dramatic as red.

Accord alternatives include the Chevrolet Malibu, Hyundai Sonata, Kia Optima, Mazda6, Nissan Altima, Subaru Legacy, Toyota Camry and Volkswagen’s Passat. Buick adds European flair with its \$30,000 German-

**Honda Accord Touring interior bested Audi A4.**

*Photo Credit: Honda*



A lot of customers are shying away from the luxury brands . . .”

— Ricky Alessi, Honda dealership general manager







**Subaru Impreza is a compact standout. The Impreza Limited features ivory leather and EyeSight safety.** Photo Credit: Subaru

built Regal Sportback Preferred, which mimics the profile of an Audi A5 or A7 Sportback.

Move down to compact sedans and you'll discover the all-wheel-drive Subaru Impreza, available well-equipped between \$21,000 and \$30,000. Its stiffer "global platform" makes for a solid ride and features such as leather and the highly praised EyeSight safety system are shared with costlier siblings.

"Typically, we will first adopt premium features such as power seats, heated steering wheels, navigation or EyeSight on our higher-level models or upper trim levels before migrating them down to lower trims or models over time," says Ken Lin, Subaru's director of product management. Fine alternatives include the Chevrolet Cruze, Honda Civic, Hyundai Elantra and Mazda3, with similar models from Nissan, Toyota and Volkswagen.

Some buyers go upscale by adding a few more dollars to aggressive monthly lease rates. That gives them access to the plush Nappa leather seats in the \$36,000 Mazda6 Signature or the aromatic quilted cowhides of the sub-\$37,000 Kia Optima SX Limited



Package. Nissan's exclusive 2019 Altima Edition One even promises three years of free concierge services.

Whatever your choice, consider this a golden age of value for mainstream SUVs, crossovers and cars. Where your transportation budget once bought hamburger, it now gets you a taste of automotive filet mignon. *LIL*

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