

Choosing Your New SUV

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You know you want an SUV, but with dozens of models in all shapes and sizes, choosing one can be a daunting task. The best way to go about the decision process is to make a list of what features your new SUV should have, what type of driving you'll be doing most, and of course, the price range that you plan to be shopping in. Are you more concerned with safety and stature, or is maneuverability and fuel economy more important? Do you really need four-wheel drive? How about cargo space? Is it just you and a friend heading to the hills to do some hiking, or will you be hauling the whole clan, with your boat, down to the lake to spend the day water skiing? The point here is to think about all the different ways you plan to use your SUV, why you want an SUV, and what features you simply can't live without.

Following are some of the major factors you'll want to consider when making your list:

Fuel Economy

This is a tough one. The cost of gas doesn't appear to be going down any time soon, but for many people one of the main things they like about SUV's are their sheer size. The ability to haul a week's groceries and a family of five, while perched comfortably above the surrounding traffic is quite attractive. However, those same features will cost you, with the largest SUV's getting mileage figures that range in the mid teens.

Two Wheel Drive or Four Wheel Drive

If you can be honest with yourself and admit you're not really going to drive your new pride and joy off-road, then you can save yourself some money and look at two wheel drive SUV's. Two wheel drives cost less than their all wheel drive counterparts, and are cheaper to maintain since the powertrain is only driving two wheels, so there are fewer moving parts to worry about.

On the other hand, if you like to get away from it all and explore the wilds, or if you know you'll be driving in the snow then a four wheel drive SUV is going to be the way to go. The extra expense of maintaining the four-wheel drive system is well worth it when the going gets tough.

Passenger and Cargo Capacity

This one is pretty self-explanatory. If you're going to be hauling more than four people, then you'll probably want to rule out the compact SUV's. The same holds true of pulling trailers. Compact SUV's can pull small trailers, but it's not really their forte. If you're going to be towing any but the smallest trailers you'll want to pay close attention to the towing capacity, torque, and horsepower ratings. Cargo space is also a concern, especially if you expect to be transporting heavy or bulky items such as furniture, appliances, or the bounty from the latest excursion to your favorite wholesale store.

Cost

There are many factors, which affect the price of SUV's. The primary factor determining the cost is the level of luxury the vehicle provides. Also playing a large role in cost is the size of the vehicle. Generally, larger SUV's cost more than smaller ones. Some brands, due to their prestige and level of fit and finish, will cost you more, but in this case you can expect to get what you pay for. The lower cost vehicles will have a more basic feel to them, which isn't necessarily a bad thing if you really plan to use your SUV as a "utility vehicle". Some want the stability and rugged capability of an SUV, but prefer a level of luxury previously only found in up-market sedans such as those from Mercedes, BMW, or Lexus. There's no need to compromise between luxury and utility now that these automakers are all producing excellent luxury SUV's.

Handling and Maneuverability

This is mainly a function of size. Do you commute on a twisty mountain road, but you're not planning to carry a lot of passengers? Then you should probably be looking at compact and midsize SUV's. The smaller SUV's are generally built on platforms very similar to passenger cars, and their handling will reflect this.

If you're mainly driving around town and on the freeway, and you need lots of hauling capacity, then you should only be considering the larger vehicles such as the Chevy Suburban or the Ford Excursion. While these larger SUV's are built more like pickup trucks, with the handling to match, this is what gives them the heavy cargo and towing capacities.

Once you've got your list you'll want to make another list of potential candidates that match up with the features from your

first list. Now go down your new list of SUV's and examine each one more closely. Cross off any that you feel have "deal breakers". For example, a particular brand's base model fits in your price range, but you want the larger engine and towing package of the mid-range model which pushes it out of your price range – cross it off the list. Go all the way through your list of candidates. Now comes the fun part; test-drives.

Make sure you drive all the vehicles remaining on your list. Otherwise you might be tempted to buy the first one you drive. Test drives can be quite seductive, for sure, but if you don't drive them all, how will you know if you missed the perfect one? Once you've driven all the SUV's from your list, take some quiet time away from the dealers to sit down with your list and cross off any that you're sure you don't like. You should now be left with just a few to choose between. This method of choosing a vehicle may sound time consuming, but the result of not making a snap decision is purchasing a vehicle that you'll be happy with long term, and the peace of mind that comes from not wondering if maybe there's something better out there. Dave Harrison is a Reservations Specialist with Affordable Hawaii Car Rentals, which offers Maui Jeep Rentals. His information comes from personal experience and he has been writing on the subject of the Hawaiian Islands and auto related topics for over ten years.