

I QUIT SUGAR **Top 10 Cars of 2012: The CarAdvice.com.au Picks**

with Sarah Wilson

3rd January 2013, Sydney Australia - It might be a New Year, but there were still some great cars in 2012. The CarAdvice.com.au team has pulled together their list of the top picks and present their top 10 new cars launched in 2012:

10. Hyundai i30

The Hyundai i30 wins the award for 'most improved' car of the year. The i30's interior quality is now excellent, close to Golf in terms of plastics finish, and better than the VW for the resolution of its seven-inch touchscreen display. A mid-spec Elite is loaded with fruit, including sat-nav and reverse camera, all for the sort of money that buys a relatively sparse German hatchback. Crucially, today's i30 is a good drive, with a well-balanced and decently controlled chassis, terrific refinement, keen engines, good transmissions – particularly the intuitive auto – and fine packaging. In fact, for its combination of a large boot and generous rear legroom, the i30 is the best-packaged small car in its class. For most families that, in addition to the five-year warranty and fixed-price servicing, will be enough to forgive the Hyundai i30 for its remote steering and merely decent handling.

9. Ford Falcon Ecoboost

The combination of traditional 'big six' virtues, like space and torque, meet with newfound refinement, lightness, agility and economy with the 2.0-litre turbocharged four-cylinder Falcon. Resale values aren't good, but there's plenty of haggling room to get thousands off the recommended retail price of all Ecoboost models, from XT to G6 and G6E. Fact is, the Falcon Four produces 353Nm – a full 63Nm more than the Commodore Omega 3.0-litre – and delivers all of those torques from low down in the rev range. The result is relaxed touring and effortless commuting in the suburbs, so the 8.5L/100km claimed economy is entirely realistic. Priced to compete with popular compact SUVs, the Ford Falcon is more dynamic, refined, and roomy than all of them. Unfortunately, it's the image issues, and associations with big sedans glugging fuel, and apparently requiring six cylinders, that is holding the brilliant Ford Falcon Ecoboost back.

[Read CarAdvice's Ford Falcon Ecoboost Review.](#)

8. Mazda CX-5 diesel

All Mazda CX-5 models come with brilliant steering, a compliant ride, and handling that sides more with lithe hatchbacks than lardy compact SUVs. Priced from \$27,800 to \$46,200, the CX-5 packs eight variants within that price range. Pick of the bunch is the \$39,040 CX-5 Maxx Sport diesel, as the flagship GT Touring loses some of its ride quality on larger 19-inch wheels, while the lower-end petrols are sparse and underpowered. Next year, Mazda will enlarge the AWD's petrol engine from 2.0- to 2.5-litre capacity, which should make the CX-5 petrol a more competitive proposition.

[Read CarAdvice's Mazda CX-5 Review.](#)

7. Porsche Boxster

The Boxster blends the best attributes of different motoring genres – it feels light on its feet and has the agility of a hot hatch; its rear drive distribution and snarly flat six-cylinder endows it with a vaguely muscle car character; yet its balance and poise are its very own, pure mid-engined bliss. It costs between \$107,000-\$138,600, plus options, but strong resale values means the investment isn't all bad news. Even the 'base' 2.7-litre six is a smooth, creamy-sounding peach. Choose the slick six-speed manual and there's as much raw, old school involvement as in the Toyota 86 and Subaru BRZ, but with a much higher level of finesse and refinement. If the Toyobaru twins are a bit simple, then the Boxster is sophisticated. Soft-top stereotypes, or cat-calls that the Boxster isn't a 'real' Porsche are both rubbish. Having beaten its bigger stablemate, the new 911, as our favourite sports car for the

year, the Boxster may be trumped in 2013 by its tightened, hard-top Cayman near-twin. Bring it on.

[Read CarAdvice's Porsche Boxster Review.](#)

6. Holden Volt

Holden doesn't mind if we call it a hybrid or an 'extended range electric vehicle' as they do. But the concept of an electric car with occasional support from a petrol engine is a clever idea brilliantly executed in the Holden Volt. Built by Chevrolet in the United States, the Volt takes about seven hours to charge and gets about 85km running silently on its torquey electric motor. Performance is about par with any entry-level four-cylinder mid-sized car. Many Australians won't drive more than

85km each day, so between overnight charges the Volt could spend its entire life running on electricity. However, the Volt – unlike the Mitsubishi iMiev and Nissan Leaf – offers the flexibility to drive well beyond that range, for up to around 600km, thanks to a 1.4-litre four-cylinder petrol engine that acts as a generator to charge the batteries, rather than actually driving the car. Economy isn't fantastic when driving in generator mode, but families can own one car with the Volt instead of requiring two, like most electric cars demand. The fact it's roomy, strong, seemingly well built, very quiet, and offers surprisingly sharp steering and balanced handling, helps offset the \$59,990 price tag, which lands the Holden Volt in entry-level BMW 3 Series territory.

[Read CarAdvice's Holden Volt Review.](#)

5. Ford Focus ST

In terms of driver involvement, and sheer balance, the Focus ST is delightful. Its \$38,290 pricetag means this front driver plays in Toyota 86/Subaru BRZ rear drive territory, yet it also undercuts the less powerful Volkswagen Golf GTI. Its 2.0-litre turbo four produces 184kW and 360Nm, offering a deep, bassy trumpet as it winds out to its (relatively soft) 6200rpm rev limiter. The steering is typical-Ford feelsome, the ST's approach to corners both delicate and playful; turn in to a sharp bend and the Focus nails a tight line, weight subtly shifting to the outside rear tyre, its attitude completely dependent on how game the driver is to lift the throttle mid corner. Ultimately, a Renault Megane RS265 is faster and tighter through the bends, and a VW Golf GTI is more liveable around town, but the Ford Focus ST is arguably the fine blend between them. And cheaper than both.

[Read CarAdvice's Ford Focus ST Review](#)

4. Range Rover

It technically won't arrive in Australia until January, but the overseas launch of the first all new Range Rover in 10 years reaffirmed its place as the world's best SUV. Opulent, quiet, roomy, yet with staggering capabilities off road, and a newfound dynamic verve thanks to the company ripping up to 420kg out of the new car compared with the old one. Drivetrains – V6 turbo diesels and supercharged V8 – are spectacular, mated to a benchmark eight-speed ZF-sourced automatic. Expensive, yes, but the Range Rover is also good value. Selling for

similar \$150-200K prices as the last Rangie, this huge, and hugely capable, off-roader sells for about the same money as a substantially smaller, more cramped, yet barely lighter Mercedes-Benz CLS. Any metal for the money equation will always favour the Range Rover, but now there's ability beyond its dimensions. World's best SUV is also one of the finest luxury cars available.

[Read CarAdvice's 2013 Range Rover Review.](#)

3. BMW M135i

Last year, we oohed and ahhed over the ballistic BMW 1M Coupe that provided M3 performance for \$99,900 – a full \$50K less. This year, we were

treated to the M135i hatchback, with the same 450Nm, and a 0-100km/h time of 5.1 seconds, all for \$68,400 – a full \$30K less than the 1M. Choose the optional eight-speed auto in lieu of the six-speed manual, and that standing start sprint is reduced to 4.9 seconds. Sharp, variable-ratio steering, superb damping that delivers both a comfortable ride and secure handling, and a chassis that loves to play when the driver is in the mood. The turbo six is one of the world's best engines, blending a raunchy soundtrack with linear power delivery and a flexibility to trundle at low speeds or attack a track staying close to the 7000rpm cut-out. The new 1 Series may look a bit frumpy, and it isn't as well packaged as a front-drive hatch, with cramped rear legroom especially, but the M135i is the point where a hot hatch really steps up over the equally-brilliant Renault Megane RS265 and Ford Focus ST.

[Read CarAdvice's BMW M135i Review.](#)

2. Volkswagen Up!

The exclamation mark should come at the end of the sentence describing the way the Volkswagen Up! drives. This sub-light hatchback redefines the standard in a class, packing big car virtues within its dainty dimensions. It starts at \$13,990 for the three-door, \$14,990 for the five, and includes a 1.0-litre three-cylinder engine with heaps of charm. A triple also uses fewer moving parts than a four-cylinder, and engineers reckon that improves low-down response. It certainly feels that way. Despite being the cheapest new Volkswagen, the steering is perhaps the best of any in the entire VW Group – light, effortless, yet crisp. The short wheelbase means the ride can get bouncy, but the damping finesse means body control is first rate and the handling chuckable, fun,

keen and ... subtly sporting. Character abounds in the Up! – a fantastic little car.

[Read CarAdvice's Volkswagen Up! Review.](#)

1. Toyota 86 / Subaru BRZ

When basic ingredients are used to create something genuinely tasty, then offered at supermarket prices, the result is something near the Toyota 86 and Subaru BRZ. These Japanese-built twins offer a four-cylinder 'boxer' engine up front, send drive only to the rear wheels, and place the driver in a low-set seat with a legs-straight driving position and three pedals to work. Yet the electro-mechanical steering is one of the world's finest, regardless of price – mid-weighted, sharp and tactile. The engine revs beyond 7000rpm and delivers crisp throttle response and a clean, creamy note when it's up there, allowing the 86/BRZ's balance to be fine-tuned with millimetre precision. The chassis is fantastically fluent; the stability control superbly calibrated. Tally the sum of this car's parts and you'll find a \$30-40K price tag. Experience what each part offers individually to contribute to the whole, and the Toyota 86 and Subaru BRZ feel like coupes far more expensive than they sell for. A brilliant bargain.

[Read CarAdvice's Toyota 86 and Subaru BRZ Comparison Review.](#)

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