

The modern car-buying experience

Rapid technology developments in the automotive industry benefit consumers, from product selection to service quality. Car buyers are getting more for their money than ever before—more vehicle configurations, more power and more features.

Presented by



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The National Automobile Dealers Association (NADA), founded in 1917, represents approximately 20,000 new-car and -truck dealers, both domestic and international, with more than 43,000 separate franchises.



The modern car-buying experience

Technology has accelerated our lives in the 21st century—online and in the fast lane.

Cars are now being developed more rapidly, enabling swifter response to market trends with vehicles that boast increased powertrain sophistication and enhanced safety features.

Along with technology comes more new-car data, putting consumers in the driver's seat for choosing, buying and maintaining their next vehicle. Likewise, car dealerships are better equipped to communicate with customers and service their modern machines than ever before.

This section, brought to you by the National Automobile Dealers Association (NADA), will empower you to make a smart purchase decision on a model that will deliver many satisfying miles.

HOW TO FIND THE RIGHT MODEL

Due to continuous automotive advancements, many car buyers may not be aware of how much has changed since their last vehicle purchase.

Fortunately, the research tools have kept pace with automotive progress, putting tremendous resources just a few mouse clicks away.

Given how traditional car types have become blurred, with once narrowly defined segments merging together, it is important for consumers to weigh all options early in the research phase. A decade ago, for example, SUVs were mostly truck-based vehicles, but today many share more in common with cars. These so-called "crossover vehicles," or CUVs, promise the best of both worlds: the comfort and refinement of a wagon and the stance, all-weather traction and cargo capacity of an SUV. For many consumers, such a segment-busting vehicle may be the perfect solution for their daily needs. Such genre-blending models exist throughout the automotive spectrum.

All major car magazines now have very robust Web sites, with reviews, auto show coverage and buyer's guides. These destinations are joined by Web-only automotive information outlets. Many of these sites have sophisticated "car selectors" that can put together

custom lists of models that have the attributes you seek.

NADA offers a full suite of online tools to assist car shoppers

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While auto dealers are clearly leading the way when it comes to buying a car, few people realize the extent to which they take a lead in community service. For nearly 40 years, TIME has recognized these dealers for the quality of service in their business and in their community. Each candidate is nominated by either state or local associations of franchised new-car dealers, and then a faculty panel from the University of Michigan Graduate School of Business Administration selects the finalists and the winner. Some of the 2007 finalists have been highlighted here, making it easy to see why they are making tracks in their community.





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(NADAguides.com), spanning from the browsing phase all the way to contacting a local dealership. Reviews are provided by independent professional groups, providing details on both new and used models. These are supported by extensive photo galleries and 360-degree views, as well as complete pricing information.

While doing your homework online can prepare you for visiting your local dealers, there is no replacing hands-on experience.

WELCOME TO THE MODERN DEALERSHIP

When you visit the new-car showroom, you will find sales staff trained in the latest automotive technology and ready to explain the newest features. Seeing the high-tech elements in person, and even using them yourself, can help in understanding their use and value.

For instance, features once reserved for high-end luxury vehicles are now becoming available, and even standard, on mainstream models. In your shopping, be sure to learn more about in-car navigation systems, Bluetooth connectivity and premium audio systems with MP3 playback, iPod compatibility and five-plus channel sound. These are prime examples where the written word can't compete with a simple demonstration.

Many dealerships exemplify the automotive revolution with showrooms that are being modernized to enhance the shopping experience, offering comfortable waiting rooms and with myriad conveniences. This new wave of dealers has invested in making your major purchase and subsequent ownership as easy, and even pleasurable, as possible.

And now, even research can be conducted in many dealerships, with interactive kiosks bringing the cars to life with video, and available Wi-Fi and computer stations enabling on-premises Web access. Some dealers have added amenities from coffee shops and fitness centers to massage services and child care.

PRICE QUOTES FROM HOME

Most car dealers maintain their own Web sites, allowing a customer to e-mail or chat with a salesperson and often providing a means to schedule a service appointment.

In addition, many dealers participate in online quote services, enabling car shoppers to request a price on a specific model from local dealers through third-party and manufacturer sites. This service can save consumers time and money, effectively addressing the purchase negotiation from home on their own schedule.

BUYING PRE-OWNED

Consumers continue to be drawn to certified pre-owned (CPO) cars. Budget-focused buyers will find that the models enrolled in the CPO programs tend to be just two to four years old, with relatively low mileage and in top condition. The dealership has gone through the car, from bumper to bumper, ensuring it meets exacting criteria for condition and addressing any possible shortcomings.

There are essentially two types of CPO programs: national, manufacturer-supported and the local, dealer-sponsored varieties. Because automakers have to share earnings from participation in the national programs, there is the potential to save money from a dealer, or dealer group, program.

With CPO, consumers can get a good price on a lightly used car with all the peace of mind of buying new. And with the savings, you can drive home a bit more car than would otherwise be possible.

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DRIVING FORCE IN HUNTSVILLE

Tracy Shields Jones, *President, Century Automotive Group, Huntsville, AL*

Tracy Shields Jones wanted to make a difference in the lives of women battling breast cancer. As an involved member of the community, her "Drive for the Cure" campaign has made her dealership the No. 1 participating BMW dealer on the East Coast for the past 10 years, receiving much praise from The Susan G. Komen Foundation and her community.

Modern car and truck technologies

Today's vehicles roll with amazing technology, improving performance, safety and entertainment. Often, the most impressive features are hidden from the driver, as high-tech wizardry works to enhance even mainstream autos to a level beyond the reach of premium sedans from just a few years ago.

While many of these electronics-driven features remain indulgences, an informed consumer should know what standard features are available today and what may trickle down from the luxury autos tomorrow. Let's lift the hood to examine some of today's most intriguing technologies.

IMPROVED PERFORMANCE

Addressing consumer demand for improved performance, automakers have made great strides in horsepower in recent years, while maintaining and even improving fuel economy. The technologies that help make this possible include:

■ **Cylinder deactivation.** These systems allow large engines, such as V-6s, V-8s and V-12s, to cut back the number of operating cylinders under light load, which includes modest-speed cruising or driving down hills. By reducing the cylinders used, the engine conserves fuel and reduces emissions.

■ **Advanced valvetrains.** Increasingly complex, variable systems allow fine electronic and mechanical control over the valvetrain. The more sophisticated management of the intake and exhaust valves improves both power and efficiency.

■ **Transmissions.** Electronic transmissions have improved performance, and we are now seeing

the number of gears in automatics climb to five, six and even seven gears. More gears enable these smart transmissions to react to power demands and elevate fuel economy.

MODERN SAFETY

Cars have become significantly safer due to advances in vehicle engineering and safety systems. For example, crash tests show the clear value in side and side-curtain airbags for occupant protection. Other systems becoming available that promise to keep motorists even safer include:

■ **Active head restraints.** Although commonly referred to as headrests, the function of these restraints is to reduce the risk and severity of neck injuries. Many brands now provide active restraints that can move toward the head and cradle it during impact through various mechanisms, providing an extra measure of safety from common injuries often caused by rear-end collisions.

■ **Lane-departure warning.** Inattentive and/or sleepy drivers are alerted when the car wanders from its lane, reducing the risk of a leading cause of highway accidents.

■ **Pre-collision.** These systems use sensors to predict an imminent impact and prepare the car for a possible crash. Some versions will warn the driver, and even take action to apply brakes, adjust seats and activate seat belt pretensioners.

MOBILE ENTERTAINMENT

Car stereos have long been at the center of any road trip. Today's best systems advance the audio art by adapting features from home stereos and computers, and

even add a few tricks of their own:

■ **Premium audio.** For discriminating ears, premium car stereos combine multichannel audio, with separate speakers for bass and treble, along with the thumping support of a subwoofer. Upscale applications may have crisp HD radio, DVD audio and noise-canceling systems that effectively quiet the cabin to enhance audio clarity. Stereos are now commonly available with satellite radio and Radio Data System (RDS) for displaying station and song information.

■ **MP3.** Many factory head units are capable of playing CDs with MP3 and WMA audio files—common formats for computer music software and online song libraries.

■ **Navigation.** Both in-car and portable navigation systems continue to add features, one of the latest being traffic monitoring service for major metropolitan areas. A premium service in most cases, this feature enables commuters to route around a potential problem.

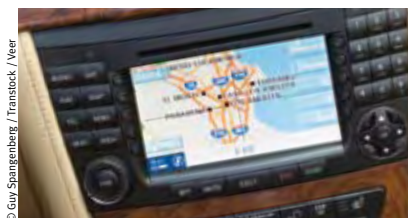
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RAISING SPIRITS

Peggy A. Proko, Vice President, Peters Auto Center, Nashua, NH

For the past 15 years, Peggy Proko has been acting as a local fairy godmother. In conjunction with the High Hopes Foundation, Proko has helped grant the wishes of nearly 50 terminally ill children in New Hampshire. In support of the foundation, her dealership has sponsored an annual hot air balloon festival, raising nearly \$40,000.



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Understanding today's safety features



Electronic stability control could save 10,000 lives annually if all vehicles were equipped with it.

Source: Insurance Institute for Highway Safety

test ratings available online quickly shows how many vehicles deliver poor or fair performance without them.

Tire pressure monitors have become standard on all passenger vehicles for the 2008 model year, reducing the risk of tire-related accidents due to underinflation. The systems range in ability from providing a warning when the tire pressure is too low to displaying the pressure in each tire. While a welcomed, passive safety aid, these should not be considered a replacement for a simple once-a-month visual tire inspection and manual pressure check.

Standard safety equipment improves with each model generation. The new car you are considering will likely have more features and provide better protection than the one you are trading in.

Advances in computer-aided design and virtual crash simulation have enabled increasingly sophisticated engineering to protect occupants. In the real world, avoiding the accident can be even more valuable than being prepared for one, making active safety systems like electronic stability control a “must have.”

When selecting a new car, factor crash test performance among your primary considerations. The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (safercar.gov) provides crash test results and rollover ratings on new models. Also check the findings from the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety (iihs.org), which conducts more stringent evaluations.

SAFETY ESSENTIALS

Antilock brakes (ABS) have become quite common on new vehicles, giving motorists significantly more car control during slippery conditions. By pulsing the brakes faster than humanly possible, ABS can shorten stopping distances on wet and icy surfaces. During panic stops, it allows the driver to still steer the car,

possibly avoiding another car or road obstacle. Without ABS, the car would be locked into a single trajectory. This ability is something that should be tried in safe conditions in order for the driver to become comfortable with the system.

Electronic stability control (ESC) helps drivers avoid accidents by using the antilock brake system to correct sliding, or rotational, movement. ESC assists in keeping a vehicle on its intended path in slippery conditions caused by both weather and simply overdriving the car. With rollover mitigation systems, ESC can also significantly reduce rollover risk. All passenger vehicles will be required to have ESC as standard equipment by 2012.

Side and side-curtain airbags can protect occupants from hard surfaces and even an intruding vehicle during side impacts. In a frontal collision, the car can have several feet of structure to absorb and distribute the metal-twisting forces. However, from the side, there is precious little separating loved ones from the front of another vehicle. As proof of their effectiveness, scanning the side-crash

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SHIFTING TOWARD EXCELLENCE

David C. Wintrode, President, Causeway Family of Dealerships, Manahawkin, NJ

One of the U.S.'s largest literacy surveys revealed that 30 million people have below basic reading skills. It is no wonder David Wintrode dedicates himself to promoting literacy in his community. He founded the Literacy Coalition of Southern Ocean County, which sponsors a year-round program called “Reading for Excellence.” Nearly 3,200 children, in six different school systems and eight Head Start preschools, have benefited from this program.

Maintaining your vehicle

We all take cars for granted—just turn a key and go. Today's cars are built to reliably provide years of service, transporting family and friends to work, school and vacation destinations. But to ensure the car is always ready to go when you are, and do so safely, it is important to adhere to a routine maintenance schedule.

WHEN TO SERVICE THE CAR

The intervals between service visits have been increasing over time due to changes in assembly, improvements in wear items and the ability for the car to actively monitor its health. Now, more than ever, it is important to consult your owner's manual to ensure you provide proper service and not spend money on following a more aggressive schedule than is necessary.

While sealed bearings and self-adjusting valvetrains have eliminated the need to lubricate and tune these key components, there are still many elements that do require routine inspections and replacements. Air filters, brake pads, coolant, engine oil, spark plugs and transmission fluid have evolved significantly in recent years, and in some cases, they may last longer in a new car than in the one you are trading in. But don't make assumptions.

In determining the frequency for basic visits, most owner's manuals guide the driver to identifying a "normal"

or "severe" duty cycle. Don't jump to conclusions here. It is worth reading the descriptions for each carefully, as more cars fall into the "severe" category than you might think. This category covers vehicles used for frequent, short trips; trailer towing; and those that face hot, cold and dusty conditions.

An increasing number of vehicles have built-in maintenance reminders to recommend when service is needed based on the vehicle's specific usage. The better systems warn as service time approaches, with some even indicating the oil life in percentages.

Ultimately, take the vehicle to a service center you can trust. A car dealer is a natural choice, as their service department is trained and equipped for working on your specific vehicle. These local experts maintain and repair the

Replacing a clogged air filter can improve your car's gas mileage by as much as 10 percent.

SOURCE: fuelconomy.gov

same model daily and know the right way to keep it running. NADA member dealers, numbering more than 20,000, adhere to a strict code of ethics that guides honest, quality work at a fair price. Also, having your service records all at one location can help track issues and avoid redundant work. When it comes time to sell or trade in, complete service records can make a good impression and possibly add value.

DRIVEWAY INSPECTIONS

In between scheduled visits, there are easy checks you can perform in the driveway once a month and before long road trips.

- **Engine oil:** Check condition and volume with the car parked on a level surface, wiping the dipstick and reinserting for a clean read. A lowering oil level and/or spots on the driveway can indicate serious problems.
- **Fluids:** Check the steering and brake fluids. For non-sealed automatic transmissions, check the level by dipstick with the engine warmed up and running.
- **Tire pressure:** Check before driving the vehicle when the tires are cold. The recommended tire pressure is usually found in the owner's manual or doorjamb, but never on the tire itself. The number on the sidewall refers to the maximum pressure and has no bearing on the proper pressure for your specific vehicle. Also, visually inspect the tire, looking for sidewall damage and penetrating objects. The tread depth should be at least $\frac{4}{32}$ of an inch. Check the spare tire pressure every two to three months to ensure it is ready to use.
- **Wash:** The simple act of washing your car provides a hands-on exterior inspection that can identify scratches, rust and loose trim pieces that warrant attention. Keeping the paint in good condition, with annual waxings, will improve both appearance and resale value.



How to choose a fuel-efficient vehicle

Fuel economy is a leading consumer concern, and the auto industry is responding with continued engine improvements, often enabling more power and better mileage with each new model generation. There are a growing number of hybrid and diesel vehicles on the market today, giving consumers more choices than ever.

Diverse vehicle offerings better enable car buyers to find the right fit for their lifestyle. In particular, the blossoming crossover vehicle (CUV) market is adding new models that blur the lines between conventional car types. These crossovers ride on a car-like platform, as opposed to the body-on-frame construction of traditional SUVs and trucks. The benefits to ride and handling are obvious, but these new-wave CUVs also weigh less, enabling smaller engines and greater fuel economy than their conventional competitors.

Such segment blurring creates new choices that may not have existed when your last car was purchased. As a result, car buyers today can better target their specific needs, rather than compromise on a model that may be engineered for true off-roading or for towing massive trailers, for example, when that capability isn't needed.

While small cars are clearly more fuel efficient than large SUVs, every vehicle class has models that perform better than others. It is well worth researching the performance of the models you are

Due to new EPA regulations, the window stickers on 2008 models show fuel economy numbers that are closer to real-world driving performance. Although the numbers will be lower than last year, the vehicles do not perform worse; the figures are just more accurate.

Source: U.S. Department of Energy

considering (fuelconomy.gov). There you will also find emissions ratings to inform "green" considerations.

Before buying, clarify what fuel is required. Many luxury and sporty cars demand premium, high-octane fuel that can add significantly to operating costs. Upon closer inspection, many models "recommend" premium for peak performance, but will operate just fine on regular gasoline. Such cars may have an incremental performance compromise—a non-issue for most drivers.

DAWN OF THE NEW DIESELS

Once outlawed in many states due to poor emissions, diesel cars are entering a new era ushered in by federally mandated ultra-low-sulfur fuel. Combined with particulate traps and other technologies, this fuel now at the pumps allows the newest diesel engines to boast a 90 percent or more reduction in harmful emissions.

Expect to see a diesel resurgence from coast to coast, since these clean-burning powerplants promise about 30 percent better fuel economy than their gasoline-fueled peers. While they typically carry a price premium, the potential long-term savings and reputation for high-mileage reliability add to their appeal.

HYBRID REVOLUTION

The poster child for the green movement, hybrid cars combine a gasoline engine, electric motors and a battery pack to create an adaptive powertrain that can continuously adjust to provide power in the most efficient means possible.

But beware: not all hybrid models are



focused on maximum fuel economy. In fact, some models use the electric assist more for power than mileage. There are two basic configurations: mild hybrids that use the electric motor to assist the gasoline engine and full hybrids that can operate solely on electric power.

While hybrids do deliver better fuel economy than their gasoline-driven peers, the higher purchase price limits potential fuel cost savings. Of course, the economics vary by model and driving situation, but generally speaking the appeal for buying a hybrid should also include low emissions, reducing the national dependence on oil and technology affinity—not just pump savings.

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NADA Public Affairs Group: David Hyatt, VP; Seena Faqiri, Specialist; Deborah Hopkins, Communications; Jeff Beddow, PR

TIME Creative Services: Liza Greene, Director; Ray Rualo, Art Director; Cindy Murphy, Production; Shanna Yehlen, Coordinator