AutoTrader.com's August Trend Engine Report Shows New Trucks and SUVs Remain Popular, While Small and Mid-Sized Cars Experience Notable Price Increases

ATLANTA, Sept. 13, 2011 /PRNewswire/ -- So far, 2011 has been a roller coaster year for the auto industry, with numerous events influencing consumers' auto shopping habits. From gas prices that have risen and fallen in the span of a few months to natural disasters that put the brakes on production for a few popular models, this year has shown how dramatically consumer shopping behavior can shift.

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Each month, AutoTrader.com's Trend Engine report highlights the most-searched vehicles on the site and offers insight into what factors may be influencing changes in popularity and average asking prices. Over the past year, the fluctuations in gas prices have dramatically affected the types of vehicles searched on AutoTrader.com: as gas prices rose sharply during the first part of the year, consumers turned their interest toward more fuel-efficient cars; however, with the decline in gas prices over the summer, consumers have shifted their focus back toward large trucks and SUVs, particularly in the new car arena. Accordingly, searches for small and mid-sized cars that are traditionally more fuel-efficient have continued to slide.

New Car Searches Focused More on Trucks and SUVs in August

Data from the site in August showed a decline in interest for cars in the small and mid-size segments, particularly on the list of most-searched new cars. Gone from the list is the new Ford Focus, which peaked at No. 10 in May but then began a steady decline throughout the summer—moving to No. 12 in June and then to No. 18 in July before disappearing from the list in August. Following in the Focus' trajectory were the new Hyundai Sonata, which fell four spots to No. 19 in August; the new Volkswagen Jetta, which fell one spot to No. 13; and the new Chevrolet Cruze, which fell two spots to No. 10.

Conversely, interest in new trucks and SUVs became even stronger in August than in July, with four trucks garnering enough searches month-over-month to move them up the list. The new Dodge Ram 1500, new Ford F-250 and new Chevrolet Silverado 2500 all moved up two spots month-over-month, landing at No. 7, No. 9 and No. 12, respectively. The biggest movement was seen in the largest of the trucks on the list, with the new Ford F-350 leaping an impressive seven spots month-over-month to land at No. 20. The other full-size trucks on the list held steady in their positions from July to August.

SUVs also fared quite well in August, with the new Chevrolet Tahoe moving up four spots to No. 17 and the new Jeep Grand Cherokee moving up five spots to No. 14.

A Closer Look at Toyota and Honda

Noticeably absent from the list of most-searched new cars are some perennial favorites that appeared on the list during the same time last year: the Honda Accord, Honda Civic and Toyota Camry. These cars, which spent much of 2010 on the list of most-searched new cars, have been absent from the list for most of the months since the tsunami and earthquake in Japan. As has been widely reported, Toyota and Honda have both experienced declining inventory levels and market share since the dual natural disasters disrupted production.

In the April through July timeframe, the trend of declining inventory for new Toyota and Honda vehicles has been evident on AutoTrader.com; however, there was a hint of stabilization for both automakers in August. Toyota inventory remained flat from July to August, and inventory of Honda vehicles increased slightly at 2%.

As inventory of these Japanese brands continues to stabilize and increase in the coming months, analysts at AutoTrader.com believe that the automakers may be set up to enter the fourth quarter in a more competitive position and better able to reclaim lost market share.

On the list of most-searched used cars, there is some good news for these models in August, as both the used Honda Accord and used Toyota Camry gained enough consumer interest in August to move up one position on that list. The Accord came in at No. 7, and the Camry broke back onto the list at No. 20. The used Honda Civic held its position from July at No. 9. On the list of most-searched certified pre-owned vehicles (CPO), searches for the Accord and Camry also remained strong, as the Accord held steady in the No. 2 spot and the Camry held on to the No. 6 spot month-over-month. While the Civic dropped five spots month-over-month to No. 12, it still retains a respectable spot on the list of most-searched CPO cars.

"Despite the production issues facing Toyota and Honda, the strength of these brands and popularity of those models remains evident in the searches conducted on AutoTrader.com," said Rick Wainschel, vice president of automotive insights at AutoTrader.com. "The Accord, Civic and Camry have long been among American's favorite cars, and we expect them to remain viable competitors in the small and mid-size segments."

Price Watch for New, Used and CPO Vehicles

Prices are still on the rise for the majority of the most-searched vehicles on AutoTrader.com, particularly in the CPO arena. Out of the top 20 most-searched CPO vehicles, 18 showed year-over-year asking price increases, with 14 of those posting increases in excess of $1,000. Overall, smaller, non-luxury vehicles had the highest percentage increases year-over-year. Of those, the CPO Honda Accord had the biggest dollar value increase, rising $1,967 (10.8%). Close behind was the CPO Honda Civic with a $1,841 (11.5%) increase and the CPO Volkswagen Jetta with a $1,751 (10.8%) increase.

On the list of most-searched used vehicles, there were less average asking price increases overall (10 out of 20). However, the smaller, non-luxury cars showed similar increases to those seen on the CPO list. The used Honda Accord had the highest increase in dollar value: $1,793, which amounts to 11.4%. The used Honda Civic followed with an increase of $1,553 (11.5%), and the Nissan Altima had the third highest increase at $1,426 (9.5%).

For new cars, it was actually an SUV that had the highest asking price increase: the new Ford Explorer's price rose $4,044, or 11.22%. This increase is easily attributable to the highly successful redesign of that model.

New Vehicle Brands Show Rise of Korean Automakers

In looking at the most-searched new vehicle brands on AutoTrader.com, analysts noted a few intriguing moves that occurred in August. While Ford and Chevrolet retained the top two spots year-over-year, Toyota dropped one spot to No. 4. Jeep rose three spots to No. 6. Also rising on the list were two Korean brands: Hyundai rose three spots to No. 7, and Kia rose an impressive five spots to No. 9. These brands have been fierce competitors in recent times, and analysts at AutoTrader.com will be keeping a close watch on searches for these makes.

Top 10 Articles on AutoTrader.com in August

AutoTrader.com publishes insightful and informative articles about automobiles and car shopping, including how-to tips, car reviews, automotive trend stories and more. In August, consumers showed great interest in cars that have had a celebrity owner, as well as AutoTrader.com's popular used car reviews.

The Top 10 Articles in August were:

1. For Sale on AutoTrader: A Detroit Lion's Lexus LS
2. For Sale on AutoTrader: Papa John's Dodge Viper
3. For Sale on AutoTrader: NY Mets Chrysler 300C
4. For Sale on AutoTrader: Football Team Owner's Porsche Cayenne
5. 2004-2011 Mazda RX-8: Used Car Review
6. Why Eco-Conscious Women Should Love Ford
7. 2012 Jeep Grand Cherokee SRT8 - First Drive
8. For Sale on AutoTrader: Vanessa Williams' BMW 650i Convertible
9. For Sale on AutoTrader: Funkmaster Flex Ford Mustang
10. 2009-2011 Ford Escape Hybrid: Used Car Review

About AutoTrader.com

Atlanta-based AutoTrader.com, created in 1997, is the Internet's ultimate automotive marketplace and consumer information website. AutoTrader.com aggregates in a single location millions of new cars, used cars and certified pre-owned cars from thousands of auto dealers and private sellers and is a leading online resource for auto dealers, individuals and manufacturers to advertise and market their vehicles to in-market shoppers. The company also provides a robust suite of software tools for dealers and manufacturers to help them manage and market their vehicle inventory and display advertising on the Internet. AutoTrader.com continues to grow key business metrics, including revenue, profitability and site traffic. Today, AutoTrader.com attracts more than 15 million unique monthly visitors who utilize the site to review descriptions, photos and videos of vehicles for sale; research and compare vehicles; review pricing and specials; and read auto-related content like buying and selling tips and editorial coverage of major auto shows and automotive trends. AutoTrader.com operates two other auto marketing brands, AutoTraderClassics.com and AutoTraderLatino.com. AutoTrader.com also owns used vehicle management software company vAuto, Kelley Blue Book (Kbb.com), HomeNet Automotive, a leading provider of online inventory management and merchandising solutions for the automotive retail industry and VinSolutions, a leading provider of end-to-end solution platforms for dealers. AutoTrader.com is a majority-owned subsidiary of Cox Enterprises. Providence Equity Partners is a 25 percent owner of the company and Kleiner Perkins Caufield & Byers is also an investor. For more information, please visit www.autotrader.com.

AUGUST MOST SEARCHED NEW VEHICLE BRANDS

MAKE	Rank 8/11	Rank 8/10
Ford	1	1
Chevrolet	2	2
Dodge	3	4
Toyota	4	3
Nissan	5	5
Jeep	6	9
Hyundai	7	10
GMC	8	8
Kia	9	14
Volkswagen	10	12

AUGUST MOST SEARCHED USED VEHICLE BRANDS

MAKE	Rank 8/11	Rank 8/10
Ford	1	1
Chevrolet	2	2
Toyota	3	3
Dodge	4	4
BMW	5	5
Nissan	6	6
Honda	7	7
Mercedes Benz	8	8
Jeep	9	9
GMC	10	10

AUGUST TOP 20 MOST-SEARCHED NEW VEHICLES

MAKE	MODEL	VDP Rank 8/11	VDP Rank 7/11	VDP Rank 8/10	Avg. Price 8/11	Avg. Price 8/10	Price % Change
Ford	F-150	1	1	2	$38,051	$37,105	2.55%
Chevrolet	Camaro	2	3	3	$36,538	$33,771	8.19%
Ford	Mustang	3	2	1	$37,044	$33,614	10.20%
Jeep	Wrangler	4	4	10	$31,280	$29,706	5.30%
Chevrolet	Silverado 1500	5	5	5	$33,392	$33,740	-1.03%
Chevrolet	Corvette	6	6	6	$65,710	$69,011	-4.78%
Dodge	Ram 1500	7	9	9	$34,716	$34,990	-0.78%
Dodge	Challenger	8	7	15	$32,893	$33,733	-2.49%
Ford	F-250	9	11	7	$48,317	$45,950	5.15%
Chevrolet	Cruze	10	8	N/A	$20,710	N/A	N/A
Ford	Explorer	11	10	82	$40,094	$36,050	11.22%
Chevrolet	Silverado 2500	12	14	13	$43,463	$41,857	3.84%
Volkswagen	Jetta	13	12	22	$23,110	$24,103	-4.12%
Jeep	Grand Cherokee	14	19	8	$39,476	$37,445	5.42%
Chevrolet	Equinox	15	13	16	$27,949	$27,258	2.54%
Dodge	Ram 2500	16	16	18	$47,382	$47,121	0.55%
Chevrolet	Tahoe	17	21	17	$48,521	$49,557	-2.09%
Dodge	Charger	18	17	70	$31,902	$30,143	5.84%
Hyundai	Sonata	19	15	29	$25,287	$23,249	8.77%
Ford	F-350	20	27	19	$50,704	$49,705	2.01%

AUGUST TOP 20 MOST-SEARCHED USED VEHICLES

MAKE	MODEL	VDP Rank 8/11	VDP Rank 7/11	VDP Rank 8/10	Avg. Price 8/11	Avg. Price 8/10	Price % Change
Ford	F-150	1	1	1	$19,853	$20,397	-2.67%
BMW	3-Series	2	2	2	$26,636	$25,626	3.94%
Chevrolet	Silverado 1500	3	3	3	$19,670	$19,883	-1.07%

Ford	Mustang	4	4	4	$19,301	$18,264	5.68%
Ford	F-250	5	6	5	$23,664	$24,870	-4.85%
Jeep	Wrangler	6	5	8	$20,913	$21,060	-0.70%
Honda	Accord	7	8	6	$17,571	$15,778	11.36%
Dodge	Ram 1500	8	7	7	$17,709	$18,337	-3.42%
Honda	Civic	9	9	9	$15,120	$13,567	11.45%
Chevrolet	Silverado 2500	10	11	12	$22,450	$23,302	-3.66%
Chevrolet	Tahoe	11	10	10	$22,885	$25,240	-9.33%
Infiniti	G35/37	12	13	11	$23,547	$23,121	1.84%
Jeep	Grand Cherokee	13	17	16	$16,781	$16,393	2.37%
Toyota	Tacoma	14	12	14	$20,718	$19,321	7.23%
Dodge	Ram 2500	15	15	13	$24,801	$24,957	-0.63%
Nissan	Altima	16	14	15	$16,404	$14,978	9.52%
BMW	5-Series	17	16	17	$30,184	$30,647	-1.51%
Audi	A4	18	18	18	$21,525	$20,985	2.57%
Toyota	Tundra	19	19	19	$22,598	$22,626	-0.12%
Toyota	Camry	20	21	21	$16,714	$15,303	9.22%

AUGUST TOP 20 MOST-SEARCHED CERTIFIED PRE-OWNED VEHICLES

MAKE	MODEL	VDP Rank 8/11	VDP Rank 7/11	VDP Rank 8/10	Avg. Price 8/11	Avg. Price 8/10	Price % Change
BMW	3-Series	1	1	1	$31,795	$30,504	4.23%
Honda	Accord	2	2	2	$20,135	$18,167	10.83%
Chevrolet	Silverado 1500	3	3	3	$24,947	$24,332	2.53%
Toyota	Tundra	4	5	4	$26,968	$25,937	3.97%
Audi	A4	5	4	8	$27,498	$26,631	3.25%
Toyota	Camry	6	6	6	$18,623	$17,390	7.09%
Toyota	Tacoma	7	8	10	$24,086	$22,580	6.67%
Chevrolet	Tahoe	8	9	7	$33,631	$34,029	-1.17%
Ford	F-150	9	10	5	$27,104	$25,368	6.84%
Volkswagen	Jetta	10	11	14	$18,010	$16,259	10.77%
BMW	5-Series	11	12	11	$36,454	$37,462	-2.69%
Honda	Civic	12	7	9	$17,893	$16,051	11.47%
Toyota	Highlander	13	16	15	$27,264	$25,089	8.67%
Acura	TL	14	14	12	$27,642	$26,424	4.61%
Acura	MDX	15	17	18	$32,821	$32,800	0.07%
Honda	Pilot	16	13	16	$26,968	$25,138	7.28%
Toyota	4-Runner	17	19	17	$27,067	$25,139	7.67%
Ford	Mustang	18	15	13	$23,611	$21,719	8.71%
Nissan	Altima	19	21	21	$18,705	$17,648	5.99%
GMC	Sierra 1500	20	23	20	$26,018	$25,459	2.20%

SOURCE AutoTrader.com

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