

Kelley Blue Book's kbb.com Names Top 10 New & Top 10 Used Back-to-School Cars

Expert Editors Offer Vehicle Recommendations, Car Shopping, Buying Tips for Students and Parents

The editors of Kelley Blue Book's <http://www.kbb.com/>, the leading provider of new- and used-vehicle information, today announce their picks for the 2008 Top 10 New and Top 10 Used Back-to-School Cars to help students and parents decide which rides are best to consider for their next vehicle purchase. With students heading back to high school and college campuses nationwide, the expert <http://www.kbb.com/> editors offer their top recommendations for getting to and from class in an economical and reliable new or used car. The editors also provide car shopping and buying tips to aid both students and parents in this all-important purchase decision.

Whether school is across town or on the other side of the country, the beginning of a new academic year often necessitates the purchase of a new (or used) car. As any parent will attest, the most important factors to consider when picking out a new set of wheels in conjunction with a new slate of classes are affordability, reliability, practicality and safety. Most students, however, would likely trade all those attributes for a heavier helping of cool and fast.

Fortunately for all involved, vehicle manufacturers have made it easier to have it all. In addition to a full warranty, the latest safety and technology advancements and perfect paint, entry-level new cars continue to provide more for less. You can save even more money with used cars, which are more reliable than ever.

"There are so many options these days, in both the new- and used-car realm, for safe, fun and affordable back-to-school rides," said Jack R. Nerad, executive editorial director and executive market analyst for Kelley Blue Book and kbb.com. "Vehicles are better built and better equipped than ever before, and there are a variety of body-style options available to suit the needs of any parent, and inevitably satisfy the wants of any teen."

Below, in alphabetical order, are the Top 10 New and Top 10 Used Back-to-School Cars for 2008 from Kelley Blue Book's kbb.com:

TOP 10 BACK-TO-SCHOOL CARS: NEW

All of the new cars on this year's Back-to-School list feature starting New Car Blue Book Values of less than \$18,000, along with ding-free doors and immaculate interiors. (Values listed are for the lowest-priced entry in each model's lineup. All New Car Blue Book Values reflect transaction prices during the last week in July 2008.)

2008 Chevrolet Cobalt

Available as a sharp-looking two-door coupe or a more accommodating four-door sedan (or a versatile wagon with retro sheet metal and an HHR nametag), the Cobalt backs up its low starting price with outstanding highway fuel economy of up to 37 miles per gallon.

Manufacturer's Suggested Retail Price: \$15,070
New Car Blue Book Value: \$14,706

2008 Ford Focus

It's affordable, economical and offers surprisingly sound driving dynamics, but what makes the Focus cool for school is the available SYNC communication and entertainment system with voice control.

Manufacturer's Suggested Retail Price: \$15,065
New Car Blue Book Value: \$14,595

2008 Honda Fit

A low starting price and highway fuel economy of up to 35 miles per gallon are appealing, but the five-door Fit wins over the in-crowd with clever interior flexibility and an available sport model that knows how to have a good time.

Manufacturer's Suggested Retail Price: \$14,620
New Car Blue Book Value: \$15,059

2008 Hyundai Tucson

Hyundai's compact crossover delivers the high seating position and cargo versatility that propelled the SUV to such great heights, but with more student loan-friendly highway fuel economy in the neighborhood of 25 mpg.

Manufacturer's Suggested Retail Price: \$18,095
New Car Blue Book Value: \$17,552

2008 MAZDA3

There's no doubting the significance of the RX-7 and Miata, but in some ways the MAZDA3 is the most successful car in the automaker's 38 years in America. Entering its sixth and final model year in its current skin, the MAZDA3 is as appealing today as it was its freshman year.

Manufacturer's Suggested Retail Price: \$14,645
New Car Blue Book Value: \$14,645

2008 Scion xB

You don't need a semester's worth of geometry to see that the second-generation xB is larger and less boxy than the first. Complementing the xB's cubic capacity are entry-level luxuries like air conditioning, power windows/locks/mirrors and a Pioneer sound system with iPod integration, all standard.

Manufacturer's Suggested Retail Price: \$16,270
New Car Blue Book Value: \$16,270

2008 Subaru Impreza

More than just a foundation for the rally-conquering (and pricier) Impreza WRX and WRX STI, the Subaru Impreza is a solid choice in the sub-\$18,000 arena thanks in part to standard all-wheel drive and class-up road presence.

Manufacturer's Suggested Retail Price: \$17,640
New Car Blue Book Value: \$17,111

2008 Suzuki SX4

The Suzuki SX4 is a multiple-choice question with two right answers: hatchback and sedan. Both body styles are available with navigation for less than \$16,000, and the hatchback is the least expensive all-wheel-drive vehicle sold in America.

Manufacturer's Suggested Retail Price: \$15,395
New Car Blue Book Value: \$15,164

2008 Toyota Matrix

Pop quiz: What's the plural form of Matrix? Answer: Corolla Wagons. Toyota's tall but sleek econo-hauler combines available highway fuel economy of more than 30 mpg with enough seat height and cargo versatility to satisfy reluctantly displaced but open-minded SUV drivers.

Manufacturer's Suggested Retail Price: \$16,850
New Car Blue Book Value: \$16,102

2008 Volkswagen Rabbit

Like any good all-nighter snack mix, Vee-Dub's venerable hatch is a mix of many good things. Every time we drive the Rabbit we're re-impressed by the responsive five-cylinder engine, the curiously tenacious cornering grip and an interior unmatched in materials and build-quality by anything within several thousand dollars.

Manufacturer's Suggested Retail Price: \$16,250
New Car Blue Book Value: \$16,250

TOP 10 BACK-TO-SCHOOL CARS: USED

All of the used cars named have a Kelley Blue Book Suggested Retail Value -- the asking price you can expect from a dealer, from which you can negotiate downward -- of less than \$12,000. (For each model, we selected the most recent model year available for less than \$12,000, priced using mileage commensurate with each car's age. We chose 2004 as the earliest qualifying model year.)

2008 Chevrolet Aveo

Thoroughly restyled for the 2007 model year, the smallest Chevy is an over-achiever that combines freshman-like pricing with grad-student style and maturity.

Kelley Blue Book Used Retail Value: \$11,800
Model Lifespan: 2007 to Present

2007 Dodge Caliber

The Caliber's outgoing personality is exhibited in its standout styling and copious cargo flexibility. Even parked in the student lot, the five-door Dodge seems to be screaming, "Hey, let's do something."

Kelley Blue Book Used Retail Value: \$11,745
Model Lifespan: 2006 to Present

2005 Ford Crown Victoria

The car more commonly known as "Taxi!" (or, in some circles, "Cop!") rides on a decades-old platform, features an equally antiquated powertrain and is far and away the least fuel-efficient car on this year's list. So, how'd it make the list? Reliability, room (passenger and cargo) and sheer mass, the benefit of which can't be denied when it comes to passive safety.

Kelley Blue Book Used Retail Value: \$11,365
Model Lifespan: 1998 to Present

2004 Ford Focus

So, you thought choosing a major was tough? The Ford Focus is available in three-door, four-door, five-door and wagon body styles, each of which delivers a uniquely appealing combination of affordability, flexibility and zeal. (For the record, we'd take the well-rounded five-door.)

Kelley Blue Book Used Retail Value: \$11,550
Model Lifespan: 2000 to 2007

2004 Honda Civic

The Civic owes its status as arguably the most prudent used-car buy out there to its famous reliability, outstanding fuel economy, refined interior and a mix of style and enthusiasm that varies within the lineup.

Kelley Blue Book Used Retail Value: \$11,765
Model Lifespan: 2001 to 2005

2006 Hyundai Elantra

In another instance of perception lagging reality, Hyundai's resale values have not kept pace with its recent quality and reliability improvements -- which make vehicles like the Civic-fighting Elantra especially good used deals.

Kelley Blue Book Used Retail Value: \$11,650
Model Lifespan: 2001 to 2006

2004 Mazda Tribute

With available all-wheel drive and enough room for four or five road-trippers and their gear, Mazda's version of the Ford Escape offers all the versatility and capability any student would need to make the most of any and every impromptu three-day weekend.

Kelley Blue Book Used Retail Value: \$11,210
Model Lifespan: 2001 to 2006

2004 MAZDA3

As a regular entry on kbb.com Top 10 lists and the only vehicle named to both the new and used lists in this year's Back-to-School roundup, we've no new praise to bestow upon the fun, stylish, affordable and versatile MAZDA3.

Kelley Blue Book Used Retail Value: \$11,700
Model Lifespan: 2004 to Present

2004 Nissan Altima

There's no denying the mass appeal of the mid-size sedan, and we like the Altima for its varsity-level athleticism. The V6 is the jewel of the lineup, but the more frugal four-cylinder leaves more money left for ramen noodles.

Kelley Blue Book Used Retail Value: \$11,845
Model Lifespan: 2002 to 2006

2004 Pontiac Vibe

The Pontiac Vibe offers fuel economy and reliability in a handy hatchback package that offers great versatility. We also like its sassy exterior styling and well-crafted, easy-to-use interior. Its low acquisition cost is just icing on the pastry.

Kelley Blue Book Used Retail Value: \$11,495
Model Lifespan: 2003 to 2008

CAR SHOPPING AND BUYING TIPS FOR STUDENTS AND PARENTS:

Arguably some of the vehicles on the lists may be cooler than others (but cool is, after all, in the eye of the beholder), and some are more practical, but each offers a balance of attributes that qualifies it as a great option for a back-to-school ride. To help ensure driving and ownership satisfaction into the coming school year and beyond, follow these guidelines for getting the right car at the right price:

-- Do Your Research - All the information you need to put together a short list of favorite vehicles is available at <http://www.kbb.com/>, including expert reviews, real-world values, side-by-side comparisons, safety and reliability ratings and more. There are even tools like a newly enhanced Perfect Car Finder®: Photo Edition that can help you decide exactly what ride is best for you.

-- Consider Your Green Options -- Visit the all-new KBB® Green <http://www.kbb.com/green> to learn about fuel-efficient vehicle options and various environmentally friendly technologies, participate in Green blogs and forums, take the Fuel Efficiency Challenge and more.

-- Drive Two or Three Different Models -- It's easy to enjoy a test drive in the vehicle at the top of your list, but without driving one or two others to compare, you might easily miss out on something you'd like even more.

-- Buying Used? -- Whether buying from a private party or a dealer, it's always a good idea to have any used vehicle checked out by a reputable independent service shop. When purchasing from an individual, print the private-party value from kbb.com as well as Kelley Blue Book's 27-point Vehicle Condition Quiz to take with you. These items will help you determine the "actual" condition and value of the vehicle.

-- Buying New? -- Always use a vehicle's New Car Blue Book Value, not Manufacturer's Suggested Retail Price, as your basis for comparing vehicles and negotiating with the dealer. New Car Blue Book Value reflects real-world selling prices, which are often hundreds or even thousands of dollars less than MSRP.

-- Parents: Don't buy a car for your teen without driving it yourself, as your experience can help you identify problems or shortcomings that your teen may not notice. Also, trust your own judgment and don't let your teen talk you into buying a vehicle with which you're not fully comfortable.

-- Teens: Do all of your homework before you meet with mom or dad; show them you are responsible and ready for a car, and make it easy for them to say "yes" to your well-researched choice.

For more information about the 2008 Top 10 New and Top 10 Used Back-to-School Cars, visit <http://www.kbb.com/schoolrides08>.

About Kelley Blue Book (<http://www.kbb.com/>)

Since 1926, Kelley Blue Book, The Trusted Resource®, has provided vehicle buyers and sellers with the new and used vehicle information they need to accomplish their goals with confidence. The company's top-rated Web site, <http://www.kbb.com/>, provides the most up-to-date pricing and values, including the New Car Blue Book® Value, which reveals what people actually are paying for new cars. The company also reports vehicle pricing and values via products and services, including software products and the famous Blue Book® Official Guide. Kbb.com is rated the No. 1 automotive information Web site among both new and used vehicle shoppers, and half of online vehicle shoppers visit kbb.com. Kbb.com is a leading provider of new car prices, car reviews and news, used car blue book values, auto classifieds and car dealer locations. No other medium reaches more in-market vehicle shoppers than kbb.com.

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