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you read this
INDEPENDENT
guide before
buying a
new car*

4x4s

**features
include:**



Petrol or diesel?

Diesel cars outsold petrol models for the first time ever in 2012. But the 4x4 market has been dominated by diesel for many years... P06

The real versatility of a 4x4

Fact: most 4x4s never venture off-Tarmac. Does that matter? Not really. There are other plus-points to owning a 4x4... P09

AUTOeVIEWS™

COMPREHENSIVE CAR REVIEW MAGAZINE

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Welcome

AUTOeVIEWS™ provides free comprehensive car guides for the in-market car buyer. Written by market leading motoring journalists, these guides are commissioned in response to consumer requests for unbiased news, reviews, features and advice on specific cars and their categories, be they superminis, family cars, 4x4s or luxury to name a few.

We hope that you find this guide educational and action motivating. We would welcome any feedback that you may have. Indeed, if you have a motoring topic that you would like us to cover please do not hesitate to email us: editor@autoeviews.com



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WHY A 4X4 COULD MAKE SENSE FOR YOU



There was a time when 4x4s were strictly work tools for farmers and soldiers. Now these exciting, versatile vehicles have been domesticated, and they make up a big chunk of the UK car market.

The American Willys Jeep of 1941 was the first 4x4, followed by the British Land Rover in 1948. But it wasn't until 1970, when the Brits launched the Range Rover, that the modern 4x4 began to take shape.

The Range Rover was a practical alternative to a luxury saloon, and the idea of choosing a 4x4 instead of a car soon spread to other sectors of the market. Today, even superminis (Peugeot 2008) and sports coupés (BMW X6) have had the 4x4 treatment, even if some – like the Peugeot – are actually 'crossovers' with off-roader styling but two-wheel drive.

We'll come back to crossovers shortly. But for the sake of simplicity, let's take '4x4' as a catch-all term for all such vehicles.

Many people say a raised driving position is one of their reasons for buying a 4x4. You get a clearer view of the road ahead, improving safety and making traffic jams feel less oppressive.

4x4s are also bigger than regular cars, and that usually translates into more interior space. Boot volume is usually on par with a similarly-sized estate, and some larger 4x4s have seven seats.

All very family-friendly, then. And there's more good news when it comes to safety. A government report from 2006 showed that risk of serious injury or death was around 50% lower than for those in smaller cars.

Extra ground clearance and the added traction of four-wheel drive (where fitted) also make 4x4s the safest option on icy or snow-covered roads.

Finally, if you're concerned about fuel economy – don't be. The latest 4x4s and crossovers are very efficient and hold onto their value well, which keeps running costs down. ■



4X4s VERSUS CROSSOVERS

The 4x4 market is growing, although many of the new arrivals are really crossovers. As their name suggests, these vehicles bridge the gap between cars and 4x4s. They have a raised ride height and chunky styling, but compact dimensions and – in many cases – two-wheel drive.

Nissan's Qashqai (say it: 'cash-kai') is the car that kick-started the crossover craze. A big dollop of 4x4 attitude sets the Qashqai apart from humdrum hatchbacks, making it a regular fixture in the top 10 bestsellers list.

The success of the Qashqai has inspired a host of imitators like the Mitsubishi ASX and Vauxhall Mokka, plus a new breed of MPV-style crossovers such as the Renault Captur.

However few Qashqais sold in the UK are four-wheel drive; most send power through the front wheels only. Opting for 4WD adds £1,500 to the car's price and reduces fuel economy by about 7mpg for the 1.6 diesel – so it's easy to see why few bother with the extra drive.

Traditional-style 4x4s are generally larger and loftier, but newer alternatives, generally more compact, have the option of either drive.

Popular two-wheel-drive '4x2s' include the Ford Kuga and Mazda CX-5.

Others, like most versions of the Honda CR-V, have 4WD systems that only kick in when needed. Either way, the old-fashioned image of the 'gas guzzler' is just that: old-fashioned.

Towards the top end of the market you enter the realm of the luxury 4x4. These potent status symbols have a desirable badge on the bonnet and plenty of gadgets inside. All except some versions of the latest BMW X5 have four-wheel drive, and they're among the most all-round capable cars you can buy.

And if you're in the minority of 4x4 owners who drive off-road, you'll be pleased to know that the Willys Jeep and original Land Rover live on as the Jeep Wrangler and Land Rover Defender. Both can tackle desert dunes, snowy peaks – or the school-run. ■



NEW OR USED?

Buying a new car gives you perfect paintwork and a factory-fresh smell. But most of all, it gives you peace of mind.

If anything goes wrong with a new car, you can get it fixed free of charge under warranty. You may also be able to pay for servicing upfront, and you won't have to worry about an MOT test for three years.

New cars are more fuel-efficient – particularly when it comes to 4x4s. And that means lower day-to-day running costs, including vehicle tax (VED).

Don't forget depreciation, though. This loss of value due to increasing age and mileage is often the biggest cost when it comes to running a car. Yet it remains hidden until the time comes to sell.

The UK's cheapest new 4x4, the Dacia Duster, costs from just £9,000. However, you'll have to spend more than twice that for a typical family 4x4 like a Toyota RAV4 or Volkswagen Tiguan.

Or you could buy second-hand. Used 4x4s aren't immune from depreciation, but the rate of loss is much slower

– and they're cheaper to buy in the first place. A safe and reliable 4x4, such as an old Honda CR-V, is yours for less than £3,000.

Downsides? Well, obviously used cars are more prone to mechanical and electrical problems. And if the warranty has run out, you'll have to

foot the bill for any repairs yourself.

Performance, refinement and equipment may not match modern 4x4s either. Be sure to inspect a vehicle and its paperwork thoroughly before you buy, judging it on condition rather than the indicated mileage. ■



PETROL OR DIESEL?

Diesel cars outsold petrol models for the first time ever in 2012. But the 4x4 market has been dominated by diesel for many years – and there are good reasons for that.



Firstly, diesels offer much better fuel economy than petrol engines, especially in larger 4x4s. You can achieve up to 50% more miles per gallon compared to a similarly powerful petrol engine. Annual vehicle tax (VED) – based on CO₂ emissions – is cheaper, too.

The advantages stack up if your 4x4 is bought as a company car. Company car tax is calculated by taking the list price of the car, then multiplying by a set percentage. The lower the CO₂ emissions, the lower this percentage – so you pay less tax.

The greenest BMW X1 is subject to company car tax based upon 18% of its list price new, while a Range Rover Sport V8 petrol is rated at 35%. And the Range Rover is much more expensive in the first place.

However, the latest breed of small, efficient petrol engines is changing the status quo. If you're buying with your own money and you don't drive a huge number of miles each year, a petrol 4x4 could actually work out cheaper.

Take the Volkswagen Tiguan as an example. At the time of writing, the 160bhp 1.4 TSI petrol Bluemotion Tech S (2WD) costs £21,250, while

the 140bhp 2.0 TDI diesel Bluemotion Tech S (2WD) is £22,445. Fuel economy is 42.2mpg for the petrol and 53.3mpg for the diesel.

Using current fuel prices, a driver covering 5,000 miles a year would take nearly nine years to pay back the £1,195 premium for the diesel Tiguan through reduced fuel costs. But somebody travelling 15,000 miles a year would make up the difference in less than three years.

Search online for calculator tools to work out your company car tax and which type of fuel suits you best. ■

RELIABILITY



Crossovers and 4x4s are bigger and heavier than regular cars, which increases wear on clutches, brakes and tyres. Some also have complex four-wheel-drive systems and – on the largest 4x4s – air suspension.

If that sounds like a recipe for big bills, don't worry. Most of the faults on modern cars are electrical, and in that respect 4x4s are no more complicated than anything else. Plus, the most rugged 4x4s are built to withstand the world's toughest environments.

They don't come more rugged than the Toyota Land Crusier. This large 4x4 and its huge seven-seat brother, the Land Cruiser V8, are the default choice from Africa to the Australian Outback. Superb reliability is the

reason – the Tonka Toyota simply won't let you down.

Want something smaller and cheaper to run? Try the Skoda Yeti – a compact crossover that's always finishes near the top of owner satisfaction surveys. The Nissan Qashqai has shaken off its early suspension problems and is now very dependable, too. And for second-hand buyers, the original (2008-2012) Ford Kuga is worth a look. It boasts a proven reliability record and low maintenance costs.

At the pricier end of the scale, the Lexus RX450h is hard to beat. Its hybrid petrol/electric drivetrain has fewer components than a conventional car, so there's less to go wrong. And its regenerative braking system, which harnesses stopping energy to charge the batteries, reduces wear on brake discs and pads. The result is thrifty fuel economy and superb reliability. Lexus dealers are also rated among the best in the business.

One way to safeguard against reliability problems

is to choose a car with a long warranty. Hyundai and Toyota both offer an impressive five years or 100,000 miles of cover, while Kia trumps them both with seven years/100,000 miles on its Sportage and Sorento 4x4s.

Vauxhall arguably has the best warranty of all with its 'lifetime' deal, valid up to 100,000 miles for as long as you keep the car. However, this cover isn't transferable to subsequent owners, so it won't apply if you buy a used Vauxhall Mokka or Antara. ■

COST VERSUS RESALE VALUE

We've already mentioned depreciation and the impact resale values have on your overall running costs. Fortunately, there are a few easy ways to boost resale value and cut your depreciation bill.

The first, you'll be pleased to hear, is that buying a 4x4 usually makes economic sense. Most 4x4s lose between 50% and 60% of their value after a typical three years and 36,000 miles of ownership. That's significantly better than mainstream cars, some of which lose up to 75%.

The second is to get a big discount when you buy. Aim for between 10% and 15% off most 4x4s, including crossovers. If the dealer won't budge on price, ask for extras like metallic paint or Bluetooth phone connectivity to be thrown in free.

Thirdly, you could buy a 4x4 from one of the 'premium' brands: Audi, BMW, Land Rover, Lexus or Mercedes. In the image-conscious 4x4 market, the appeal of an upmarket badge can really boost resale value.



Let's use the Audi Q3 as an example. The Q3 2.0 TDI (177) SE retails at £26,225 and is predicted to retain around 53% of that amount after three years/36,000 miles. A Hyundai ix35 2.0 CRDi Premium with Individual and Media packs sells for £26,500 and will retain about 40%.

That means the Q3 will be worth £13,900 when you sell, versus £10,600 for the ix35. Or to put it another

way, the premium 4x4 will lose £3,300 less than the mainstream model – enough to fill the Q3's tank with diesel 36 times.

There is a catch, though. The Hyundai comes fully loaded with sat nav, leather trim, cruise control, Bluetooth, a panoramic sunroof and much more. Equipping the Q3 to the

same spec would add thousands to the list price, wiping out any potential savings.

The best way to beat depreciation, of course, is to buy second-hand. Large, petrol-powered 4x4s like the BMW X5 xDrive50i are a real bargain on the used market. However, budget for high fuel and tax costs, and consider a used car warranty from the likes of Warranty Direct or Warrantywise. ■



THE REAL VERSATILITY OF A 4X4

Fact: most 4x4s never venture off-Tarmac. Does that matter? Not really. There are other plus-points to owning a 4x4, even if the furthest you get off-road is parking with two wheels on the kerb.

Four-wheel drive is about more than just clambering up mountains. It's also a massive benefit on the road, where it provides literally twice the traction in treacherous conditions. It's useful when the ground is wet – and completely transforms the experience of driving on snow. You'll simply glide past front- and rear-wheel-drive cars as they lie stranded at the roadside.

Not all the 4x4s we've mentioned are actually 4WD, of course. But even some 2WD crossovers have

traction aids to improve grip. The Volkswagen Tiguan, for example, has an optional electronic differential lock (£220), which prevents the wheels spinning on slippery or uneven terrain.

Extra ground clearance is also helpful when the going gets tough. Plus a higher seating position gives a better view of the road – and makes getting in and out of the car much easier. For elderly drivers and people with mobility problems, 4x4s may be the obvious choice.

They're great family cars, too. The upright stance of most 4x4s means even the lankiest of teenagers should be comfortable in the back, while a large boot is also de rigueur. Bars for attaching a roof rack are often standard, while other handy features, such as dog guards or the Vauxhall Mokka's built-in bicycle rack, may be on the options list.

Unlike many cars, though, 4x4s don't sacrifice space for style. They are eye-catching and really practical. ■



SAFETY – FOR YOU, YOUR KIDS AND PEDESTRIANS

Most new 4x4s are tested for safety by an independent, Europe-wide organisation called Euro NCAP. They get an overall safety star rating out of five, plus individual scores for adult, child and pedestrian protection (i.e. the likelihood of injuring somebody hit by your car).

To measure safety, Euro NCAP uses electronic dummies – including smaller dummies in the back to represent young children. These are fitted with sensors to show how real passengers would fare in an accident.

Each car goes through front and side impact tests, plus a ‘pole test’ that simulates a sideways collision with a tree or lamppost. ‘Active’ safety

systems, like the automatic braking system on the Mercedes M-class, are tested too.

Needless to say, when all the crashing is over, Euro NCAP sends plenty of mangled new metal straight to the scrapheap.

The majority of new 4x4s achieve a full five stars for safety. One notable exception is the Jeep Compass, which

scored just two stars – mainly due to a poor showing in the pole test.

We’d also avoid the ancient Suzuki Jimmy and the most basic versions of the Dacia Duster as neither have electronic stability control (ESC). This important safety aid applies braking to individual wheels to prevent the car from skidding. It’s particularly effective if you

have to swerve at high speed. ESC will be mandatory on all new cars from 2014.

Unsurprisingly, some older 4x4s don’t have ESC and also fall short in Euro NCAP tests. Check before you buy at: www.euroncap.com

You can find security ratings for 4x4s on the Thatcham website at www.thatcham.org. Click the ‘Security’ tab, then select ‘New Vehicle Security Ratings’.

A score out of five is given according to how hard the car is to steal (theft of) and break into (theft from). These ratings are used by the insurance industry. ■

Where to buy

Everyone should buy a new car at least once in their life. The excitement of picking up the keys to a gleaming, factory-fresh 4x4 takes some beating. But first you need to decide where to buy.

Everyone should buy a new car at least once in their life. The excitement of picking up the keys to a gleaming, factory-fresh 4x4 takes some beating. But first you need to decide where to buy.

Main dealers are perhaps the easiest – and most popular – place to find a car. You can browse brochures, chat with well-informed salespeople and go for a test-drive. Oh, and you should get a free coffee or two.

You can also compare different models from a particular brand back-to-back. So at a Subaru dealer, for example, you could test-drive both the Forester and XV 4x4s.

Once you find a car you like, you can order from the dealer in your chosen colour and spec. You may also decide to trade your old car in. This saves the bother of selling it privately. Just remember to haggle before you sign on the dotted line.

However, even if you haggle like a candidate on The Apprentice, a main dealer probably won't be the cheapest place to buy a new 4x4.

Car supermarkets have a 'pile 'em high, sell 'em cheap' approach that could net you a better deal. Most only stock used cars, but some have new models as well. Test drives are available and you can compare rival 4x4s from different brands – e.g. the BMW X3 versus the Volvo XC60. Many models will be less than three years old and still covered by a warranty.

Scour the internet and you could find even better value. Online brokers can often

source a vehicle in your preferred spec at thousands below list price. Their prices are fixed, though (no haggling) and you can't arrange a test-drive.

You can also buy second-hand 4x4s from all of the above sources. The safest bet is an 'approved used' car from a main dealer. These will have been professionally inspected and come with a warranty. You do pay for the privilege, though.

Private sales are cheapest, but remember cars are 'sold as seen'. That means you have no legal comeback if the suspension breaks and you do some unscheduled off-roading on the way home...

What's on sale today

If you've got this far, you must be pretty keen to buy a crossover or 4x4. And why not? There's something for everyone in this diverse and fast-moving market.

Let's start with the smallest, supermini-sized crossovers. The Nissan Juke is the biggest seller and competitively-priced, from £13,000. Its bizarre, bug-eyed looks divide opinion, but they have won it a legion of fans.

Other cars following in the Juke's tyre tracks include the Mini Countryman, Peugeot 2008, Renault Captur, Vauxhall Mokka and forthcoming Ford Ecosport. A pint-sized Audi Q2 crossover is also due in 2015.

Upping your budget to nearer £20,000 opens up a huge range

of mid-size crossovers and 4x4s. There's the Qashqai, of course – available in both standard and seven seat Qashqai+2 sizes – plus a host of familiar names like Ford Kuga, Honda CR-V, Mazda CX-5, Skoda Yeti and Toyota RAV4. There's little to choose between most of these family favourites on paper, so test-drive as many as possible before you buy.

Before we move up to full-size 4x4s, let's take a quick left turn to crossover estate cars. Models like the Audi A4 and A6 Allroad, Peugeot 508 RXH,



Subaru Outback, Volkswagen Passat Alltrack and Volvo XC70 offer four-wheel-drive ability in a smaller and less conspicuous package. They're not for everyone, but they are more car-like to drive than most 4x4s.

If size matters, though, you'll need a big 4x4. Now the sky is the limit in terms of specification and cost. Your options start with the Audi Q5, BMW X3 and Range Rover Evoque, then move up via the

BMW X5, Mercedes ML and Lexus RX to the two most capable kings of the road: the Porsche Cayenne and Range Rover.

The Cayenne is currently the best 4x4 to drive, with blistering performance and handling that would shame most sports cars. And the Range Rover is the luxury choice – a vehicle without real equal. It could rightly be considered the best car in the world. ■

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