

Fuel-Efficient Vehicles Making Some Headway in February on AutoTrader.com's Top-Searched Cars List

Shopping and Survey Data from AutoTrader.com Show Large Trucks and SUVs Still Popular; That Could Change in Coming Months for Car Shoppers if Fuel Prices Rise Further

ATLANTA, March 10, 2011 [PRNewswire/](#) -- Where is the tipping point in gas prices where consumers shift their interest to more fuel efficient cars?

That's the question analysts at AutoTrader.com have been focusing on as they analyze traffic and data on the site. According to the February Trend Engine Report, which provides monthly insights into auto shopping behavior, consumers haven't reached that tipping point yet, but they may be close based on information gleaned from the site at the tail end of February.

Trucks and SUVs continued to hold the majority of shopper's interest across New, Used, and Certified Pre-Owned vehicles during the past month.

The number of family cars and sedans on the list of most-searched new cars has actually decreased; in January, these cars captured nine out of 20 spots on the list, with only four out of 20 in February. Three of the four family cars are newcomers to the list this month, and all get more than 25 mpg combined, which could indicate a slight leaning toward fuel efficient cars.

Additionally, a recent survey of users of AutoTrader.com showed that 53% of shoppers on the site would consider a car with more fuel economy than the one they currently drive, so more activity in fuel-efficient car shopping may show itself on AutoTrader.com in March or April if gas prices continue to rise.

"We're starting to see a little bit of movement on the list of most-searched new cars toward fuel efficiency, but not really enough to say that gas prices had a dramatic effect on consumer shopping behavior in February," said AutoTrader.com President and CEO Chip Perry. "In fact, the addition of some heavy-duty trucks shows that consumers have a higher-than-expected threshold for gas prices and are still following their hearts with the love of larger vehicles. Similarly, the lists of most-searched used and CPO cars haven't actually changed much in the last few months. If gas prices continue to rise, we'll be on the lookout for new trends, and as our survey during February showed, many consumers are now starting to think about more fuel-efficient vehicles."

Many Unexpected Changes on the New-Car List; Pre-Owned Vehicle Lists Stable

In February, the total number of trucks and SUVs that made the list of the most-searched new cars actually increased month-over-month, going from nine out of 20 in January to 11 out of 20 in February. The new Ford F-150 held on to its No. 1 position month-over-month and year-over-year. Three heavy-duty trucks made big leaps into the top 20 from the month prior, with the new Ford F-250 leaping nine places to land at No. 12 in February; the new Dodge Ram 2500 moving up 13 places to No. 17; and the new Chevrolet Silverado jumping eight places to land at No. 19.

Even with all the movement regarding trucks and SUVs, there were four fuel-efficient newcomers to the list of most-searched new vehicles in February, with three family cars and one fuel-efficient SUV. The new Chevrolet Cruze jumped 25 places, going from No. 39 in January to No. 14 in February; the new Kia Optima leapt 42 places, going from No. 58 in January to No. 16 in February; and the new Hyundai Elantra moved up 29 spots, going from No.

47 in January to No. 18 in February. Although classified as an SUV, the fuel-efficient new Chevrolet Equinox zoomed up 19 spots, going from No. 34 in January to No. 15 in February.

The story for pre-owned vehicles didn't change much between January and February, despite the rising gas prices. Trucks and SUVs still make up 11 out of the top 20 spots on both the most-searched used car list and the most-search CPO car list. The only difference noted between the lists month-over-month is that the most-searched used car list in January had 12 trucks and SUVs, but the used Toyota Tacoma was edged out by the used Volkswagen Jetta in February.

Ford Remains Most-Search Brand on AutoTrader.com

Ford again achieved the honor of being the No. 1 most-searched brand on AutoTrader.com for both new and used vehicles, with Chevrolet holding on to the No. 2 spot. While Ford attracted the most searches overall, Chevrolet did see five new vehicles in the top 20 in February that were not on the list in January. This could certainly be a reflection of the phenomenal sales month Chevrolet experienced in February.

"Although AutoTrader.com doesn't get involved in the actual transaction, there's definitely a correlation between searches on our site and sales on the showroom floors," Perry noted. "Study after study has confirmed that the Internet is the most-used research tool for auto shoppers, and those shoppers devote the majority of their online research time looking at and comparing cars on third-party sites like AutoTrader.com."

Average Asking Prices On the Rise for Majority of New, Used and CPO

Year-over-year average asking prices increased on the majority of new, used and CPO vehicles in February. For the most-searched new vehicles, prices were up on 13 out of 19 (no pricing information was available for one model that was introduced after February 2010); for the most-searched used vehicles, prices were up on 16 out of 20; and for the most-searched CPO vehicles, prices were up on 12 out of 20.

On the new-car list, eight vehicles had an average asking price increase over four percent, with the Kia Optima grabbing the biggest increase, 14.6%, moving from \$19,930 to \$22,833 year-over-year. Even so, five of the eight vehicles with year-over-year average asking price increases over four percent were either trucks or SUVs, as the price of the Jeep Grand Cherokee increased 4.2% from \$36,412 to \$37,924; the asking price of the new Ford F-150 increased 4.6% from \$36,323 to \$38,101; the price of the new Chevrolet Silverado 2500 increased 5.4% from \$41,962 to \$44,240; the price of the new Ford Explorer increased 8.9% from \$35,597 to \$38,747 year-over-year; and the price of the new Ford F-250 increased 9.2% from \$44,550 to \$48,657.

Used car average asking prices were a little more modest, with only four vehicles having a price increase over four percent. Of those four, two were heavy-duty trucks (the price of the used Chevrolet Silverado 2500 increased 4% from \$22,777 to \$23,688 and the price of the used Ford F-250 increased 5% from \$23,283 to \$24,454); one was an SUV (the price of the used Jeep Wrangler increased 4.96% from \$19,169 to \$20,119); and the other was a family car (the price of the used Nissan Altima increased 4.1% from \$14,443 to \$15,032).

Average asking prices for CPO vehicles rebounded after a rough start to the year in January, which was when the majority of asking prices dropped. As

stated earlier, 12 out of 20 CPO vehicles on the most-searched list in February saw increases in their average asking prices. Interestingly, 10 of these vehicles had a price increase greater than 4%, with trucks and SUVs comprising eight of the 10 major increases. Notable standouts with year-over-year price increases include the CPO Toyota Highlander, which had a price increase of 7.1%, going from \$24,545 to \$26,286; the CPO Toyota Tundra, which had a price increase of 7.1%, going from \$24,814 to \$26,579; the CPO Toyota 4-Runner, which had a price increase of 8.1%, going from \$24,341 to \$26,302; and the CPO Ford F-150, which had a price increase of 8.9%, going from \$23,604 to \$25,712.

"We look at average asking prices because they, too, have a story to tell about auto shopping behavior," Perry commented. "Consumer confidence is on the rise and more people are looking to purchase their next car. Since inventory levels haven't fully recovered, we're seeing mostly steady—but sometimes dramatic—uptick in prices for many vehicles. By looking at the types of vehicles that are seeing the biggest increases in asking prices, we can see that the numbers from February once again confirm American's interest in larger vehicles."

Top 10 Articles on AutoTrader.com in February

AutoTrader.com publishes insightful and informative articles about automobiles and car shopping, including how-to tips, car reviews and automotive trend stories. In February, love was in the air at AutoTrader.com, as many of the month's top articles centered on love.

The most-viewed stories on AutoTrader.com in were:

1. [Cars We Love – Love Letters to Our Favorite Cars](#)– you can feel the love in these little notes to our auto writers' favorite cars.
2. [2003-2007 Honda Accord – Used Car Video Review](#) – find out which model years and trim levels our reviewers recommend for the always-popular Accord
3. [Top Cars That Attract Women](#) – men looking for a little extra in scoring a date for Valentine's day and beyond should check out these nine cars.
4. [2002-2005 Audi A4 – Used Car Video Review](#) – European luxury, decent fuel economy and great handling make the used A4 a car to consider.
5. [Secret Crush... Cars We Love in Secret](#) – just like the song you listen to when no one's around, there are cars that auto enthusiasts love to love—in secret.
6. [Two's Company: Our Favorite Two Seaters](#) – take romance on the road with a car made just for two.
7. [Paris Hilton's \\$375,000 Car Present](#) – as if her social life wasn't already on the fast track, Paris can now go 0-60 in 3.6 seconds with her Lexus LFA, a birthday present from her new beau.
8. [2011 Hyundai Elantra – New Car Review](#) – with the best mpg in its class and passenger space that rivals sedans in the mid-size class, the Elantra is garnering tons of consumer interest on AutoTrader.com
9. [Consumer Reports Likes Kia Sportage Best](#) – the Sportage comes out on top when compared to other vehicles that "straddle the line between hatchbacks and SUVs."
10. [A 40-MPG Ford F-150 in the Works](#) – with the turmoil in the Middle East and gas prices on the rise, fuel-efficient technology for trucks and SUVs can't come fast enough.

These articles and more, including coverage of upcoming auto shows and events, can be found at www.autotrader.com/research.

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) and HomeNet Automotive, a leading provider of online inventory management and merchandising solutions for the automotive retail industry. 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.

FEBRUARY TOP 10 NEW VEHICLE BRANDS SEARCHED

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

FEBRUARY TOP 10 USED VEHICLE BRANDS SEARCHED

MAKE	Rank 2/11	Rank 2/10
Ford	1	1
Chevrolet	2	2
Toyota	3	4

Dodge	4	3
BMW	5	6
Nissan	6	5
Honda	7	7
Mercedes Benz	8	8
Jeep	9	9
GMC	10	10

FEBRUARY TOP 20 MOST-SEARCHED NEW CARS

MAKE	MODEL	VDP Rank 2/11	VDP Rank 1/11	VDP Rank 2/10	Avg. Price 2/11	Avg. Price 2/10	Price % Change
Ford	F-150	1	1	1	\$38,010	\$36,323	4.64%
Ford	Mustang	2	3	3	\$34,652	\$32,381	7.01%
Chevrolet	Camaro	3	11	2	\$32,120	\$33,997	-5.52%
Chevrolet	Silverado 1500	4	4	4	\$33,635	\$34,070	-1.28%
Ford	Explorer	5	13	114	\$38,747	\$35,597	8.85%
Dodge	Challenger	6	23	13	\$33,077	\$36,278	-8.82%
Jeep	Wrangler	7	9	5	\$29,946	\$29,045	3.10%
Chevrolet	Corvette	8	17	9	\$67,289	\$68,140	-1.25%
Dodge	Charger	9	63	65	\$30,715	\$29,861	2.86%
Dodge	Ram 1500	10	7	8	\$35,267	\$34,254	2.96%
Volkswagen	Jetta	11	6	27	\$23,045	\$23,355	-1.33%
Ford	F-250	12	21	10	\$48,657	\$44,550	9.22%
Jeep	Grand Cherokee	13	14	52	\$37,924	\$36,412	4.15%
Chevrolet	Cruze	14	39	--	\$20,309	--	--
Chevrolet	Equinox	15	34	12	\$27,489	\$27,330	0.58%
Kia	Optima	16	58	169	\$22,833	\$19,930	14.57%
Dodge	Ram 2500	17	30	20	\$47,026	\$46,671	0.76%
Hyundai	Elantra	18	47	84	\$18,589	\$17,361	7.07%
Chevrolet	Silverado 2500	19	27	21	\$44,240	\$41,962	5.43%
GMC	Sierra 1500	20	16	25	\$35,656	\$36,302	-1.78%

FEBRUARY TOP 20 MOST-SEARCHED USED VEHICLES

MAKE	MODEL	VDP Rank 2/11	VDP Rank 1/11	VDP Rank 2/10	Avg. Price 2/11	Avg. Price 2/10	Price % Change

Ford	F-150	1	1	1	\$19,758	\$19,650	0.55%
BMW	3-Series	2	2	2	\$24,618	\$24,636	-0.07%
Chevrolet	Silverado 1500	3	3	3	\$19,690	\$18,959	3.86%
Ford	Mustang	4	4	4	\$17,358	\$17,032	1.91%
Ford	F-250	5	5	5	\$24,454	\$23,283	5.03%
Honda	Accord	6	6	7	\$15,936	\$15,643	1.87%
Jeep	Wrangler	7	8	9	\$20,119	\$19,169	4.96%
Dodge	Ram 1500	8	7	6	\$17,862	\$17,518	1.96%
Honda	Civic	9	10	10	\$13,940	\$13,411	3.94%
Chevrolet	Tahoe	10	9	8	\$24,248	\$24,322	-0.30%
Chevrolet	Silverado 2500	11	11	11	\$23,688	\$22,777	4.00%
Toyota	Tacoma	12	12	15	\$19,443	\$18,919	2.77%
Infiniti	G35/37	13	14	12	\$21,997	\$21,958	0.18%
Dodge	Ram 2500	14	13	13	\$25,227	\$24,321	3.73%
Jeep	Grand Cherokee	15	15	18	\$16,630	\$16,447	1.11%
Nissan	Altima	16	16	14	\$15,032	\$14,443	4.08%
BMW	5-Series	17	17	17	\$28,980	\$29,952	-3.25%
Audi	A4	18	18	19	\$20,678	\$20,599	0.38%
Ford	Explorer	19	19	16	\$16,348	\$16,473	-0.76%
Volkswagen	Jetta	20	21	22	\$13,420	\$13,024	3.04%

FEBRUARY TOP 20 MOST-SEARCHED CERTIFIED PRE-OWNED CARS

MAKE	MODEL	VDP Rank 2/11	VDP Rank 1/11	VDP Rank 2/10	Avg. Price 2/11	Avg. Price 2/10	Price % Change
BMW	3-Series	1	1	1	\$29,859	\$29,891	-0.11%
Honda	Accord	2	2	2	\$19,019	\$18,151	4.78%
Chevrolet	Silverado 1500	3	3	3	\$24,521	\$23,393	4.82%
Toyota	Tundra	4	4	7	\$26,579	\$24,814	7.11%
Toyota	Tacoma	5	5	10	\$22,969	\$21,868	5.03%
Ford	F-150	6	6	5	\$25,712	\$23,604	8.93%
Toyota	Camry	7	7	13	\$17,715	\$18,201	-2.67%
Chevrolet	Tahoe	8	8	4	\$33,238	\$31,632	5.08%
Honda	Civic	9	9	9	\$15,676	\$16,154	-2.96%
Audi	A4	10	10	8	\$25,963	\$26,456	-1.86%
BMW	5-Series	11	11	6	\$35,322	\$35,635	-0.88%
Toyota	Highlander	12	12	20	\$26,286	\$24,545	7.09%
Volkswagen	Jetta	13	15	17	\$16,263	\$15,977	1.79%
Honda	Pilot	14	13	14	\$24,801	\$24,512	1.18%
Acura	TL	15	14	11	\$26,183	\$27,026	-3.12%
Acura	MDX	16	16	23	\$32,263	\$33,266	-3.02%
Ford	Mustang	17	18	12	\$21,487	\$20,141	6.68%
Toyota	4-Runner	18	17	18	\$26,302	\$24,341	8.06%

GMC	Sierra 1500	19	20	15	\$25,510	\$24,376	4.65%
Honda	CR-V	20	19	28	\$20,804	\$21,136	-1.57%

SOURCE AutoTrader.com

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