Autotrader Names Must Test Drive Award Winners for 2018

ATLANTA, March 27, 2018 /PRNewswire/ -- Narrowing your shopping list from over 300 models available to "the one" can be a daunting task, not to mention trying to make sense of the dramatic changes in in-car technology, available safety features and more. After spending a year testing nearly every model on the market in basically every driving condition, from off-roading to kid-hauling duty, the experts at Autotrader announce the 2018 Must Test Drive Award winners, featuring the top new cars worth taking for a spin before shoppers make their final purchase decision.

According to a recent survey conducted on behalf of Autotrader, nearly 70 percent of respondents said the test drive is very important when making the decision on which vehicle to purchase. Among adults who have taken a test drive, nearly 3-in-4 say they ended up buying the vehicle, with half of car shoppers purchasing the same day they test drove the vehicle.[1]

"While most of the car-buying process has moved online, the in-person test drive continues to be a make or break aspect of the purchase decision, and it's important to consider all your options," said Brian Moody, executive editor for Autotrader. "Don't rely on old assumptions when shopping. Taking any of the Must Test Drive Award winners for a ride will introduce you to unexpectedly good cars, and might change the way you think about a brand."

The Autotrader Must Test Drive Awards is intended to benefit a broad set of shoppers by highlighting a diverse group of 12 vehicles that simply must be seen and experienced to believe. Logging thousands of miles, the Autotrader editorial experts chose the winners of the annual Must Test Drive Awards based on a wide-ranging set of criteria, including interior comfort and materials, available technology features and ride quality, and each vehicle was agreed upon unanimously by the entire editorial team. To be considered for a Must Test Drive Award, a vehicle must be of the current or next model-year and be available to purchase at the time of the awards announcement. It must have a base price under $75,000, offering a significant value for the asking price, and must score a 3.5 or higher on Autotrader's five-point scale.

With these factors in mind, the 2018 winners all have something special that separates them from the competition. The variety of award-winning models below are weighted equally and are unranked, as Autotrader's experts understand the needs of each shopper are unique.

2018 Autotrader Must Test Drive Award Winners

2018 Buick Regal TourX
The Buick Regal TourX is a mid-size station wagon with all-wheel drive. That may not sound so enticing, but the TourX is one of the first real competitors to the Subaru Outback, and we were impressed with virtually every aspect of it. Not only does it combine crossover or SUV cargo capacity with a car-like driving experience, the TourX boasts excellent fuel economy (21 miles per gallon city and 29 mpg highway) despite a potent 250-horsepower 2.0-liter turbocharged engine.

2018 Chevy Colorado ZR2
The Chevy Colorado ZR2 combines the easy-to-handle dimensions of a mid-size pickup truck with the cool off-road capabilities some shoppers need, or the capabilities they say they need, even if they just plan to mostly use their truck in the city. The ZR2 is a true off-road machine, rugged and ready for almost anything you can throw at it.

2018 Honda Accord
The latest Honda Accord is simply the best-ever version of the popular mid-size sedan. While you might be tricked into thinking it's just a refreshed Accord with some more features, you'd be wrong. The styling is different, and there's more available equipment,

but the big news is the fuel economy. The 2018 Accord now reaches as high as 30 miles per gallon in the city and 38 mpg on the highway, which is a level previously thought to only be achievable if you bought a compact or subcompact car.

2018 Jeep Wrangler

The latest Jeep Wrangler is an excellent SUV, and while it looks fairly similar to the outgoing model, serious shoppers will notice the major differences. There is, for instance, a new turbocharged 4-cylinder powertrain which will improve fuel economy, along with a revised interior that's dramatically more comfortable than the outgoing model's cabin.

2018 Kia Stinger

Kia shocked many shoppers by introducing the Kia Stinger, a rear- or all-wheel drive turbocharged performance sedan. This sport sedan will definitely change the way you think about Kias in general. Even the base-level Stinger, with its $33,000 starting price and 255 horsepower, is a potent vehicle with excellent performance and a high-quality interior.

2018 Land Rover Range Rover Velar

The Range Rover Velar is absolutely gorgeous, whether you're looking at it from the inside or from the outside. The exterior styling is handsome and sleek, and the interior is modern and top-quality. This is one of the few luxury vehicles where I can actually see and feel exactly where the money was spent. The Velar's daring exterior styling and an elegant interior make it a standout in Land Rover's lineup.

2018 Lincoln Navigator

The latest Lincoln Navigator is the best version yet of the full-size luxury SUV, and it may just be the best full-size luxury SUV available today. The 2018 Navigator is more expensive than the outgoing model, with a starting price of around $73,000 with shipping, but it's also gorgeous and reminds everyone that there is still room for large SUVs on the market.

2018 Mercedes-Benz E-Class Coupe

The Mercedes-Benz E-Class Coupe is one of the most elegant and graceful two-door models in the Mercedes-Benz range. It's an excellent car with outstanding performance, touting a 329-horsepower turbocharged V6 that pushes it from 0 to 60 in 5.5 seconds.

2018 Nissan Leaf

The latest Nissan Leaf is a big leap forward over the old model, and it now provides a smart value in its segment. The Leaf eliminates range anxiety while complimenting the car's highly improved interior and loads of awesome tech and safety features. Perfectly balancing range and price, the 2018 Leaf boasts an impressive range of 151 miles and a reasonable starting price of around $31,000 with shipping (before incentives, which can be substantial).

2018 Subaru Crosstrek

The new Crosstrek not only looks good on paper, boasting a reasonable starting price of around $22,800 and excellent fuel economy figures of up to 27 mpg city and 33 mpg highway, but it also has the characteristically Subaru look and feel that seems to entice young, active car shoppers. This plucky compact crossover offers a car-like wagon with standard all-wheel drive and a little more ground clearance for when the going gets tough.

2018 Toyota Camry

The latest Toyota Camry offers major changes from prior models, which is a difficult feat, considering prior models were pretty impressive. This Camry has attitude and shows Toyota is taking risks. Admittedly, the new Camry isn't just sporty and bold, it's also still the same reliable, roomy sedan that's always been highly popular in the United States, and it's priced reasonably to compete with rivals, with a starting price of around $24,500.

2018 Volvo XC60
The new Volvo XC60 delivers Volvo's impressive interior and technology to a completely new segment, scaling down the same stunning cabin from the popular XC90 into a more affordable package. Indeed, the XC60 is a huge upgrade from the outgoing model without a significant price jump, as it starts from around $42,000 with shipping.

Find the Must Test Drive Award winning vehicles at Autotrader.com and request a test drive from your local dealer. You also can save the cars you like on Autotrader and get alerts on price drops, available incentives and more. To learn more about the 2018 Autotrader Must Test Drive Awards, including photos, detailed vehicle information and available inventory, visit https://www.autotrader.com/musttestdrive.

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[1] Source: Morning Consult, March 2018

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