



SUV, sedan, or truck? New or used? CR's experts help you make the right choice for your needs—and your budget. **PLUS** Smart options to consider in every category.

by Keith Barry  
Illustration by Sinelab

**IF IT'S BEEN SEVERAL YEARS** since you last bought a car, it might be shocking to see how much the landscape has shifted. To start, the cost of buying a new vehicle skyrocketed during the early years of the pandemic and continues to climb, topping \$50,000 for the first time ever in September 2025, according to Kelley Blue Book data. The end of the federal EV tax credit and new tariffs added further uncertainty about how high prices may go. A shortage of lower-priced new cars has driven up used car prices, too.

Even the types of vehicles you'll find on dealer lots have changed. There are more hybrid and electric options, but sedans have largely given way to SUVs and pickup trucks, and automakers are focusing on high-margin luxury models instead of basic cars.

"Car buying is a different world than five or 10 years ago, and you need to adjust your expectations accordingly," says Jake Fisher, senior director of Consumer Reports' Auto Test Center. "Your best bet is to choose a vehicle that's satisfying, reliable, safe, and meets your current and future needs so that you don't have to buy another one anytime soon."

To guide you to a choice you'll be happy with for the long haul, we've broken down the most popular vehicle types and their pros and cons. We've also chosen standout models in each category, from sensible SUVs to zippy sports cars. (For more used car options, see "[Best & Worst Used Cars](#)")

**IF YOU WANT AN ...**

**SUV**

► **PROS** Unlike the first SUVs—essentially pickups with a back seat and a long roof—today's car-based models have the same underlying design as a sedan. That makes them lighter, quieter, and easier to drive. They still offer extra space for passengers and cargo, more headroom, and increased ground clearance that can help in snowy weather. And their higher seating position, which some drivers prefer, can make for easier access than a sedan provides. Some truck-based SUVs are still available. Built on rugged pickup frames, they're better suited for off-roading and towing campers or boats.

► **CONS** SUVs usually cost more than comparably equipped sedans, and many models look more rugged than they actually are. Even when they're named after a national park, many popular car-based SUVs can't go off-road, nor can they tow more than a few thousand pounds. Those that can tend to have rougher rides and get worse fuel economy. In general, SUVs' higher ground clearance can reduce front visibility. Their bulky size and heavy weight makes for longer braking distances and worse handling than smaller vehicles. While some SUVs have a third row of seats, that space is usually pretty cramped. If you often need to carry seven or eight adult passengers, you might want to consider a minivan instead.

**They're roomy and easy to get into and out of, but larger SUVs can have poor front visibility.**

► **FEATURES TO LOOK FOR** A powered liftgate can make it easier to open or close a heavy hatch. A **surround view camera** helps with parking such a large vehicle. A **trailer hitch** isn't just for towing—you can also use it to mount a bike rack on the back of the vehicle; that's much easier to reach than a roof-mounted rack.

► **GAS, HYBRID, OR EV?** SUVs are bigger and heavier than sedans, so they tend to be less fuel-efficient. Hybrid models offer impressive fuel savings, and our road tests show they often have quicker and smoother acceleration than nonhybrids. Two-row electric SUVs tend to do well in our road tests and score high on owner satisfaction. Fewer fully electric three-row SUVs are available, and most are fairly expensive and not reliable.

► **GET THE MOST FOR YOUR MONEY** The least expensive SUVs are usually subcompact models. These small, tall hatchbacks can start below \$25,000 and may seem like a good deal, but many tend to have low owner satisfaction. Even subcompact SUVs from luxury brands are typically noisier and less comfortable than larger versions. Compact SUVs offer more space and refinement, while mid-sized two- and three-row models add even more room and versatility. But don't count on big savings by buying used: Some small and mid-sized models are in such high demand that 2023 and 2024 versions may cost only a few thousand dollars less than brand-new ones. That means promotional financing and longer warranties might make a new SUV a better deal.

► **3 GREAT CHOICES**

75 OVERALL SCORE



**SUBCOMPACT SUV**

✓ **TOYOTA COROLLA CROSS HYBRID**

A subcompact hybrid SUV that gets an impressive 41 mpg overall, the Corolla Cross is easy to maneuver in parking lots, has good visibility, and is easy to get into and out of.

\$29,295-\$33,330  
BASE MSRP

1 RELIABILITY

1 OWNER SATISFACTION

41 MPG

83 OVERALL SCORE



**COMPACT SUV**

✓ **HONDA CR-V HYBRID**

The hybrid version of this popular SUV comes with tons of cargo room, is loaded with the easiest-to-use safety controls we've seen.

\$35,630-\$42,630  
BASE MSRP

2 RELIABILITY

2 OWNER SATISFACTION

35 MPG

65 OVERALL SCORE



**MID-SIZED SUV**

✓ **TOYOTA 4RUNNER**

This rugged-looking truck-based mid-sized SUV lives up to its appearance. It can tow up to 6,000 pounds and take on trails, and it's slightly more comfortable and refined than other off-roaders.

\$41,570-\$67,900  
BASE MSRP

2 RELIABILITY

2 OWNER SATISFACTION

21 MPG