

Edmunds highlights five affordable off-road vehicles

July 7 2021, by Ryan Zummallen



This photo from Ford shows the 2021 Ford Bronco Sport, a compact SUV that uses boxy proportions and standard four-wheel drive to tackle off-road terrain. Credit: Ford Motor Co. via AP

Does a little outdoor adventure sound enticing to you? To many

Americans it does, as evidenced by crowded national parks and increased demand for trucks and SUVs. If you're looking for a vehicle that can handle going off-road yet still be your inexpensive source for daily transportation, there are several options at your disposal.

Edmunds' experts highlight five new trucks and SUVs that are ready to explore right out of the dealership, and each is listed well below the average transaction price of around \$40,000 for a new vehicle. All prices include the destination charge, and our list runs from lowest to highest manufacturer's suggested retail price.

2021 SUBARU CROSSTREK

Subaru's Crosstrek comes standard with two off-road essentials: all-wheel drive and above-average ground clearance for a small SUV. The former enhances traction when you need it, while the extra ground clearance helps you safely drive over treacherous terrain. You also get a comfortable ride and roof rails for carrying extra equipment.

When equipped with the optional automatic transmission, the Crosstrek also comes with X-Mode. This feature enhances the all-wheel-drive system and makes the Crosstrek more capable in low-speed off-road conditions. Our biggest concerns are the sluggish base engine and a lack of cargo space compared with competitors. However, the Crosstrek offers loads of capability in a small package, at a price that makes it an easy selection for this list.



This photo from Jeep shows the 2021 Jeep Renegade, a compact SUV that sits high off the ground compared with other vehicles its size. Credit: FCA US via AP

MSRP of 2021 Subaru Crosstrek: \$23,295

2021 JEEP RENEGADE

The Renegade is similar in size to the Crosstrek, and it also benefits from a higher ground clearance. It has an available all-wheel-drive system with up to five driving modes, and the Trailhawk version offers low-range gearing designed to help you crawl up steep inclines. Unlike the Crosstrek, however, the Renegade comes standard with front-wheel

drive, so you'll need to pay extra for four-wheel drive.

While the Renegade has real off-road chops, its daily usefulness takes a few hits. Cargo space is limited, and the interior is cramped for taller passengers. If you're OK with these sacrifices, the Renegade offers access to the outdoors at a compelling price.

MSRP of 2021 Jeep Renegade Sport 4x4: \$26,365

2021 TOYOTA TACOMA

The Toyota Tacoma is one of the more affordable midsize pickups you can buy. And based on our testing, it also has the most out-of-the-box capability. Standard ground clearance of more than 9 inches is exceptional for a pickup truck of this size.



This photo from Subaru shows the 2021 Subaru Crosstrek, a small SUV with a spacious interior and standard all-wheel drive. Credit: Subaru of America via AP

Rear-wheel drive is standard, so you will need to pay extra to upgrade to the four-wheel-drive system. Because of the ground clearance, it may take extra effort to climb inside the cabin. On the plus side, Toyota now offers more adjustability in the driver's seat to help you find a comfortable position. This generation Tacoma has been around for a while, but it has a strong reputation for a reason.

MSRP of 2021 Toyota Tacoma SR 4x4 Access Cab: \$28,705

2021 FORD BRONCO SPORT

A newcomer on the crossover SUV scene is the 2021 Ford Bronco Sport. It's more akin to Ford's Escape small SUV than the full-fledged Bronco, but the Bronco Sport has loads of personality all its own. Its stubby, upright profile comes in handy on rocky terrain, and four-wheel drive is standard on all models.

Ford designed the Bronco Sport with adventure in mind. There are lots of clever storage areas for carrying wet or dirty gear, and some trims have trail-ready technology such as front-facing cameras and a low-speed cruise control system. The Bronco Sport trails the competition in terms of comfort, however. The steering and braking feel vague and slow to respond. Still, the Bronco Sport is enticing at this price due to its inherent toughness.



This photo from Jeep shows the 2021 Jeep Wrangler in its two-door version, a rough and rugged SUV that prioritizes off-road ability above all else. Credit: FCA US via AP

MSRP of 2021 Ford Bronco Sport: \$28,155

2021 JEEP WRANGLER

No list of off-road vehicles is complete without including the Wrangler. And while some versions can quickly climb into \$50,000 territory, the venerable two-door Wrangler Sport starts at a reasonable price considering its standout capability. Four-[wheel drive](#) is standard, as is rugged equipment such as skid plates and tow hooks.

Even in base trim, there are limitless opportunities to explore in a Wrangler. If you like, you can remove the doors or the roof, or fold down the windshield to better enjoy the outdoors. Any concerns about ride comfort and steering feel should be left at the door since they simply aren't the point of the Wrangler. The point is uncompromised adventure, and on that front it delivers.

MSRP of 2021 Jeep Wrangler Sport: \$30,395



This photo from Toyota shows the 2021 Tacoma, a midsize pickup with good ground clearance and a reputation for toughness off the pavement. Credit: Toyota Motor Sales U.S.A. via AP

EDMUNDS SAYS

Off-road vehicles can provide years of adventure and family-friendly fun, provided you choose the right truck or SUV for your lifestyle. Affordable models are a great option over fully loaded versions because they offer strong capability without being so expensive that you'll be afraid to actually use them.

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