Kbb.com's 2011 Top 10 Coolest New Cars Under $18,000: Editors Rank This Year's Best Affordable, Cool New Cars, Placing 2012 Fiat 500 at No. 1

Personality-Filled, Amenity-Laden Vehicles Dominate This Year's Kbb.com 'Cool Cars' List

IRVINE, Calif., June 24, 2011 /PRNewswire/ -- The expert editors from Kelley Blue Book's www.kbb.com, the leading provider of new car and used car information, today name the 2011 Top 10 Coolest New Cars Under $18,000. In a new twist on an annual list published by Kelley Blue Book's kbb.com, this year the editors ranked their top choices from 10 to one, naming the 2012 Fiat 500 as this year's No. 1 affordable 'Cool Car.'

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Getting a bargain is special in good economic times, but in economic times like these -- when the economy is teetering, home prices continue to fall and fuel prices inexplicably bounce up to near-record levels -- getting a bargain is more special than ever.

Despite the rising specter of inflation, there are still plenty of new cars available for less than $18,000. Of course, all of them will accomplish the basic tasks that cars are engineered to accomplish – they go, they stop and they keep you out of the weather. But in the kbb.com editors' vast experience with cars costing less than 18 grand, not all of them are cool, and certainly not all of them are fun. But then there are the select few, the cars that not only do everything one wants and needs a car to do, but those that also do it in an engaging and enjoyable manner.

"There are great deals to be had on many new cars under $18,000, but only a handful of them really possess that cool, difficult-to-describe 'it' factor," said Jack R. Nerad, executive editorial director and executive market analyst for Kelley Blue Book's kbb.com. "Each year the competition keeps getting tougher in this affordable segment, with more personality-filled, amenity-laden, versatile vehicles entering the marketplace. In ranking our top picks this year, the 2012 Fiat 500 took the top prize as our No. 1 choice. After 28 years out of the U.S. market, Fiat is making huge waves with the new 500 and in our books, it is the leader of the 'Cool Cars' parade."

As you might imagine, two criteria -- fun-to-drive and fun-to-own -- are critical in the roll-up to what the editors freely admit is a very subjective "cool factor," the over-arching number-one criterion. Each of the cars on the list is available for purchase at $18,000 or less, using Kelley Blue Book's exclusive Fair Purchase Price as the yardstick (Kelley Blue Book's Fair Purchase Price is the price consumers typically are paying for a car, based on actual new-vehicle transactions and updated weekly for changing market conditions). Paying less than sticker also is pretty cool, so here, counting down from numbers 10 to one, are kbb.com's Top 10 Coolest Cars Under $18,000:

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10: 2011 Hyundai Elantra

Who knew good value could be so cool? The all-new 2011Hyundai Elantra is an

all-around package of slick design, convenient features and fuel-efficiency -- every Elantra gets 40 miles per gallon on the highway...

9: 2011 Nissan Cube

We agree with Huey Lewis: it is hip to be square, at least when it comes to a car like the Nissan Cube. The polarizing squares-meet-circles design theme gets a lot of attention, but the Cube's attractiveness is more than skin deep, with features like a sliding and reclining second-row seat, an overabundance of head room and a headliner design that mimics the concentric circles created by a pebble dropped into a pond...

8. 2011 Volkswagen Jetta

Germany! It's a country practically brimming with freaky coolness, exemplified by Rammstein, Kraftwerk and, of course, Volkswagen. The latest rendition of VW's Jetta captures much of Germany's quirky-cool spirit while being expressly engineered for an American appetite...

7. 2012 Ford Focus

European automakers have long subscribed to the idea that a well-packaged car doesn't need to be large in size. Ripping a page out of that playbook, Ford has brought the compact, Euro-sweetened 2012 Focus to America, offering head-turning looks, sporty handling and a healthy standard equipment list in an efficient and affordable package...

6. 2012 Honda Civic

Cool doesn't always have to be in your face. Take the 2012 Honda Civic, for example. Its attributes read like a thought-out online dating profile: Good looking but not flashy, low maintenance and easygoing…but happy be your partner in crime for any adventure (insert winky face here)...

5. 2011 Kia Forte Koup

Having an attractive car that others haven't seen – that's cool. The 2011 Kia Forte Koup isn't just the sportiest-looking car on our list, its standard-equipment list includes a satellite-ready audio system, Bluetooth hands-free phone connectivity and USB/iPod integration, so it looks cool and acts cool…

4. 2011 Honda Fit

Fun, flexible and funky, the Honda Fit remains an instantly unanimous choice for our annual cool cars list. Even the crisper, better-equipped Fit Sport comes in under our $18,000 ceiling...

3. 2011 Ford Fiesta

It's on our list for the second year in a row and we have a feeling the Ford Fiesta is going to be another perennial favorite. Its European looks and well-crafted interior outclass everything else in the category, and its sharp driving dynamics and nimble handling still impress us every time we get behind the wheel...

2. 2011 Mazda3

At some point we're going to have to give the Mazda3 a lifetime achievement award for its unequaled streak of appearances on our annual list of coolest cars. For the 8th year in a row – every year of the cars existence, in fact – the Mazda3 has earned a spot on our list for its standout sheet metal, excellent interior and exceptional driving dynamics...

1. 2012 Fiat 500

Regardless of what the Hello Kitty mafia would like to believe, cute isn't cool. Not usually, anyway. But that's because cute is rarely backed up by substance, as it is in the 2012 Fiat 500...

To see all of the information about this year's 'Cool Cars' list, including full editorial commentary and reasoning behind each of the editors' picks, visit the 2011 Top 10 Coolest New Cars Under $18,000 story in kbb.com's Latest News section at http://www.kbb.com/car-news/all-the-latest/10-coolest-cars-under-18000-_-2011-edition/.

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