

what drives us?

DOWNSIZE TO UPGRADE

A Buying Trend That Also Holds True in the Automotive World

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Buyers who choose a subcompact or small vehicles are much like many of today's home buyers – they're willing to sacrifice some space but want a product that's finished to the nines. Similarly, car buyers may choose small and mighty to leave themselves room for upgrades while still staying in budget. Elevated ride height and superior passenger and cargo room are the reasons why many choose to go for a small SUV over a small sedan.



Mazda CX-5

Mazda CX-5 Sets the Bar

The exterior design of its latest model Mazda CX-5 is sleek, yes, but when it comes to interiors, that's where Mazda shines across the board of all of its vehicles, and the CX-5 is no exception. Every CX-5 comes with a comprehensive set of driving aids. Our top range Signature AWD model was loaded up with all of the

convenience features and luxury appointments as well as some advanced safety features normally found only on higher-priced vehicles. Total MSRP was \$39,000 including the upgraded turbocharged 2.5-liter four-cylinder engine upholding the validity of Mazda's long-running "Zoom-Zoom" tagline by producing 227 hp and 310 lb-ft of torque (or even a little more if you're using 93 octane gasoline).



Buick Encore GX

Compare the Buick Encore GX

Among the larger and more luxurious contenders in the segment, the Buick Encore GX is another to compare. It, too, comes with one of the more nicely finished interiors in the class with plenty of advanced tech and safety feature options. The lower

trims get a turbocharged 1.2-liter three-cylinder engine (137 horsepower, 162 lb-ft) whereas our top-level Essence model got the upgraded turbocharged 1.3-liter three-cylinder (155 hp, 174 lb-ft). Either powertrain will be paired to a continuously variable automatic transmission (CVT) unless you opt for FWD, where it gets paired to a nine-speed automatic transmission. So, if you're seeking a sportier driving experience, you will appreciate the Encore Essence FWD with total price tag around \$35,000. While Encore GX doesn't have the raw power of some of the other brands, there's a lot to satisfy the buyer looking for better gas mileage and superior fit and finish.

Mercedes' GLB 250—An Affordable Option from a Prestige Brand

Some might be surprised that they can get into the Mercedes brand and stay in the \$40,000 price range. The boxy styling of the Mercedes GLB-Class takes some style cues from the G-wagon and slots between the subcompact GLA and the larger pricier GLC compact and still has a third-row seat option. Aside from the super-tight third row, The GLB rates great for headroom and legroom inside, but it's obvious that Mercedes cut back on some of the appointments you might expect of the brand to deliver at a lower price point. The entry-level 250 SUV is powered by a turbocharged 2.0-liter four-cylinder engine getting 221 hp and 258-lb-ft or torque connected to an eight-speed automatic transmission—not bad, but those who are fans of Mercedes for more than just the emblem will need to budget for a starting price of \$50,000 to get the AMG GLB 35 with 302 horsepower and performance-tuned suspension. Our tester added 4Matic AWD to the 250 model and, with options, was close to topping \$50,000 already.



Mercedes GLB 250



Chevy Trailblazer

Chevy Trailblazer Bridges The Gap

The Chevy Trailblazer is another gap-bridger, slotting between

Chevy's subcompact Trax and compact Equinox. It has a nice-looking exterior with aggressive styling cues that Chevy says come from the Camaro, but we also think it took some inspiration from the Range Rover Evoque. You're not going to get a cabin that you would describe as overly luxurious or the ride level comfort of some of the other comparisons here, but the starting price is around \$26,000, leaving plenty of room to add options. Trailblazer gets good marks for its rear seat space and cargo space behind the rear seats. The fold-flat rear seats and folding front passenger seat make carting extra-long items no problem. Like the Encore GX, the Trailblazer offers two different turbocharged three-cylinder engines. The 137-hp 1.2-liter that is decently responsive and nimble as an in-town

driver, and the \$2,000 upgrade to the 155-hp 1.3-liter is worth it, but still leaves the Trailblazer a little lackluster on the highway. Adding AWD replaces the standard CVT with a nine-speed automatic transmission that will give it a little more zip. Our tester had the more powerful engine, AWD and the top RS trim which adds a number of desirable packages. Fully loaded, the AWD RS prices out around \$34,000.

Beverly and Steve Smirnis are members of the Texas Auto Writers Association and the Texas Motor Press Association, reviewing vehicles and casting their votes at driving events where the Truck of Texas, Car of Texas and Off-Road Truck of Texas are some of the titles awarded. Follow their automotive blog on TheSavvyList.com/ TheSavvyDriver.com/

