

user's choice

HINDUSTAN TIMES-MaRS CONSUMERS SATISFACTION SURVEY

CARS



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Wheels of desire

DRIVER'S SEAT Which cars do Indian car owners regard as the best on the roads? And which cars do they consider the best in each price band? *HT* and MaRS bring you the definitive answers to these and several other questions. Read on...

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Younger car owners are much more satisfied with their wheels than older ones. And car owners in Lucknow, for some reason, are more satisfied with their cars compared to their counterparts in the rest of the country. And Honda SIEL Cars India makes three of the five cars with the highest ratings, according to the *HT*-MaRS Car Owners' Satisfaction Survey (see How we did it on Page 26 for methodology), which threw up few predictable results, but several surprises as well.

Apart from Honda, Fiat India was the other big winner in this survey. The company, which reported an 82 per cent rise in sales last month (May 2010 vs May 2009), has two clear winners in Fiat Linea and Fiat Grande Punto.

The former was ranked the third best car overall (jointly with Honda Civic) and top of its class in the Rs 6-8

lakh price band. The Grande Punto came in at No. 10 overall and top of its class in the Rs 4-6 lakh price band.

It will come as no surprise that overall satisfaction levels rise with the price of the car, ie, owners of higher end cars tend to exhibit higher satisfaction levels than owners of lower end cars.

"To be able to understand the ratings, it must be understood that satisfaction ratings of cars by owners is a personal experience — much more so for cars than for any other durables," says Raghu Roy, managing director, MaRS, *HT*'s knowledge partner for this project.

"While the performance of the car remains the principal determinant of the satisfaction level, two other factors contribute significantly. One is the expectancy disconfirmation — whether the performance is below or above expectations. The second is the pride of ownership, which makes some owners overlook problems or exaggerate performance," he adds.

This survey has several firsts to its

credit. It is the first in India to list the most women-friendly cars, the best family cars, the best looking cars, the most environment-friendly cars and the cars with the best resale value across brands.

This, we believe, will help readers cut through the clutter of information about various models and make informed choices about their next car purchase. It shouldn't come as a surprise that car owners rated cars bought in 2009 and 2010 the highest. After all, it's reasonable to expect them to rate newer cars above older ones. But surprise... owners of 2007 model cars rate their cars higher than owners of 2008 models!

Maruti Suzuki scores on customer service. On this count, its cars — Alto, Swift Dzire and SX4 — top their class

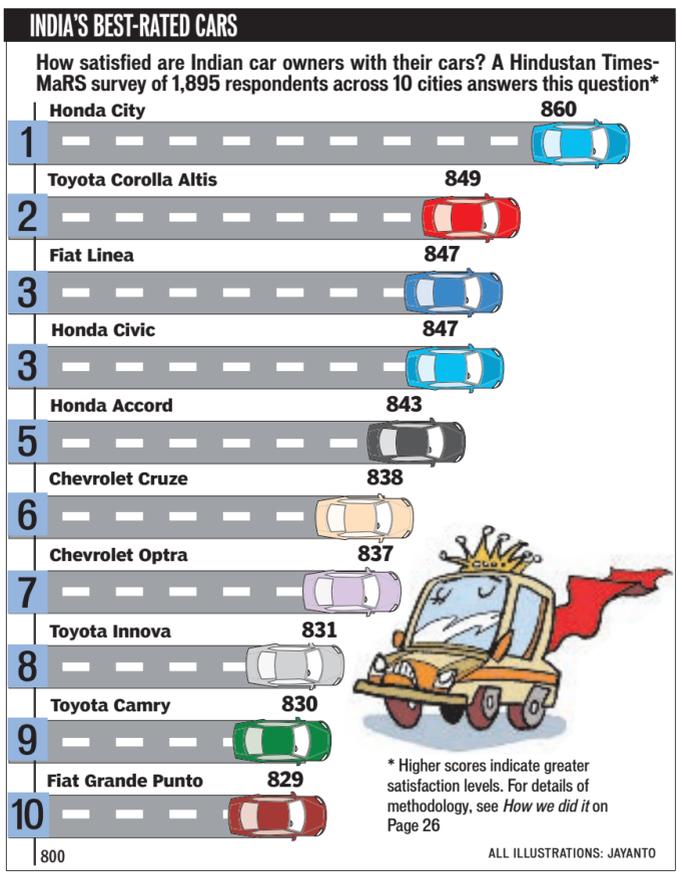
OWNERS OF HIGHER END CARS EXHIBIT HIGHER SATISFACTION LEVELS THAN OWNERS OF LOWER END CARS.

in the less than Rs 4 lakh, Rs 4-6 lakh and the Rs 6-8 lakh categories, respectively. It does not have any entries in the more than Rs 8 lakh and SUV/MUV category. Such domination of a particular parameter is obviously a tribute to its reach as well the competition among Maruti service centres to attract and retain customers.

Three Marutis — Alto, Swift Dzire and SX4 — also come out on top under the "maintenance" parameter.

These two findings may hold the secret to Maruti Suzuki's dominance over the Indian market even after the entry of higher rated international rivals. Competitors, take note.

"Overall, three findings stand out. It is clear that the more you spend the more satisfaction you derive. Then, the younger you are, the happier you are with your car. And finally, there is disconnect between perception ratings and satisfaction levels. Perception ratings may determine brand shares, but satisfaction levels are determined by personal experience," says Roy.



MOST SATISFYING THE HONDA CITY

A coming of age 'luxury' car

TOP GEAR Honda City's top of the line quality is something that has neither been compromised nor bettered by the competition.



At a price of more than Rs 8 lakh, Honda City does not come cheap, but many people in middle management positions still consider it affordable.

Suman Banerji
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Honda City was the car that launched a company in India. In the process, it became almost synonymous with the company that makes it.

It is only the second car in India to be identified so closely with its maker — Maruti 800 is the other.

The City, as it is commonly called, tops the *HT*-MaRS Satisfaction Survey.

But its USP could be one that surveys don't capture — in a society like ours, the car symbolises one's coming of age.

"I was looking for a car that made me feel good. It was a luxury car without quite being one (it's a mid-size car — one notch below the Civic). It gives fantastic fuel efficiency, is very comfortable, and gives me an image without bankrupting me," says Shweta Bhadekar, former deputy country head, IAVI, and consultant, WHO.

That could be the secret behind its

longevity and continued popularity. It has been on the roads for more than a decade now and it has been subject to two model changes already, but the country's fascination with the car refuses to ebb.

"The City is a tried and trusted car across the world and has a huge brand equity in India," says Shikhar Malhotra, owner of the Ace Honda, a large Honda car dealership and service centre in Noida.

"The car has been the face of affordable luxury in the country for more than a decade and it is an indication that the owner has arrived," he adds.

THE HONDA CITY HAS BEEN ON THE ROADS FOR MORE THAN A DECADE NOW, BUT THE COUNTRY'S FASCINATION WITH THE CAR REFUSES TO EBB.

There are many factors behind City's success. The Honda brand ensures top of the line quality, something that has neither been compromised nor bettered by the competition. The company made radical design changes to the car every five years even when the existing car was doing well and each time, the numbers have only gone up.

"I upgraded to the City from a Swift and initially, I was inclined to go for a second-hand one because even a second-hand City is worth the money," said Rahul Jain, a chartered accountant who bought a new City last year. "But when I heard about the new City, I waited and bought it."

At a price of more than Rs 8 lakh, the car does not come cheap but many people in middle management positions consider it affordable.

What's great about the car: Just about everything.

What's not: A tad expensive, lack of top of the line features

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■ The Toyota Corolla Altis has now established itself as a quality car loaded with many safety features.

HT PHOTO

Taking design, comfort and convenience to a new level

TRUSTWORTHY The Toyota Corolla Altis has exceeded the company's target of 35 per cent market share in its class after its relaunch two years ago.

HT Correspondent
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The world's largest-selling car did not meet the same success in India until last year but following the model change, the Toyota Corolla Altis is a different car altogether.

Consumers have finally warmed up to the car and fallen for its charms.

Second on the list in the survey behind only the Honda City, the Altis is not as flashy as the Cruze or a head-turner like the Civic, but it's a capable workhorse like few others.

"The build quality of the car is by far the strongest in the segment, and the maintenance cost is also one of the lowest," says R.S. Rana (36), an advocate at the Delhi High Court, an Altis owner.

THE TOYOTA COROLLA ALTIS IS NOT AS FLASHY AS THE CRUZE OR A HEAD-TURNER LIKE THE CIVIC, BUT IT'S A CAPABLE WORKHORSE LIKE FEW OTHERS

"The car is also loaded with full safety features, which was another aspect I looked at before buying it," he says. When one is spending so much, it better have all aspects covered adequately."

"Sales of the Corolla Altis are very satisfying," says Sandeep Singh, deputy managing director (marketing), Toyota Kirloskar Motors. "It is the segment

leader now and has exceeded our target of capturing 35 per cent market share in its class. The continued success of the car represents the faith of customers in the Toyota brand."

The resale value of the car has also gone up after the relaunch. It now commands an even better value than the Civic, which being a Honda car, is generally in great demand. "Toyota has established itself as a quality car maker in India and people queue up for any old Corolla," says Ashfaq Ahmed, a used cars dealer in Noida. "Generally, middle-aged people come to us for a Corolla as it is seen as a no-nonsense car."

What's great about the car: Build quality, after sales, interior space
What's not: Conservative looks and styling

Linea makes heads turn

STYLE MANTRA The car is renowned for its strong build, superior handling and fuel efficiency, but after-sales services is a potential problem area

HT Correspondent
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If ever the advertising campaign of a product foretold the consumer response to it, the Fiat Linea is a good example.

With a tagline of 'admiration guaranteed', the car's looks made a big splash, and the first few cars on road drew stares from all quarters.

Archana Buddhiraja, who works in an advertising firm in Delhi, was among the early buyers.

"There were many options and maybe some (cars were) better technically. But if people do not stop and look at your brand new car then what good is it to spend so much money on it?" she says.

"The car is easy to drive, comes with features like 'blue and me' technology that allows me to connect my phone via bluetooth."

The Linea is the first of Fiat's two cars (the second being the Punto) whose performance will decide the firm's future in India — and it seems it is on a revival track.

"The Fiat Linea has been positioned as a car of style and elegance. Since its launch, in January last year, consumer

WITH A TAGLINE OF 'ADMIRATION GUARANTEED', THE CAR'S LOOKS MADE A BIG SPLASH, AND THE FIRST FEW CARS ON ROAD DREW STARES FROM ALL QUARTERS.



■ The Linea is the first of Fiat's two cars whose performance will decide the firm's future in India.

HT PHOTO

response for the car has been very positive and upto Fiat's expectations," says Rajeev Kapoor, CEO, Fiat India. "The Fiat Linea has achieved impressive sales numbers and continues to be a leading player in the sedan segment."

The car is renowned for its strong build, superior handling and fuel efficiency.

But in India, its after-sale service is not up to the mark especially when compared with the likes of Maruti Suzuki and Honda.

What's great about the car: Looks, looks and looks

What's not: Suspect resale value, inefficient AC.

Epitome of elegance, class

Sumant Banerji
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Since its launch in 2003, the Honda Accord has perhaps chauffeured more CEOs and businessmen in the country than any other set of four wheels.

The top-of-the-line car in the Honda family was the second to be launched in India with the aim of offering a feel of luxury and class of a global scale.

And it comes at a cost much lower than the Mercedes E class, which was the minimum one had to pay until then to take home a piece of luxury.

While the Honda Accord comes with a price tag of Rs 21 lakh, the Mercedes E class costs you Rs. 27 lakh.

Faced with very little competition, the Accord quickly became the benchmark.

"I bought the Accord for the styling and status," says Somnath Sircar, a senior advocate in the Supreme Court. "I already have a CR-V and City in the family. Though the maintenance is slightly expensive, I guess it is worth it. In any case, it is less than the Skoda Superb, which is its only competition."

Step into an Accord and one immediately gets a feel of luxury, so necessary for a car that stretches beyond Rs.



■ With dual airbags, anti-lock braking system and a sunroof, the feature-laden Honda Accord is a must buy.

HT PHOTO

25 lakh. While dual airbags and anti-lock braking system are standard, Honda introduced sunroof in the car to make it even more feature laden.

Globally, the company has also played around with the design of the car from a sedate saloon to a sporty sedan to keep the element of mystery intact.

"The Accord customer is a mix from the corporate sector and business class and the fact that it is a favourite among those who can afford practically any car on the road goes to show how capa-

ble this car is," says Shikhar Malhotra, owner of Ace Honda, a large Honda dealership in Noida.

"Though the car is great on all fronts, nobody cares about the fuel efficiency or maintenance costs. All one needs is features and luxury and of course brand equity. On these counts, the Accord is unparalleled."

What's great about the car: Affordable luxury, performance, brand, resale value
What's not: Fuel economy, only available in petrol

A subtle, tranquil ride to glory

HT Correspondent
■ letters@hindustantimes.com

When the Civic was launched in 2006, it aroused expectations as a Honda car had not failed in the country till then.

With its aircraft-like design, the car not only met those expectations but exceeded them.

Third on the list on the survey, the Civic stands out in its segment for its contemporary styling even though it is faced with newer cars like the Toyota Corolla Altis, Chevrolet Cruze and Skoda Laura.

"Customers who have a sense of style and want a good looking car opt for the Civic. These are those who are not new to luxury or comfort but are the discerning ones who pay attention to the detail," says Shikhar Malhotra, owner of Ace Honda, a large Honda dealership in Noida.

The car is a favourite with entrepreneurs and business executives as it is flamboyant but not too flashy and makes a statement at the same time.

"The interiors are top notch and it gives you the feel of a cockpit when you are behind the wheel," says Prashant Kapoor, who works in a bank.

"My family had a City, but I was looking for another Honda. The Civic is perfect though I would have liked better ground clearance and fuel economy." For much of its life span in India, the



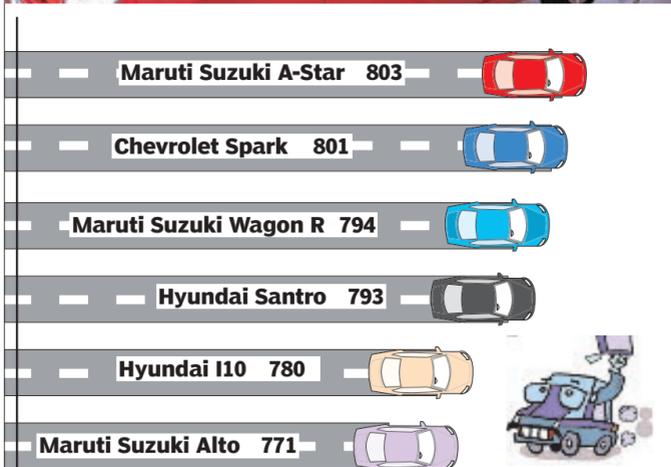
■ The Civic stands out in its segment for its contemporary styling even though it faces much newer rivals.

HT PHOTO

Civic has been a runaway success selling more than all its competitors put together in the first three years.

"The Civic is a segment-defining product both in terms of looks and performance," says Jnaneshwar Sen, vice-president (marketing), Honda Siel Cars India. "It is one of our best-selling cars globally as well and is also one of the safest. It comes loaded with features such as ABS and paddle shift gears."

What's great about the car: Looks, styling, interior space, attention to detail
What's not: Ground clearance, fuel economy.



* on road price (ex-Delhi)

PRICE BAND - LESS THAN RS 4 LAKH

Maruti's A-Star: It's different

STAR RATING The futuristic A-Star scores very high on fuel efficiency and styling

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For the world, it is the new Alto. But in India the A-Star is a car unlike any other Maruti car. Respondents in the survey ranked it the highest in terms of quality in the less than Rs 4 lakh category of cars.

The car captured the imagination of the youth when it was displayed as a concept at the 2008 Delhi Auto Expo. The end product may not have been as flashy but is futuristic nevertheless.

"I found the A-Star a practical and good-looking car," says Sonal Singh, 26, junior manager at SAIL. "Its interiors, with the integrated music system, are unlike those of any other car. The sleek dashboard and fuel economy are awesome. I wish there was a little more space at the back as well as luggage but for a small family it is just about adequate."

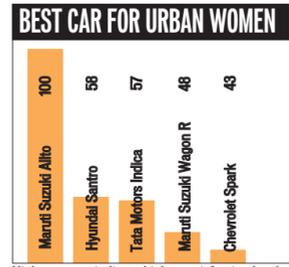
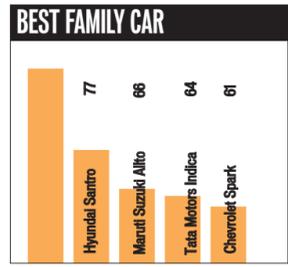
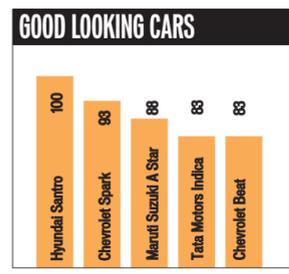
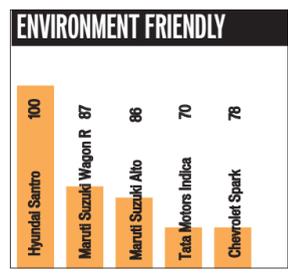
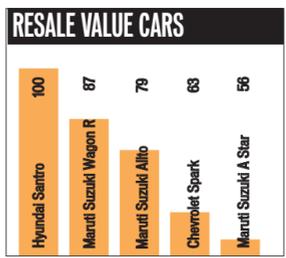
Looks and styling apart, equipped with Maruti Suzuki's new K series engines, it is the car's superior fuel economy that makes it stand out in the bevy of small cars on offer. At 19.6 km per litre, it was the most fuel-efficient small car in the country till the Tata Nano

came in.

"A-Star was conceived as an urban city car with class leading fuel efficiency and styling. It also began the company's shift to more advanced K series engines, which will soon power all of Maruti's compact cars," says Mayank Pareek, executive officer, MSIL.

"Mostly it is people in the age group of 20-30 years who are buying the A-Star," says J.S. Rekhi, owner of Rana Motors.

"The young generation is aware of the new technology that powers the car. The biggest pull factors are the fuel economy and styling."



Higher scores indicate higher satisfaction levels.

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PRICE BAND Rs 4-6 LAKH

Bold, sporty and masculine

HT Correspondent
letters@hindustantimes.com

Grande Punto and stable-mate Linea helped Fiat script a turnaround in Europe. Now, they seem to be repeating the story for the Italian carmaker in India as well.

Though the market remains wary of Fiat's dodgy after-sale and service record, which has not allowed otherwise excellent cars like Uno and Palio to succeed in India, the snub-nosed Grande Punto is holding its own against the likes of the Mahindra Logan and Maruti Swift.

"The Grande Punto has been positioned as a bold and sporty car. Its sleek and masculine looks have been received very well by Indian consumers," says Rajeev Kapoor, president and CEO, Fiat India.

"The response to the Grande Punto has certainly lived up to our expecta-

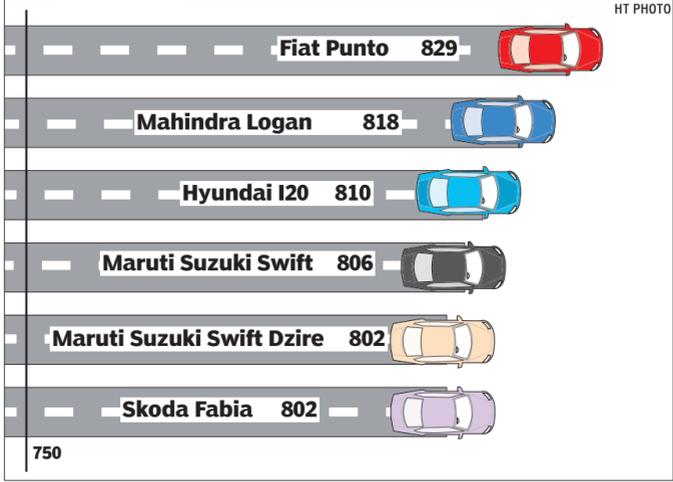
tions. Through Fiat's joint venture with Tata Motors we now have 105 Tata-Fiat dealerships and 114 points of sales in 81 cities across India catering to sales and service of the Punto." He adds.

Apart from its looks, Punto's strong build and big car feel appeal to consumers enough to ignore drawbacks such as mediocre after sales and service.

"The car scored on appearance but I also liked the space inside, which gave the feel of a big car," says HCL executive Hemant Dhawan, 28. "It also came with a whole range of features such as front power windows in the base variant, missing in other cars in the segment."

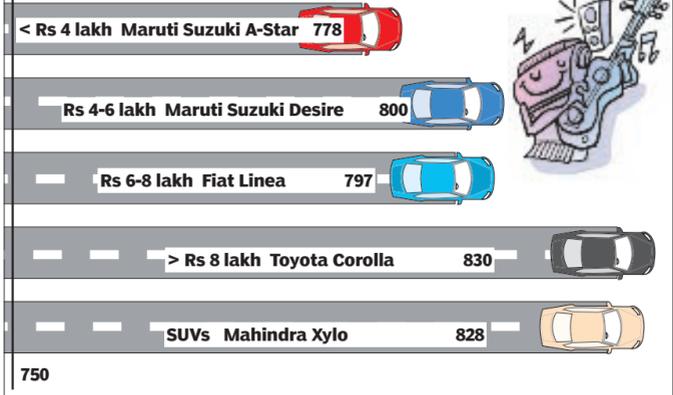
But the car is low on resale value. "There are few takers for a used Fiat. Though the Punto is better off, we don't see it getting a good price," says Angad Singh, owner of the Delhi-based Srijan Motors, which deals in used cars.

SATISFACTION LEVELS - CARS COSTING Rs 4-6 LAKH*

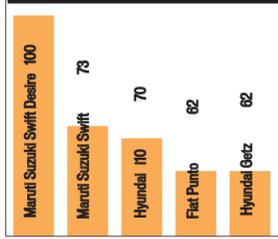


SATISFACTION LEVELS - INTERIORS

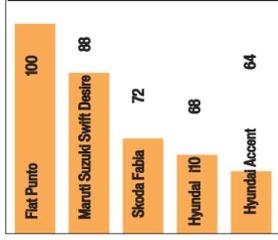
Which are the top cars on this parameter in each price band?



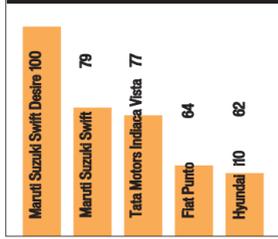
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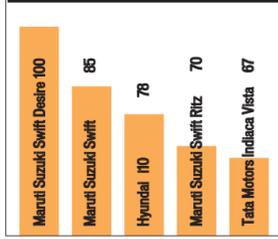
GOOD LOOKS



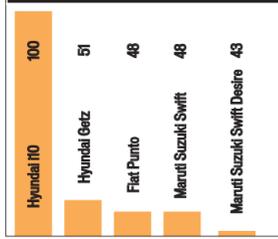
RESALE VALUE



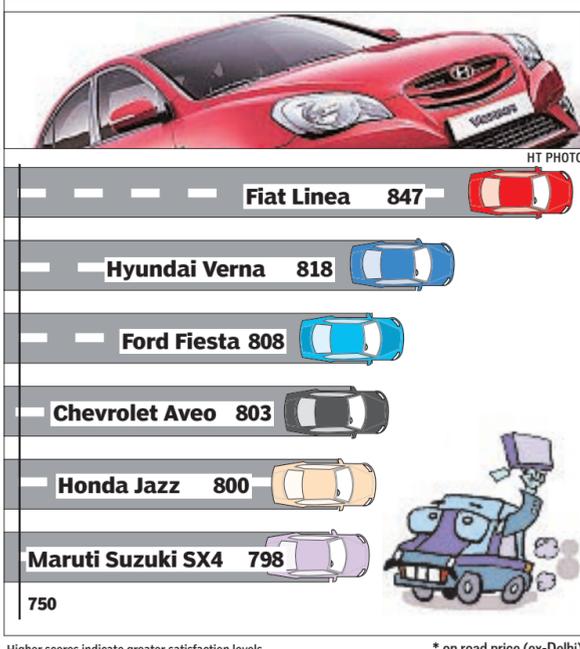
FAMILY TOP 5 CARS 4-6LAKHS



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CARS COSTING Rs 6-8 LAKH*



Higher scores indicate greater satisfaction levels

* on road price (ex-Delhi)

PRICE BAND Rs 6-8 LAKH

It's what's inside that matters

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The Verna — South Korean auto giant Hyundai's fourth sedan in India — was a winner from the day it was launched in 2006. Within five days, 2,000 cars were booked, and the number rose to 5,000 by the end of the launch fortnight.

Echoing the market sentiment, many owners and experts alike consider the Verna to be one of the better performers on Indian roads.

Although the Verna's aerodynamic design wasn't its most popular feature, a powerful engine and plush interiors tilted the balance in its favour.

"I was split between buying the (Honda) City or the (Hyundai) Accent diesel. But I was told that the latter would be discontinued to make way for the Verna," says Mohali-based Jabraj Singh, a property consultant.

"I was not particularly enamoured

of its looks. But when I took a test drive on the diesel variant, I was impressed. Whenever I want to feel like a king, I take the car to the highway," he adds.

Most owners say they like the Verna's superior build and low maintenance, which make it a practical choice.

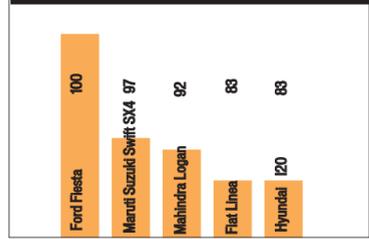
"The Verna strikes the right balance between performance and pragmatism," says Arvind Saxena, director, Hyundai Motor India Ltd.

"It has the right dose of power coupled with segment-leading boot and rear leg space that make it a family and performance car at the same time."

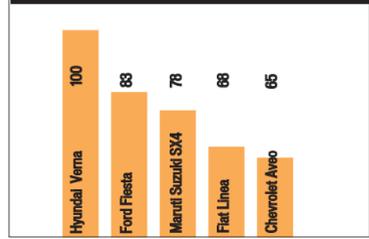
The diesel variant is more in demand, and accounts for almost 70 per cent of Vernas sold. Resale values are also skewed towards the diesel variant.

"There are few takers for the Verna petrol, but the diesel (variant) is always in great demand," says Kameshwar Rao, a Gurgaon-based used car dealer.

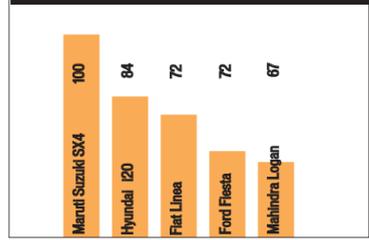
ENVIRONMENT FRIENDLY



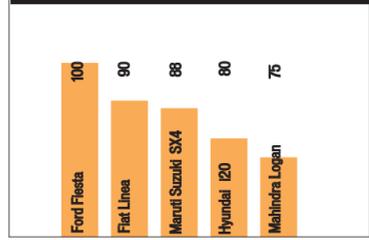
GOOD LOOKS



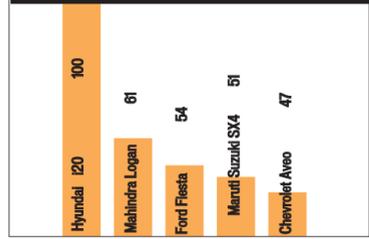
RESALE VALUE



FAMILY CAR

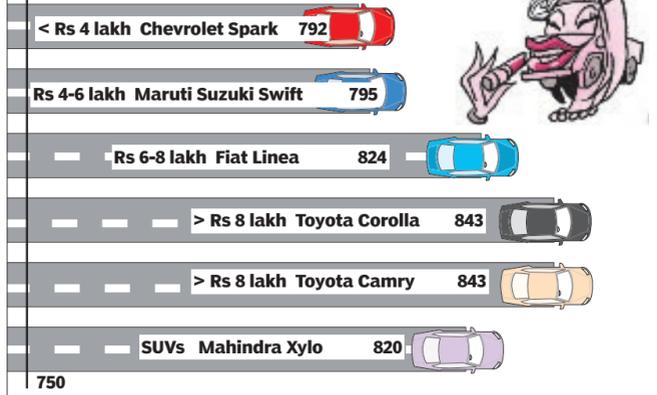


SUITED FOR URBAN WOMEN



SATISFACTION LEVELS - COST OF MAINTENANCE

Which are the top cars on this parameter in each price band?



The best cars in India ride on JK Tyre.



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PRICE BAND ABOVE RS 8 LAKH

Too many winners in this segment

HT Correspondent
letters@hindustantimes.com

The only reason why we clubbed the Rs 8-10 lakh segment with the above-Rs 10-lakh segment was because only the Honda City falls in the former category (the on-road price of the base model of each car in Delhi was considered).

The problem was the top four cars in this segment — Honda City, Toyota Altis, Honda Civic and Honda Accord — were also among the Top 10

overall and so, are being featured on pages 23 and 24.

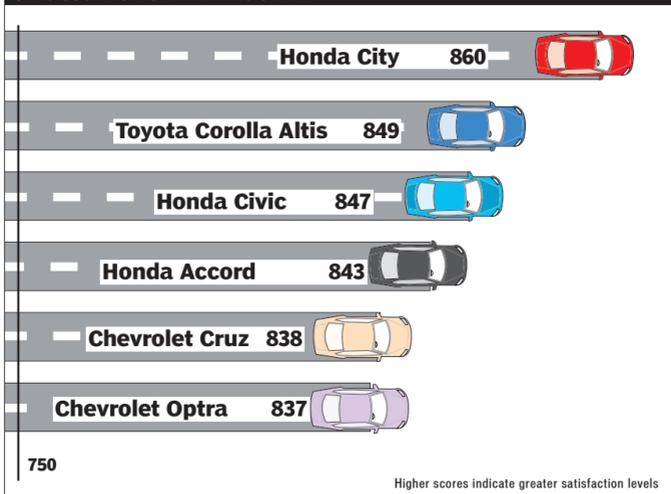
The Chevrolet Cruze came in at No. 5 in the above-Rs 8 lakh segment. Its muscular front grille and stylish looks coupled with great fuel efficiency (about 14 km/litre) are turning heads and winning converts in India.

"It's a tad expensive (at Rs 11.4-13.8 lakh depending on the variant), but it offers far superior features compared to rivals," says Shankar Mishra, a supreme court lawyer who recently bought one after test driving four cars.



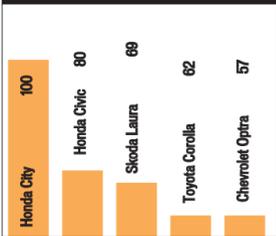
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CARS COSTING MORE THAN RS 8 LAKH*

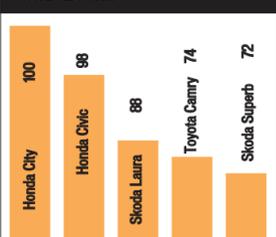


* on road price (ex-Delhi)

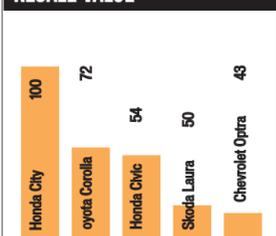
ENVIRONMENT FRIENDLY



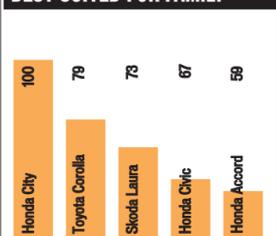
GOOD LOOKS



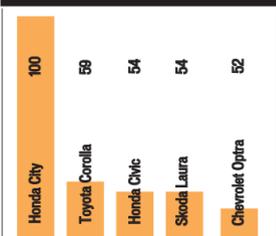
RESALE VALUE



BEST SUITED FOR FAMILY



BEST FOR URBAN WOMAN

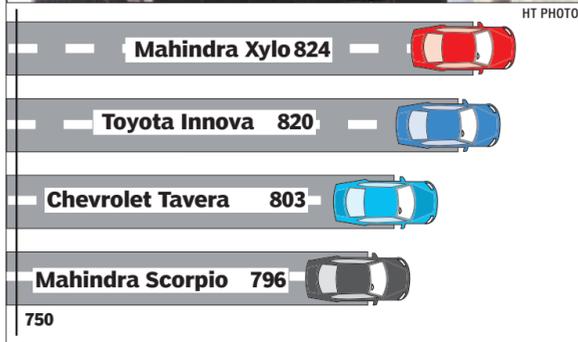


Higher scores indicate greater satisfaction levels

SPORTS UTILITY VEHICLES AND MULTI-UTILITY VEHICLES



HT PHOTO



SEGMENT SUVs & MUVs

Space and style give it the edge

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Mahindra's Xylo bridges the price and style divide between its flagship Scorpio and the raw Bolero. Mumbai-based CA Ujjwal Jain (30) found it fit the bill for a steady, spacious and stylish family vehicle.

"I was undecided between (buying) the Xylo and a rival brand, and found Xylo to be (better) value for money," says Jain. "It is spacious, has good pickup and the engine is almost as good as the Scorpio's," he says.

"Xylo has set a new benchmark in comfortable road travel in India, with its luxurious space and host of features for passenger comfort and convenience," says Vivek Nayer, senior vice-president-marketing, automotive sector, Mahindra & Mahindra.

"Our customers really love its innovative features — like the flat bed seats,

snack trays, digital drive assist system and surround cool dual air-conditioning," he adds.

The Xylo's 'happy legs' ad, which stresses the space in the car, has also created a buzz.

But Jain feels better plastics should have been used in the cabin and the ride quality should have been improved for greater back-seat comfort at high speeds. He also complains about the cost of after-sale services being higher than he had anticipated.

Gaurav Trehan, a self-employed 36-year-old, is largely happy with his Xylo. "Its driving comfort, spacious and comfortable seating, and air conditioning are better than the competition's," the Mumbai resident says. "It's an ideal car for long drives, and (for) elders."

He is happy with the after-sale services, too. "Maintenance is free for the first 3,500 km," he said. "The first maintenance cost me just around Rs 3,000."

above. Then, to differentiate the perception survey scores from the satisfaction survey, we used a statistical device to peg the score of the top car in each price band at 100 and indexed the scores of other cars proportionately against this. Hence, the scores are not comparable across price bands.

Two caveats will be in order: Cars like Honda Accord, Honda Civic and Honda City, which fall into three discrete segments in the SIAM classification, come in the same category (above Rs 8 lakh) in the HT-MaRS survey.

Secondly, our survey did not cover cars like Mercedes Benz, BMW and Audi and high end SUVs like Honda CRV and Toyota Fortuner.

HOW WE DID IT

METHODOLOGY Here's a look at all the things that you don't get to see about newspaper surveys

The Hindustan Times-MaRS Car Owner's Satisfaction Survey was carried out in April and May 2010 by MaRS, HT's knowledge partner for the project.

The MaRS team selected 1,895 car owners across 10 cities and towns (Delhi, Mumbai, Kolkata, Chennai, Bangalore, Hyderabad, Lucknow, Ludhiana, Ahmedabad and Pune).

Care was taken to ensure a good mix of cars. Our survey covers 38 models, which were divided into five categories defined by the following price bands:

Price band	Number of models
Less than Rs 4 lakh	6

Between Rs 4 and 6 lakh	11
Between Rs 6 and 8 lakh	8
Above Rs 8 lakh SUVs/MUVs	9
	4

We went by the on-road price of the base model of each car in Delhi while deciding on the segments. We chose this format over the segmentation followed by the Society of Indian Automobile Manufacturers (based on length and engine displacement) as our survey showed that people first decided on a budget and then chose a car to fit that budget.

In the satisfaction survey, car owners were asked to comment on the model they owned.

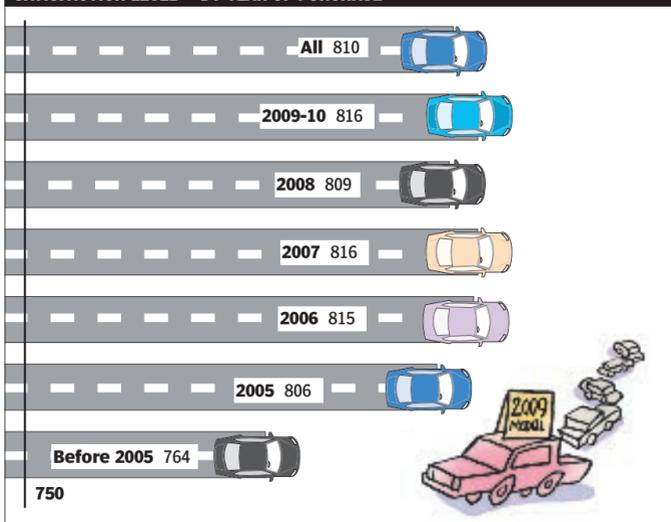
This allowed us to track — on a scale of 0-1,000 — what they felt about parameters such as acceleration, quality of components, fit and finish, service quality etc.

These scores were then consolidated using a statistically validated method to arrive at overall scores for each car. This means that scores across price bands are comparable.

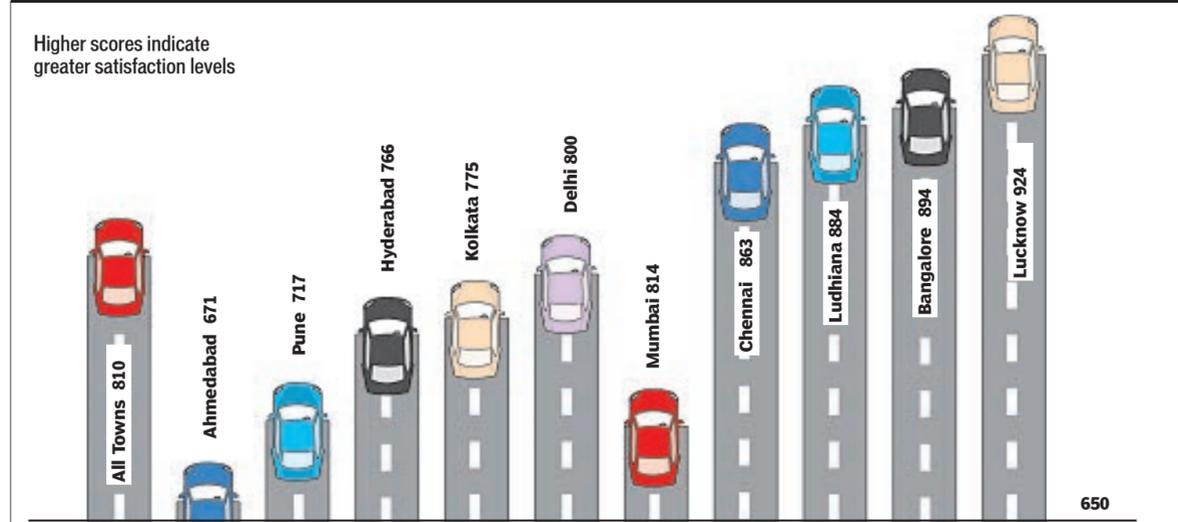
Simultaneously, we also conducted a perception survey — on parameters not related to ownership.

We asked car owners about the best looking cars, the best family cars, the best cars for women, etc. in the same price band as the one they owned — using the same method as

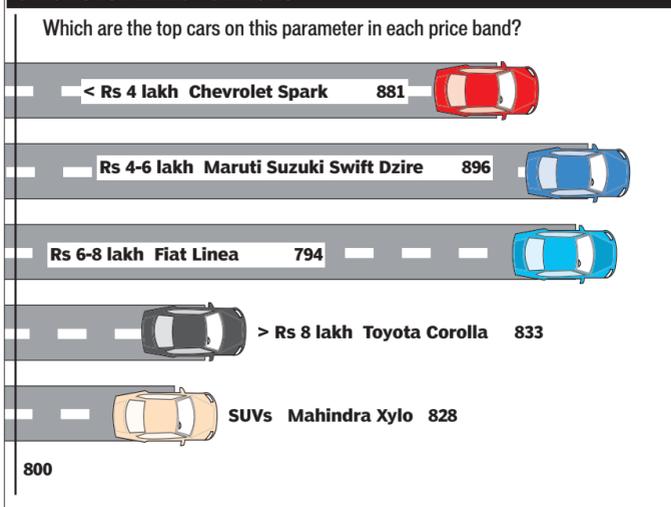
SATISFACTION LEVEL — BY YEAR OF PURCHASE



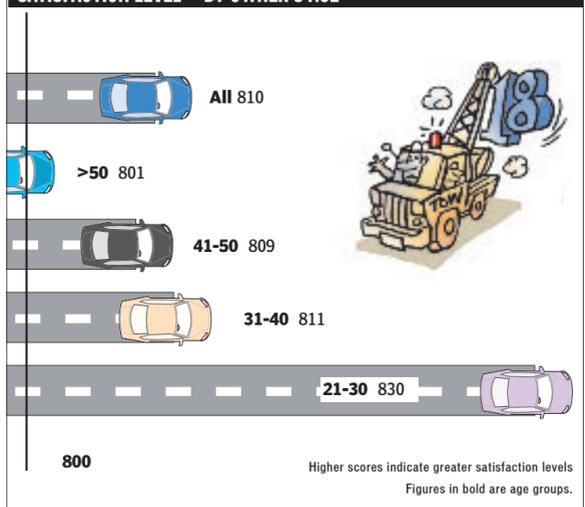
SATISFACTION LEVEL — BY TOWNS



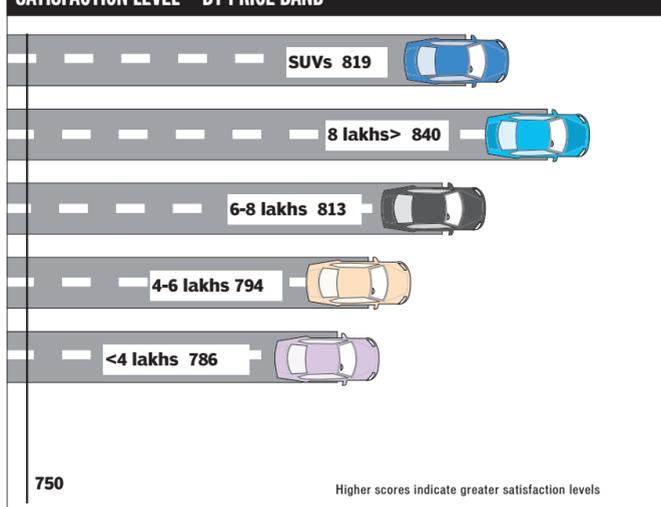
SATISFACTION LEVELS — SERVICING



SATISFACTION LEVEL — BY OWNER'S AGE



SATISFACTION LEVEL — BY PRICE BAND



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