



EMBARGOED UNTIL: 1:30 PM, ET, February 28, 2011

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CONSUMER REPORTS NAMES FIRST-TIMERS FORD MUSTANG AND KIA SORENTO AMONG SIX NEW TOP PICKS FOR 2011

Honda Fit, Toyota RAV4, Toyota Sienna, and Chevrolet Avalanche also join elite list

YONKERS, NY — The Ford Mustang and Kia Sorento are among six new models named to the *Consumer Reports* annual Top Picks car list for 2011, earning spots in the Sporty Car and Family SUV categories respectively. The 10 picks come from six manufacturers and eight brands, reflecting the increasing competitiveness within today's auto market.

Findings from *Consumer Reports'* Annual Auto Issue, including the new Top Picks, were announced today at a Washington Automotive Press Association (WAPA) press conference in Washington, D.C.

The redesigned Hyundai Elantra, which now comes standard with Electronic Stability Control (ESC), also tops the list in the Small Car category. The previous Hyundai Elantra SE was Top Pick for Small Sedan for the past three years.

Other new additions for this year include the Honda Fit, Toyota RAV4, Toyota Sienna and Chevrolet Avalanche. They join reigning models from last year's list, the Infiniti G37, Toyota Prius and Nissan Altima.

"This year's diverse list of Top Picks reflects the fact that the industry is changing," said Rik Paul, *Consumer Reports'* automotive editor. "No one particular manufacturer dominates, as a number of automakers are now producing high-quality, reliable cars that score well in our tests."

Consumer Reports' Top Picks are the best all-around models in their categories and must meet stringent road test, reliability, and safety requirements. Each Top Pick scores at or near the top of its category among the more than 270 vehicles *Consumer Reports* has recently evaluated at its Auto Test Center; has average or better predicted reliability (based on the problems subscribers reported on more than 1.3 million vehicles in *Consumer Reports'* latest Annual Auto Survey), and performed adequately in overall safety if tested by the government or insurance industry safety tests. In addition, each model must offer electronic stability control (ESC), a proven lifesaving safety feature, as standard equipment.

The Sorento, Top Pick in the Family SUV category, is the first Kia model to make the list in the history of the Top Picks. The redesigned 2011 Sorento is a more well-rounded SUV with a roomy, nicely finished interior.

The Ford Mustang joins the list as the Top Pick for Sporty Car, a category which has been dominated by foreign models for the past five years, including the Subaru Impreza WRX, Mazda MX-5 Miata and Volkswagen GTI.



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“Ford’s reliability has improved greatly over the past few years,” Paul added. “While the high points of this iconic muscle car are its strong V8 and new V6 engines, its agile handling, good fuel economy, decent ride, comfortable front seats, and very good fit and finish also make it a reasonable daily driver.”

Even as more hybrids have entered the market in recent years, the Toyota Prius retains its position as the Top Pick for Green Car for the eighth consecutive year. It still gets the best fuel economy—44 mpg overall—of any vehicle *Consumer Reports* has recently tested.

Consumer Reports’ testing procedures are the most comprehensive of any U.S. publication or Web site. More than 50 individual tests are performed on every vehicle, including evaluations of braking, handling, comfort, convenience, safety, and fuel economy. Roughly 6,000 miles of general driving and evaluations are racked up on each test car during the testing process. *CR* buys all its test cars anonymously from dealers. Other reviewers base their evaluations on press cars that are hand-picked by the automakers.

Here, by category, are the 2011 Top Picks.

- **BUDGET CAR: Honda Fit.** ESC is now a standard feature in the 2011 Fit (\$16,020 to \$16,730) which helps solidify this versatile subcompact hatchback as the best in its class and a great value. The Fit provides an amazing amount of interior space for its size, aided by a flexible rear-seat design in which seatbacks can fold down or the lower cushion can flip up to open an area stretching from floor to ceiling. Agile handling makes the Fit enjoyable to drive. And it pays back with excellent fuel economy: 30 mpg overall with an automatic transmission, 33 mpg with a manual.
- **SMALL CAR: Hyundai Elantra.** Redesigned for 2011 the Elantra (\$18,445) delivers a lot for the money. With its makeover, this well-rounded sedan is now more stylish and engaging to drive. The Elantra provides fairly nimble handling; a decent ride, a smooth, responsive powertrain; a well-finished interior; and a relatively roomy rear seat. It’s also miserly on gas, achieving 29 mpg overall in *CR’s* tests and 39 mpg on the highway. Reliability for the redesigned model is expected to be as good as the previous one.
- **FAMILY SEDAN: Nissan Altima.** This is the second year in a row that the Altima (\$23,970 to \$30,335) has been the *Consumer Reports* Top Pick for Family Sedan. The Altima provides an impressive balance of comfort and performance while delivering some of the best fuel economy in its class: 26 mpg overall for four-cylinder models and 24 mpg with a V6. The Hybrid version gets 32 mpg. Its comfortable ride, secure handling and spirited acceleration make the Altima enjoyable to drive. And it has a roomy, well-finished, and very quiet interior. The four-cylinder models earned an above-average reliability Rating, and the V6 model was average.
- **SMALL SUV: Toyota RAV4.** The RAV4 (\$25,405 to \$31,435) returns to the Top Picks list for the fourth time in the past five years. Its winning formula includes a roomy interior, agile handling, and very good fuel economy for its class. The four-cylinder version provides 23 mpg overall, one of the best gas mileage of any automatic, nonhybrid SUV *CR* has tested. The spirited V6 version accelerates about as quickly as the Cadillac CTS and Volkswagen GTI and gets only 1 mpg less than the four-cylinder model. A small third-row seat is optional.
- **GREEN CAR: Toyota Prius.** Holding the title for Top Pick for Green Car for the eighth year in a row, the Prius (\$26,750) is a pleasant car to drive, with a roomy interior, a comfortable ride, hatchback versatility, and excellent crash-test results. Software problems in the antilock brake system affected the first-year reliability of this redesigned model, but those problems have been fixed.

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- **FAMILY SUV: Kia Sorento.** The Sorento (\$26,590 to \$32,390) was redesigned for 2011 and is now a more well-rounded SUV. The roomy, nicely finished interior includes comfortable seats and easy-to-use controls. An optional third-row seat, although tight, allows the Sorento to carry up to seven passengers. The smooth V6 engine provides good performance and fuel economy—20 mpg overall—that’s as efficient as the base four-cylinder engine. The Sorento is also stocked with an inviting list of features for its price, making it one of the bargains of this class.
- **SPORTY CAR: Ford Mustang.** One of the high points of the Mustang (\$28,880 to \$43,880) is the strong rumbling V8 engine that propels *CR*’s coupe and convertible test cars. It delivers scorching acceleration, a great exhaust sound, and good fuel economy for the class. For 2011, the Mustang received a refined, punchy V6, which provides strong acceleration and a decent 24 mpg overall with a manual transmission.
- **FAMILY HAULER: Toyota Sienna.** The Sienna (\$35,810 to \$38,201) has earned a place in the Top Picks list three out of the past five years. Redesigned for 2011, the current model is still a very comfortable versatile minivan with excellent reliability. The spacious cabin can seat up to eight people. The engine delivers lively performance and decent fuel economy. And the Sienna is still the only minivan available with all-wheel drive.
- **SPORTS SEDAN: Infiniti G37.** The G37’s (\$37,225) inviting combination of agile handling, blistering acceleration, and a luxurious interior makes it one of our highest-scoring sedans and earned it a spot on the Top Picks list for the fifth straight year. It’s fun to drive on a twisty road but is still a fairly comfortable cruiser on the highway. A snug cabin and small trunk are the only notable weaknesses. Rear-wheel drive is standard, all-wheel drive optional.
- **PICKUP TRUCK: Chevrolet Avalanche.** The Avalanche (\$47,435) is a versatile crew-cab model with a unified bed and cab that helps give it a steady, comfortable, quiet ride. And the innovative partition between the cab and the bed can be folded to extend the cargo area into the back of the cab. That allows the truck to carry longer cargo. A three-piece bed cover provides a weather-tight and lockable cargo area. *CR* recommends getting the optional backup camera to reduce the truck’s large blind zone.

Consumer Reports’ Annual Auto Issue goes on sale March 8 wherever magazines are sold. Free highlights from the issue will be available at www.ConsumerReports.org. Subscribers will be able to access all the stories and ratings from the issue.

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