

[ROADSIDE ASSIST]



COULD BE WORTH A PUNT

My daughter's considering an MG ZS small SUV as it looks good value. It has a tiny 1.0-litre three-cylinder engine or 1.5-litre non-turbo four-cylinder. Being an old bloke, I'm sceptical about small engines for reliability and longevity. Are they a bad choice?

Peter Oliver

MG sales have almost trebled this year due to half decent product, strong value and industry-leading seven-year warranty. I also used to be sceptical about three-cylinders — thought them only fit for motorbikes — but the modern turbo ones are crackers. Certainly a better choice than MG's naturally-aspirated 1.5-litre mated to its ancient four-speed auto gearbox. Reliability?

Impossible to say, but that seven-year warranty is excellent insurance. The ZS 1.0T is a good car for not much money (\$23,990 drive away), but its four-star ANCAP rating and depreciation would worry me. Unless she really needs an SUV, a small hatchback like a Hyundai i30 is a good alternative.

DRIVEN TO DISTRACTION

I was shocked to read Claire Haiek's Audi SQ7 report saying she would prefer to enter navigation details through the touchscreen while on the go. Surely nobody in their right mind would take such an action without stopping the car? It's as bad as taking your eyes off the road to use a mobile phone.

Harry Laurenceson, email

Tough one this, Harry. I see your point, and while using your phone while driving is illegal, using your car's touchscreen — with or without phone mirroring such as Apple CarPlay/Android Auto — is legal. The caveat being as long as you're not "distracted", which is a bit ambiguous. Whether laws change in the future remains to be seen, but legislators should keep a close watch on how quickly in-car tech is evolving. My personal preference is to use the car or phone's voice control (such as Siri) for things such as navigation input or making calls. Hands and eyes then remain on the road.

SEASON OF GOODWILL

Re: "Keep Your Options Open", heed Iain Curry's advice and service your car at the dealership because goodwill is everything. My Volvo's gearbox failed outside warranty but when I told Volvo Australia it was serviced independently they weren't keen to help.

Pete Mulkearns, email

Service independently doesn't mean you won't receive goodwill repairs outside of warranty, but common sense dictates you'll be viewed more favourably if you've serviced within the dealer network.

THE BIG ISSUE

My brother's a 193cm giant and is having trouble getting a vehicle he can fit in. What cars or SUVs have the biggest driver's space?

Would the SsangYong Korando be suitable?

Garry, email

On the car front, a fellow motoring writer who is even more giant at 200cm tells me the Kia Cerato, Holden Astra, VW Golf and Honda Civic offer him good driving positions. The Korando is a small SUV, but reviews suggest it has decent headroom, so give it a try. Toyota's C-HR is roomier than it looks from the outside, while the Suzuki Vitara is a bigger small SUV and rivals the SsangYong for price. Try the Nissan X-Trail for a true mid-size SUV, while the market-fresh Kia Seltos has impressive cabin dimensions. I'd favour it over the SsangYong; they're priced similarly. Have your brother do a tour of the dealerships and check for the best fit.

HYBRID GAINS

Is there any advantage to owning a hybrid Toyota Camry if I live in the country and only do trips of 200km or more? As a retiree, fuel economy is critical for monthly cash flow. If I can do less than 5L/100km it would be a big saving.

Chris Scott, email

Toyota prices its hybrids so close to non-hybrids it's a no-brainer for practically everyone. Especially as hybrid batteries have a 10-year warranty. The Hybrid's combined economy figure is 4.2L/100km, returning 4.7L in town and 4.2L on the highway. The four-cylinder non-hybrid does 7.8L, 11.0L and 5.9L respectively. Clearly the biggest gains are for urban drivers, but I find

IAIN CURRY GETS ANSWERS

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hybrids give more reliable economy figures on long journeys. The non-hybrid's 5.9L/100km on the highway? Fanciful. The most you'll pay extra for a Camry Hybrid over the non-hybrid is \$2000. The only negative, which could swing it in your case, is the Hybrid needs pricier 95 fuel. The non-hybrid drinks 91.

BOUNCE THE CZECH

While reading Roadside Assist last week you admitted owning a Skoda. It is sad you can "expertly" comment on cars when you own a Skoda. All cars should have options for rear-wheel drive and eight cylinders. Focus please on real cars and real drivers and remember there's no replacement for displacement.

Peter Stewart, Townsville

How's the festive spirit there, Peter? I'd love a rear-drive V8 as the family car — a Mercedes C63 AMG wagon would be fine — but it's 10 times the price I paid for our Skoda family wagon and I'm not sure my wages would cover the weekly fuel bills. Skoda sales are up 17 per cent this year, and they've shifted more vehicles in 2019 than Jeep, a brand that still embraces the V8. I take it you're not looking forward to the electric car future, either?



I drive a 2013 Peugeot 4008 2.0-litre with CVT gearbox. It's comfortable but sluggish getting up to speed. I see Peugeot's 5008 SUV and 508 sedan are fitted with a 1.4-litre. Is this engine powerful enough, especially the heavy 5008?

Steve Barnett, email

Peugeot's 508 sedan is my current big car crush (it's stunning in the metal), and it and the 5008

actually use a 1.6-litre turbo four-cylinder. Its 8-speed auto gearbox is better than your 4008's CVT, but it's still lazy from standstill. There's enough power and torque (165kW/300Nm) when rolling, but a 0-100km/h time of 8.1 seconds isn't stirring. The 5008's weight is near-identical to the 508 sedan, and the engine's well-suited to this seven-seater. But the 508's crying out for a motor with more mongrel.



Who is VACC?

PEELING BACK THAT FAMOUS ORANGE SIGN

Geoff Gwilym VACC CEO



Some people think the Victorian Automobile Chamber of Commerce is a regulator or part of a government service.

This is understandable. Given its branding has been around for over 100 years and many people see VACC's 'accreditation' signs, they assume the association has more of a policing role in the industry.

In reality, VACC is an employer association dedicated to advocating for the best possible policy position for the automotive industry. This includes dealerships, independent mechanics, panel beaters and many specialist operations, like tyre retailing and engine reconditioning.

VACC spends a lot of time talking to government and preparing policy documents that help inform governments and regulators about the industry and the potential effects of any proposed policies.

A large part of the industry is made up of small businesses, so it doesn't take much for government intervention to have a profound impact on 'mum and dad' operations. Big business can be badly impacted as well.

It's VACC's job, on behalf of its more than 5000 business members, to ensure any policy movements are balanced and don't negatively impact the industry.

Many things VACC achieves for its members have a positive knock-on effect for consumers: things like being able to pay vehicle registration fees in installments.

VACC is the voice of the automotive industry, ensuring business owners are heard by politicians and regulators. While we live in a world of individualism, sometimes a collective voice can't be beaten when it's time to get something done.

Prepared by the Victorian Automobile Chamber of Commerce in the interest of better motoring.

Share your thoughts ceo@vacc.com.au