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The latest video and written news stories by the editorial staff of Kelley Blue Book's kbb.com

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All-new and updated video and written reviews from the editorial staff of Kelley Blue Book's kbb.com, and links to consumer reviews and ratings on kbb.com

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INDUSTRY INSIGHTS:

Crystal Ball for 2012 is Cloudy

- Jack R. Nerad, executive editorial director and executive market analyst, Kelley Blue Book's kbb.com

January is typically a time when the prognosticators put out the pronouncements for the new year. It is an uneasy exercise at best, this predicting the future thing, but generally what came before offers ample clues as to what we can expect next. Not so for 2012. The tea leaves are scattered and the crystal ball is cloudy. Even the handwriting on the wall is proving very hard to read as we move into what could (should?) be a pivotal year for our economy and the nation.

Let's look at some of the leading indicators to see if we can discern a trend or something that might even seem like a trend. First, let's eyeball housing because housing is an even more basic need than transportation. At first glance, the news here seems pretty good. Mortgage rates are at historically low levels, which should prompt home purchases. New home sales, existing home sales and even home builds were reported up in November. Could we be on the verge of climbing out from the dreariness of the Great Recession?

Well, not so fast. Yes, mortgage rates are as low as most of us can ever remember, but those low rates are accompanied by lending standards that make it hard for many consumers to qualify. At the same time, foreclosed houses continue to enter the market, keeping overall prices soft. Sadly, the foreclosures and difficult lending standards are trumping low interest rates, driving many consumers into rental properties. Perhaps that's not a bad place to wait things out since home prices have plunged by one-third since 2006 and some housing analysts predict that they will drop further in 2012.

So how does the gloom-and-doom of the housing market affect consumer confidence? Has it sent confidence in the future over a cliff? At first glance the answer is a resounding 'no.' The Conference Board Consumer Confidence Index was up in December, following an increase in November.

At the same time we hear reports that pre-Christmas and immediate post-Christmas sales were good, exceeding analyst expectations. Again, are we looking at an upward trend?

Well, I'm sorry to be a bubble-burster, but while consumers might be signaling a small ray of hope, the details on the Consumer Confidence report aren't nearly as encouraging as the fact that the number went up in December versus November. First off, while we have seen an increase in this measure in the past two months, the December number is virtually on par with the Consumer Confidence Index of April 2011 – not exactly boom times. Further, though there is an inkling of improvement, according to consumers' assessments the overall look remains bleak. Consumers characterizing business conditions as 'bad' stood at 33.9 percent in December. That is down from the 38 percent who called business conditions 'bad' in November, but it still is twice the number who called business conditions 'good.' Some 41.8 percent of respondents said jobs were 'hard to get' in December, compared to just 6.7 percent who said jobs were 'plentiful.' None of this can lead any of us to believe that a strong recovery is in the cards for 2012. But there might be one factor, one card in a badly stacked deck that is harder to divine from surveys but might foretell better times on the horizon – consumers seem sick and tired of a struggling economy and thus they might spend well more than the leading indicators suggest. Two factors that point in that direction: Reasonably strong Christmas sales and steady auto sales even in the context of perniciously high unemployment. One thing that is certain - 2012 is a tough year to predict. And we didn't even mention the elections...

Check out the very latest news stories by visiting kbb.com and clicking the the *Kbb Top Picks* tab on the home page. The following latest news stories by kbb.com's editorial staff went live on the site or were updated during December 2011.

Videos Posted to kbb.com:

[Audi TT RS Video Review](#)

[Dodge Durango Video Review](#)

[Hyundai Accent Video Review](#)

[MINI Cooper Countryman - Long Term Update #1](#)

[Porsche 911 Video Review](#)

Written Stories Posted to kbb.com:

[10 Best Redesigned Cars for 2012](#)

[2011 Tokyo Motor Show: Top 10 New Vehicles](#)

[2012 BMW 328i Sedan First Drive Review: All new, still perfect](#)

[2012 Cadillac CTS Touring Package option adds V-spec style](#)

[2012 Detroit Auto Show](#)

[2012 Family Cars Overview - Midsize Sedans](#)

[2012 Ferrari 599 GTB 60F1 celebrates 60 years of Grand Prix wins](#)

[2012 Honda CR-V pricing starts at \\$23,105](#)

[2012 Honda Crosstour adds four-cylinder engine choice](#)

[2012 Porsche 911 Carrera First Drive: Brand spanking familiar](#)

[2013 BMW 6 Series Gran Coupe revealed](#)

[2013 Bentley Continental GT/GTC V8 - 2012 Detroit Auto Show](#)

[2013 Buick Encore - 2012 Detroit Auto Show](#)

[2013 Cadillac ATS will introduce all-new 270-hp turbocharged four](#)

[2013 Cadillac ATS will introduce new 270-hp four-cylinder engine](#)

[2013 Chevrolet Malibu Eco First Drive Review: New Car, Old Soul](#)

[2013 Chevrolet Sonic RS - 2012 Detroit Auto Show](#)

[2013 Dodge Dart Interior update](#)

[2013 Mercedes-Benz E300/E400 Hybrid - 2012 Detroit Auto Show](#)

[2013 Mercedes-Benz SL-Class - 2012 Detroit Auto Show](#)

[2013 Scion FR-S revealed!](#)

[Acura ILX Concept - 2012 Detroit Auto Show](#)

[Acura NSX Concept - 2012 Detroit Auto Show](#)

[Aptera Motors closes its doors](#)

[Bridgestone shows its ultimate run-flat tire](#)

[Camera-Based Collision Alert Debuts on 2012 GMC Terrain](#)

[Chevrolet to launch new IndyCar engine and revive Detroit Grand Prix](#)

[Current Deals on the Year's 10 Best-selling Compacts and Crossovers](#)

[Daihatsu D-X Concept - 2011 Tokyo Motor Show](#)

[Double Dealing: Top December Deals on 10 Resale Value Champs](#)

[Future Fuel-Efficient Chevrolets to Benefit from New Small Engines](#)

[Future Vision: Volvo P1800 Concept](#)

[GM/Tengin linkup promises widespread use of carbon fiber in cars](#)

[GM Introduces the Industry's First Front Center Air Bag](#)

[GM confirms direct injection for next-gen small-block V8](#)

[Honda AC-X Concept - 2011 Tokyo Auto Show](#)

[Honda Accord Coupe Concept - 2012 Detroit Auto Show](#)

[Honda EV-STER Concept - 2011 Tokyo Auto Show](#)

[Honda Micro Commuter Concept - 2011 Tokyo Auto Show](#)

[Hyundai i-oniq Concept - 2012 Geneva Auto Show preview](#)

[Jaguar XF Sportbrake teased in factory-authorized Christmas card](#)

[KBB Poll: 1 in 3 would take a do-over on their current car](#)

[Lexus Concept interior teased - 2012 Detroit Auto Show](#)

[Lexus LF-LC Concept update - 2012 Detroit Auto Show](#)

[Mazda Takeri Concept/i-ELOOP - 2011 Tokyo Auto Show](#)

[Military Tribute Camaro to be auctioned to benefit wounded veterans](#)

[NHTSA: Highway deaths in U.S. decline for fifth consecutive year](#)

[Next-gen Honda powertrains will employ 'Earth Dreams Technology'](#)

[Nissan Pathfinder Concept - 2012 Detroit Auto Show](#)

[Rearview mirror: A look back at the auto industry in 2011](#)

[Rinspeed Dock+Go Concept - Geneva Auto Show](#)

[Saab files for bankruptcy](#)

[Subaru Advanced Tourer Concept - 2011 Tokyo Motor Show](#)

[Suzuki Q-Concept - 2011 Tokyo Motor Show](#)

[Suzuki Regina Concept - 2011 Tokyo Motor Show](#)

[Tesla Model S pricing will start at \\$57,400](#)

[The Freshman Car Class of 2012: 10 New Cars to Know](#)

[Top 10 Winter Cars for 2012](#)

[Toyota FCV-R Concept - 2011 Tokyo Motor Show](#)

[Toyota FT-EV III Concept - 2011 Tokyo Motor Show](#)

[Toyota Fun-Vii Concept - 2011 Tokyo Motor Show](#)

[Toyota NS4 Concept - 2012 Detroit Auto Show](#)

[Volkswagen Cross Coupe Concept - 2011 Tokyo Motor Show](#)

[Smart for-us concept - 2012 Detroit Auto Show](#)

NEW-VEHICLE REVIEWS ON KBB.COM:

The following new-vehicle reviews written by kbb.com's editorial staff went live on the site or were updated during December 2011. To see any new-vehicle review from kbb.com's editorial staff, please visit kbb.com and click on the *Car Reviews* tab, then select the make and model.

[2012 Kia Forte](#)

While many critics complain that some Japanese car companies have been resting on their laurels a bit too long, the Korean manufacturer Kia has been working overtime to improve its product line. Reveal after reveal shows Kia now has the upper hand over Honda and Toyota, at least in the areas of innovation, styling and fuel economy...

To read the latest Consumer Reviews & Ratings on this vehicle, click [here](#).

[2012 Kia Sorento](#)

The 2012 Kia Sorento SUV continues to buck the trend toward larger, thirstier and more expensive mid-size SUVs. Built in Kia's new West Point, Georgia, manufacturing facility, the 2012 Kia Sorento also bucks the trend toward shipping American jobs off shore. With available seating for seven, some of the most advanced engine and transmission offerings in the marketplace, and a list of creature comforts that looks more Lexus-like than Kia-originated, the 2012 Kia Sorento SUV is one attractive prospect...

To read the latest Consumer Reviews & Ratings on this vehicle, click [here](#).

[2012 Chrysler 200](#)

In what must be one of the most ambitious model overhauls in Chrysler's long and rocky history, the company updated or completely remade its entire model line in the last year, including its Dodge and Jeep divisions. Such massive change in a short time is impressive, and none was more in need than the dowdy Chrysler Sebring sedan. Given a new look, a new interior and a new name, the 2012 Chrysler 200 is a far more competent competitor in the midsize sedan class, and no longer feels like a car one would only rent but not buy...

[2012 Chrysler Town & Country](#)

Like the Chrysler Corporation itself, the Town & Country underwent a substantial transformation in 2011, with new front and rear styling, a new engine and suspension, and a vastly improved interior. One of the oldest nameplates in production, the Town & Country name has long evoked fine living...

To read the latest Consumer Reviews & Ratings on this vehicle, click [here](#).

[2012 Buick Enclave](#)

As more and more people move away from truck-based SUVs into smaller, more manageable crossovers, the 2012 Buick Enclave begins to make a lot of sense. Once known only for its near-luxury cars with an aging customer base, Buick has transformed itself into a manufacturer of modern luxury vehicles with a uniquely American take...

To read the latest Consumer Reviews & Ratings on this vehicle, click [here](#).

[2012 Honda Ridgeline](#)

Where Toyota and Nissan decided to jump feet first into the compact/mid-size pickup-truck market, Honda took a decidedly different approach. Rather than trying to bring another body-on-frame pickup to the market, Honda created a crew-cab configuration based on its popular Pilot SUV...

To read the latest Consumer Reviews & Ratings on this vehicle, click [here](#).

[2012 BMW 6 Series](#)

Until the new Mercedes-Benz SL shows up within the year, the 2012 BMW 6 Series is the new kid on a small block that also includes the Jaguar XK. Being the freshest counts for a lot in a segment driven more by image and style considerations than by value and practicality, and the BMW 6 Series is taking full advantage of its turn in the spotlight...

[2012 Acura MDX](#)

From its debut in 2001 right through to the current 2012 model, the Acura MDX SUV has continued to be one of our favorite SUVs. And we are not alone. In addition to critical acclaim, the MDX has always been well regarded by consumers, as measured by its consistently strong sales position in the segment (second only to the Lexus RX 350)...

To read the latest Consumer Reviews & Ratings on this vehicle, click [here](#).

[2012 BMW X6](#)

To its credit, in the evolution of its sport-sedan fleet BMW has come a long way. Although some might take issue with the 1 Series sheetmetal when compared to an early 2002, few would argue with the dynamic improvements. BMW's recent foray into the SUV market is something else altogether, and nothing in its lineup is so egregious – to the BMW faithful – as the X6 and its many derivatives - including a 6-cylinder version, a wicked-powerful hybrid model and the 547-horsepower twin-turbocharged X6 M...

To read the latest Consumer Reviews & Ratings on this vehicle, click [here](#).

[2012 Kia Rio](#)

If the subcompact category were a movie, the Honda Fit, Ford Fiesta and Hyundai Accent would be the stars, soaking up the highly sought-after screen time, each exuding their own unique talents to draw in the audience. But what about the Kia Rio? Well, it would probably be that one guy in that one scene with that one line that no one really remembers. Until now. For 2012, the Kia Rio has been revamped and restyled in an attempt to gain more notoriety in the sub-compact ranks...

To read the latest Consumer Reviews & Ratings on this vehicle, click [here](#).

[2012 Ford Transit Connect](#)

Ford's 2012 Transit Connect van is the little truck that wasn't supposed to be. But, despite all the critics and macho truck guys who swore they'd never be caught dead in one, the Transit Connect van has won over numerous converts and changed the costs of transportation for thousands of businesses...

To read the latest Consumer Reviews & Ratings on this vehicle, click [here](#).

[2012 Dodge Caliber](#)

When it comes to compact cars, Dodge doesn't exactly rule the roost. In fact, Dodge offers only one model, the 2012 Dodge Caliber, with dimensions that cross into mid-size sedan territory, and interior materials and an overall resale value that are arguably lackluster. It's a shame the cost cutters had their way with this one, because on paper the 2012 Caliber hatchback looks like a winner. It provides good use of interior space, has a versatile hatchback design and delivers good fuel economy...

To read the latest Consumer Reviews & Ratings on this vehicle, click [here](#).

[2012 Toyota Venza](#)

With the 2012 Toyota Venza wagon, Toyota combines some of the best attributes of an SUV with the handling and visual appeal of a sporty sedan. Departing from the usual tall and lean SUV look, the Venza is visibly wide in its stance, with big wheels and an imposing grille...

To read the latest Consumer Reviews & Ratings on this vehicle, click [here](#).

[2012 Toyota Matrix](#)

The 2012 Toyota Matrix puts a twist on the compact car formula, combining a wagon-like design with a tall seating position, available all-wheel drive (AWD) - front-wheel drive is the standard setup – and a peppy yet fuel-efficient engine. Slotting between a compact hatchback and a small crossover SUV, the 2012 Matrix hatchback offers a big dose of sporty styling and outstanding ride and handling...

To read the latest Consumer Reviews & Ratings on this vehicle, click [here](#).

WHAT'S NEW:

Kelley Blue Book's kbb.com Editors Introduce 10 Cars from 2012 Freshman Class

Editors Name 10 New Nameplates to Know In Coming Year

IRVINE, Calif., Dec. 5, 2011 /PRNewswire/ -- Kelley Blue Book www.kbb.com, the leading provider of [new](#) and [used vehicle](#) information, today announces the [2012 Freshman Vehicle Class](#). While each new model year brings dozens and dozens of all-new cars, most arrive wearing familiar nametags.

While the totally redesigned 2012 Toyota Camry is a big deal, there's a lot on the line when revamping the best-selling car in the country – it doesn't stir the same kind of intrigue as totally new cars like the 2012 Hyundai Veloster or 2012 Fiat 500... [MORE](#)

Kelley Blue Book's kbb.com Names Porsche 911 '2012 Best Redesigned Vehicle'

Kbb.com Editors Name Top 10 Redesigned Vehicles of 2012

IRVINE, Calif., Dec. 8, 2011 /PRNewswire/ -- Kelley Blue Book www.kbb.com, the leading provider of [new](#) and [used vehicle](#) information, today announces the 2012 Porsche 911 has been named [2012 Best Redesigned Vehicle](#).

#1: [2012 Porsche 911](#)

Redesigning an icon like the Porsche 911 is tricky business, but the latest rendition deftly walks that tightrope... [MORE](#)

Kbb.com Reports Top December Deals among 2012 Best Resale Value Award Winners

IRVINE, Calif., Dec. 9, 2011 /PRNewswire/ -- To assist consumers with their holiday car shopping, Kelley Blue Book's kbb.com has compiled a list of some of the top deals available on the vehicles projected to best retain their value after five years. The holiday shopping list includes the top 10 current pricing and incentives available for some of the vehicles honored in the 2012 Kelley Blue Book Best Resale Value Awards... [MORE](#)

Blue Book Market Report: Off Rental-fleet Vehicles Appreciated Most Year-to-date

Dealers to Save More than \$2,000 Purchasing Three-Year-Old Highly Fleeted Compacts

IRVINE, Calif., Dec. 12, 2011 /PRNewswire/ -- Kelley Blue Book www.kbb.com, the leading provider of [new car](#) and [used car](#) information, today reports that vehicles typically found in high volume within rental fleet have appreciated most since the start of the year, as covered in the company's [Blue Book Market Report for December 2011](#). Kelley Blue Book's analysis highlights that affordable buying opportunities remain available even in this supply constrained market... [MORE](#)

Kelley Blue Book Names Most-Researched New Vehicles, Brands of 2011; Hyundai Debuts in Top Five Researched Brands on kbb.com

Hyundai Elantra Jumps 29 Positions on Most-Researched List; Luxury Models Unable to Hold Ground

IRVINE, Calif., Dec. 13, 2011 /PRNewswire/ -- Kelley Blue Book, the leading provider of [new car](#) and [used car](#) information, today announces the most-researched new vehicles of 2011 on the company's top-rated website, www.kbb.com. In addition, Kelley Blue Book's kbb.com reveals the top five brands with the greatest share of market interest for 2011.

This year's success story is the Hyundai Elantra, entering the top 20 most-researched new vehicles list at No. 7, jumping 29 positions from 2010. Elantra's victory can be attributed to the vehicle's top-rated fuel efficiency, affordability, superior redesign and Hyundai's increased popularity among consumers...

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Kelley Blue Book Finds Top 10 Holiday New-Car Deals

Kbb.com Quick Poll Finds 17 Percent of Site Visitors Plan to Buy a New Car as Gift

IRVINE, Calif., Dec. 14, 2011 /PRNewswire/ -- Kelley Blue Book, the leading provider of [new car](#) and [used car](#) information, has identified 10 of the most heavily discounted 2011 and 2012 new cars available just in time to give the best gift of all; a new car. Those looking to give the ultimate gift this year will find some new cars and trucks \$6,000 below MSRP (Manufacturer's Suggested Retail Price) or lease deals that would please even the finickiest of folks on your gift-giving list... [MORE](#)

Kbb.com Spreads Holiday Happiness with On-site Sweepstakes

Five Entrants to Win \$200 Shopping Spree from Advance Auto Parts; Enter by December 27, 2011

IRVINE, Calif., Dec. 19, 2011 /PRNewswire/ -- Kelley Blue Book www.kbb.com, the leading provider of [new car](#) and [used car](#) information, today announces a Holiday Happiness sweepstakes in honor of the gift-giving season. Today through December 27, 2011, kbb.com site visitors can enter to win one of five \$200 shopping sprees from [Advance Auto Parts](#), a leader in the automotive aftermarket... [MORE](#)

Kelley Blue Book's kbb.com Editors Name Top 10 Winter Driving Vehicles for 2012

Diverse New-Car Roster Boasts User-Friendly All-Wheel Drive Systems, Features Befitting the Season

IRVINE, Calif., Dec. 28, 2011 /PRNewswire/ -- Kelley Blue Book www.kbb.com, the leading provider of [new car](#) and [used car](#) information, today announces the [Top 10 Winter Driving Vehicles for 2012](#).

The days are short, the nights are cold and the chances of encountering rain, snow, sleet or some other form of weather-related treachery during the course of any daily drive are at their peak. It just may be time for consumers to consider upgrading their current rides for vehicles more befitting the season... [MORE](#)

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Founded in 1926, Kelley Blue Book, The Trusted Resource®, is the only vehicle valuation and information source trusted and relied upon by both consumers and the industry. Each week the company provides the most market-reflective values in the industry on its top-rated website www.kbb.com, including its famous Blue Book® Trade-In and Retail Values and Fair Purchase Price, which reports what others are paying for new cars this week. The company also provides vehicle pricing and values through various products and services available to car dealers, auto manufacturers, finance and insurance companies as well as governmental agencies. Kbb.com provides consumer pricing and information on [minivans](#), [pickup-trucks](#), [sedan](#), [hybrids](#), [electric cars](#), and [SUVs](#). Kelley Blue Book Co. Inc. is a wholly owned subsidiary of AutoTrader.com.