

Verdict in for best of 2021

By OLGA DE MOELLER

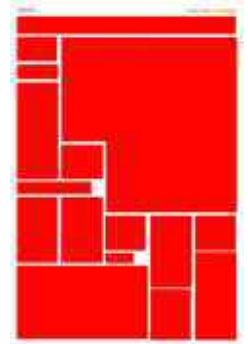
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The RAC's list of top picks for drives covers a wide range & popular favourites

Western Australia's top-selling Hyundai i30 has scooped the small-car category in the RAC's Best Drives of 2021.

Latest new car sales figures from VFACTS, which is compiled by the Chamber of Automotive Industries, show the i30 was sitting pretty on a 27.7 per cent market share in its segment last year, with 2623 cars leaving dealerships — though behind its main competitor and bestseller, the Toyota Corolla, on 29.9 per cent (2836 cars sold).

The ever-popular Toyota Camry Hybrid took out the medium-car gong (under \$50,000) and the Tesla Model 3 was best electric car — up against a range of electrified players, including the Volvo XC40 Recharge plug-in hybrid, Kia Niro, Toyota Kluger and Camry hybrids, Nissan Leaf, MG ZS EV, Mitsubishi Eclipse Cross PHEV and Outlander PHEV and the Tesla Model 3 Long Range.

More than 60 vehicles were road-tested by the RAC in a year beset by supply constraints for manufacturers and car-hungry customers facing long delivery times.

RAC's manager of fuels and vehicles Alex Forrest gives us the lowdown on the top 12 picks, below, including the Kia

Carnival, which took out the people mover category in spite of initially missing out on auto wipers and a full LCD screen in front of the driver when it launched in January 2021, with Kia saying these would be added later as a running change.

At the other end of the spectrum, Toyota's GR Yaris

has been named best sports car under \$65,000.

"This 98-octane petrol-sipping, three-cylinder, turbocharged all-wheel-drive grocery getter was arguably the most hysterical, irrational and disproportionately expensive (\$49,500 drive-away) car ever to wear a Toyota badge," Mr Forrest said.

"Yet, Toyota could not build enough of them to satisfy demand."

Dual-cab utes also had a big year, with 2021 being the first full year of sales of the new Isuzu D-Max, plus a new flagship Mazda BT-50, a heavily revised Nissan Navara and some important upgrades to the Toyota HiLux, WA's bestselling 4x4 ute with a 26.9 per cent market share in its segment based on 6182 vehicles purchased.

The small and medium-sized SUV segments also saw plenty of new arrivals, including the Hyundai Tucson, Peugeot 3008 and 5008, Citroen C5 Aircross, Kia Sportage, Genesis GV70 and GV80, Land Rover Defender 90 and Subaru Forester, which took out best medium SUV under \$55,000.

Notably, 52,642 SUVs were purchased across light, small, medium and extra large categories, making up the bulk of new car sales in WA in 2021.

Here are the RAC's top 12 picks for 2021.

SMALL CAR

HYUNDAI i30

■ **PRICE** From \$27,490

drive-away (auto)

■ **ANCAP SAFETY RATING** *****

■ **BODY TYPE** Hatch

■ **FUEL ECONOMY/FUEL TYPE**

7.4L/100km, unleaded 91

■ **ENGINE/TRANSMISSION**

2.0-litre petrol, 6-speed auto

We drove the current Hyundai i30 early in 2021 after its launch in late 2020, with the stand-outs being the inclusion of most of Hyundai's suite of electronic safety gear ("SmartSense" is the marketing term) across the range.

This includes autonomous emergency braking and lane keeping assist and driver attention warning. A major styling upgrade for 2021 also modernised the range, especially the i30 sedan. Rides and handles well, too.

MEDIUM CAR UNDER \$50,000

TOYOTA CAMRY HYBRID

■ **PRICE** From \$37,670

drive-away

■ **ANCAP SAFETY RATING** *****

■ **BODY TYPE** Sedan

■ **FUEL ECONOMY/FUEL TYPE**

4.5L/100km, premium 95

■ **ENGINE/TRANSMISSION**

2.5-litre petrol/electric hybrid, CVT

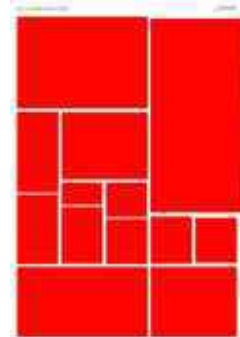
Medium passenger sedans may not be favoured by consumers right now, with SUVs having usurped their job years ago. However, the Camry

Hybrid remains, and may just be enough to stop you boarding the SUV bandwagon.

The Camry Hybrid's electrified drivetrain makes it punchy to drive in traffic but also refined and very fuel efficient. It's as roomy for occupants as a mid-sized SUV and, arguably, better value. It's also quite cheap to service.

MEDIUM CAR OVER \$50,000

AUDI A4 AVANT



■ **PRICE** From \$84,300 drive-away

■ **ANCAP SAFETY RATING** *****

■ **BODY TYPE** Wagon

■ **FUEL ECONOMY/FUEL TYPE** 7.3L/100km, premium 95

■ **ENGINE/TRANSMISSION** 2.0-litre turbo-petrol, 7-speed dual clutch

While SUVs grab the attention (and wallets) of most consumers, there remains a small but devoted group of drivers who love a low-slung, good-handling, efficient, practical and premium car-based wagon. The Audi A4 Avant is one of those wagons, and with this one you get all-wheel-drive, which you don't get in some of its pricier competitors.

With a finely finished interior, the A4 Avant is the reason many are wooed by a wagon.

PEOPLE MOVER

KIA CARNIVAL

■ **PRICE** From \$50,890 drive-away

■ **ANCAP SAFETY RATING** *****

■ **BODY TYPE** Van

■ **FUEL ECONOMY/FUEL TYPE** 9.6L/100km, unleaded 91

■ **ENGINE/TRANSMISSION** 3.5-litre V6, 8-speed auto

We were able to road-test the new Carnival in March 2021 and along with new niceties such as a rotary transmission dial, mood lighting on the Platinum model and SUV-like external styling, the new Carnival retains all the features that make it so versatile.

These include those two big sliding side doors, movable and removable seats, and huge spaces for luggage, which help make the Carnival better suited to the needs of big families than most SUVs.

SPORTS CAR UNDER \$65,000 TOYOTA GR YARIS

■ **PRICE** From \$49,500 drive-away

■ **ANCAP SAFETY RATING** Not rated

■ **BODY TYPE** Hatch

■ **FUEL ECONOMY/FUEL TYPE** 7.6L/100km, premium 98

■ **ENGINE/TRANSMISSION** 1.6-litre turbo three-cylinder, 6-speed manual

Consider that the standard Yaris makes 88kW from its 1.5-litre engine, and suddenly the GR Yaris' 200kW from its slightly bigger (1.6-litre) engine begins to hint at the sort of driving experience this car provides. With all-wheel-drive, a widened body and a taste for 98 RON petrol, the GR Yaris has

little more in common with the regular Yaris than its name.

The Rallye Edition, with lightweight wheels and limited-slip differentials, sharpens up the sportiness even more.

SMALL SUV UNDER \$40,000 MAZDA MX-30

■ **PRICE** From \$38,160 drive-away

■ **ANCAP SAFETY RATING** *****

■ **BODY TYPE** SUV

■ **FUEL ECONOMY/FUEL TYPE** 6.4L/100km, unleaded 91

■ **ENGINE/TRANSMISSION** 2.0-litre four-cylinder, 6-speed auto

Mazda remains a keen innovator and this continued to be showcased in 2021 with the release of the MX-30 mild hybrid. "Mild" is the key word because there's no direct electric assistance when driving, however, it does help the engine stop/start system keep the engine stopped for longer.

Even calling this a hybrid is a stretch to some extent, but it also has a well-designed and ergonomic interior and those funky rear-hinged doors. Plus, it runs on 91 RON fuel, which can't be said of all small SUVs.

MEDIUM SUV UNDER \$55,000 SUBARU FORESTER

■ **PRICE** From \$40,680 drive-away

■ **ANCAP SAFETY RATING** *****

■ **BODY TYPE** SUV

■ **FUEL ECONOMY/FUEL TYPE** 7.4L/100km, unleaded 91

■ **ENGINE/TRANSMISSION** 2.5-litre four-cylinder, CVT

Given the Forester is Subaru's bestselling model and the sixth-best-selling medium SUV in WA overall, the brand is

well motivated to ensure it stays competitive.

So, added for 2021 was autonomous emergency steering, lane centring and lane departure prevention.

With all-wheel-drive all the time and good ground clearance, the Forester remains highly capable both on and off road. The ability to detect driver drowsiness and reversing AEB are standard in all variants except for the base model.

LARGE SUV \$55,000 - \$70,000 HYUNDAI PALISADE

■ **PRICE** From \$61,085 drive-away

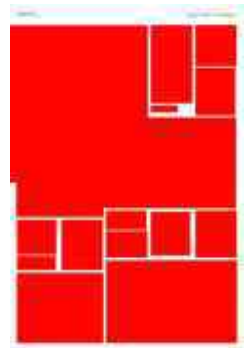
■ **ANCAP SAFETY RATING** Not rated

■ **BODY TYPE** SUV

■ **FUEL ECONOMY/FUEL TYPE** 10.7L/100km, unleaded 91

■ **ENGINE/TRANSMISSION** 3.8-litre V6, 8-speed auto

One of the biggest advantages of the Hyundai Palisade, compared with the Santa Fe, is



the room in the third row of seats, which is almost useable for the average-sized adult.

It can be had as an eight-seater, too, meaning the Palisade is the SUV you get when you really want to avoid getting a people mover. It has plenty of space and luxury for the money, and the full-sized spare tyre is also a plus.

AWD SUV \$70,000 - \$150,000 GENESIS GV70

■ **PRICE** From \$74,920 drive-away

■ **ANCAP SAFETY RATING** *****

■ **BODY TYPE** SUV

■ **FUEL ECONOMY/FUEL TYPE** 9.8L/100km, unleaded 95

■ **ENGINE/TRANSMISSION** 2.5-litre turbo four-cylinder, 8-speed auto

The GV70 has the potential to be a threat to the main players in the medium-sized premium SUV segment, which includes the Audi Q5, BMW X3 and Volvo XC60. As Hyundai's luxury brand, Genesis is less well known than its established competition, but comparably

well appointed with clean-slate styling and good driving dynamics. Servicing is being promoted as free for five years, but of course that's rolled into the purchase price.

ALL-TERRAIN SUV TOYOTA LANDCRUISER 300 SERIES

■ **PRICE** From \$99,470 drive-away

■ **ANCAP SAFETY RATING** *****
(Five stars awarded January 12, 2022)

■ **BODY TYPE** SUV

■ **FUEL ECONOMY/FUEL TYPE** 8.7L/100km, diesel

■ **ENGINE/TRANSMISSION** 3.3-litre V6 twin-turbo, 10-speed auto

Much of the public focus on the 300 Series has been on its new V6 twin-turbo engine and its limited availability.

However, one of the 300's most impressive party tricks is its electronically controlled kinetic suspension system. A development of the non-electronically controlled system on the previous 200 model, the new system makes for an incredibly smooth ride over some of the roughest terrain, which we discovered on the Mundaring powerlines track. It's more powerful yet more fuel efficient and refined, but also a lot more expensive.

4X4 TWIN CAB UTE

TOYOTA HILUX

■ **PRICE** From \$67,600 drive-away (SR5 4x4)

■ **ANCAP SAFETY RATING** *****

■ **BODY TYPE** Twin-cab ute

■ **FUEL ECONOMY/FUEL TYPE** 7.9L/100km, diesel

■ **ENGINE/TRANSMISSION** 2.8-litre diesel four-cylinder, 6-speed auto

Another off-road Toyota takes the cake here, and in the face of newly introduced competition in 2021 that included the Isuzu D-Max and

Nissan Pro-4X, the current model HiLux stood out as having improved interior functionality and refinement while still being able to do ute things well.

Additions to the Rogue variant, like the motorised tray blind and chunky sports bar, do reduce its practicality, so a cheaper variant might be a better bet for those looking to fully utilise their utility.

ELECTRIC CAR

TESLA MODEL 3

■ **PRICE** From \$66,616 drive-away (rear-wheel-drive)

■ **ANCAP SAFETY RATING** *****

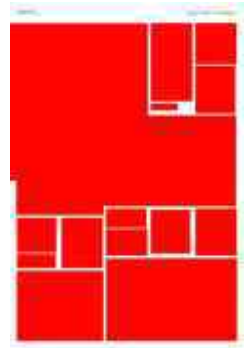
■ **BODY TYPE** Sedan

■ **FUEL ECONOMY/FUEL TYPE** 13.2kWh/100km, 491km range, electricity

■ **ENGINE/TRANSMISSION** Single motor RWD, 62kW/h lithium-ion battery, 1-speed automatic reduction gear

In 2021, the Tesla Model 3 faced more new competition in Australia than it ever has, with more to come.

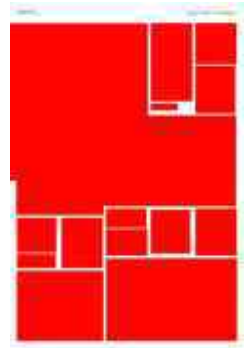
But being inherently designed to be an electric-only car from the ground up (unlike many other electric cars), the Model 3 was the stand-out electric car we drove in 2021. We drove the Long Range variant, and by that Tesla means 614km (Standard Range is 491km). Playful hidden features in the infotainment system, including Monty Python references, sweeten the experience.



Hyundai i30



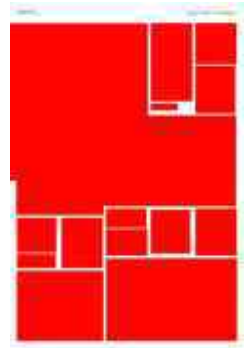
Audi A4 Avant



Toyota Camry Hybrid



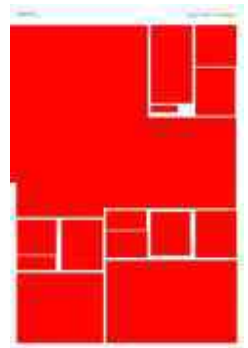
Toyota GR Yaris



Kia Carnival



Mazda MX-30



The RAC's Alex Forrest, with three of his top car picks for 2021, a Genesis GV70, Subaru Forester and Toyota LandCruiser 300 Series. Picture: Nic Ellis



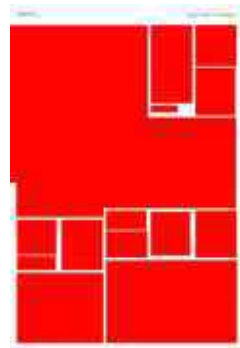
Hyundai Palisade



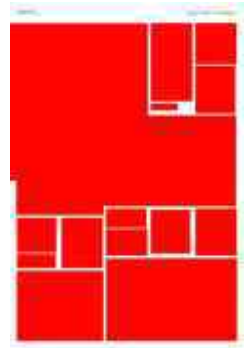
Genesis GV70
Picture: Mark Bramley



Toyota HilLux SR5



Subaru Forester



Toyota Landcruiser 300 Series



Tesla Model 3

'Toyota could not build enough of them to satisfy demand.'