

4x4 OF THE YEAR

2004 • FULL-SIZE GROUP •

BMW X5 4.4i



Just about everything you'd hope to find in a BMW is here to enjoy – great driving position, muscular performance and smart luxurious equipped interior. It doesn't look much like an off-roader, though, which is just as well because anyone attempting any serious 4x4 adventuring would quickly become disillusioned, not to mention horrified to discover how much the repairs would cost afterwards. There are even a couple of disappointments on the road, such as the overfirm suspension and rather ponderous feel to the steering – not quite as crisp as it ought to be in a driver's car. The permanent 4WD system means that handling is ultimately very good, as is high-speed refinement but for a little too much tyre roar. This is very much an expensive sports utility poser for well-heeled city folk.

SPECIFICATIONS

| | |
|----------------|----------------------------------|
| Price: | £44,000 |
| Engine cc/bhp: | 4398/288 |
| Transmission: | 5-speed automatic, permanent 4WD |

RATINGS (0-10)

| | |
|-------------|----|
| Comfort: | 7 |
| Refinement: | 7 |
| Off-road: | 3 |
| Value: | 8 |
| Style: | 6 |
| TOTAL: | 31 |

WE LIKED: Stomping performance
WE DISLIKED: Over-flow ride, little off-road ability

JEEP GRAND CHEROKEE 2.7 CRD LIMITED



Probably the best blend ever of traditional off-roader and modern urban cruiser, the big Jeep mixes coil-sprung live axles and optional diff locks with an elegant monocoque bodyshell in a way that works for both disciplines – it really is a serious off-roader, but also looks the business in the high street. Though theoretically styled to appeal to European tastes, the Grand Cherokee still has a strong American feel, a feeling is reflected in the slightly oversoft leather-upholstered armchair seating. As with any big off-roader the big power version is the most desirable – in the Jeep this would involve a lusty 4.7-litre V8 – but for practical purposes the 2.7-litre common-rail Mercedes turbodiesel is unquestionably the most popular choice.

SPECIFICATIONS

| | |
|----------------|--|
| Price: | £29,295 |
| Engine cc/bhp: | 2685/160 |
| Transmission: | 5-speed automatic, dual range, permanent 4WD |

RATINGS (0-10)

| | |
|-------------|----|
| Comfort: | 7 |
| Refinement: | 6 |
| Off-road: | 7 |
| Value: | 7 |
| Style: | 9 |
| TOTAL: | 36 |

WE LIKED: Blend of on and off-road ability
WE DISLIKED: Slightly soft seating

MERCEDES-BENZ ML500



Low-range gearing and traction control give this elegant estate surprisingly good off-road ability, even though the suspension is so well tied down to ensure stable on-road handling that it spends most of its time off road waving wheels in the air. But then, as with so many of these new-wave luxury sports utilities, the ML isn't really an off-roader at all, it's a big, powerful estate with excellent road manners and high-speed cruising refinement trading on its badge, leather-clad and air-conditioned interior and superb Mercedes engineering. Hence the ML looks more like an MPV than a mud-plugger, which loses it points even though it is actually quite good in the mud. This big V8 version is definitely the star player in the range, though it's more at home on the highway than out on the range.

SPECIFICATIONS

| | |
|----------------|--|
| Price: | £41,900 |
| Engine cc/bhp: | 4966/292 |
| Transmission: | 5-speed automatic, dual range, permanent 4WD |

RATINGS (0-10)

| | |
|-------------|----|
| Comfort: | 7 |
| Refinement: | 8 |
| Off-road: | 6 |
| Value: | 7 |
| Style: | 4 |
| TOTAL: | 32 |

WE LIKED: Ferocious performance
WE DISLIKED: MPV styling