

2012 Honda Pilot wins 3-Row SUV Shootout



Although consumers turned their backs on the biggest SUVs in the wake of 2008's gas-price spike, they have come back to family haulers, but on a slightly smaller scale. Cars.com, USA Today and "MotorWeek" put seven of these to the test to see which could please our experts and our family with its combination of driving quality, features and family-friendliness.

The 7 contenders:

2012 Chevrolet Traverse

2012 Dodge Durango

2012 Ford Explorer

2012 Honda Pilot

2012 Kia Sorento

2011 Mazda CX-9

2011 Toyota Highlander

The experts judging this Shootout were:

• **Kristin Varela, Joe Wiesenfelder** and **David Thomas** of Cars.com

• **James R. Healey** with USA Today
• **Ben Davis** with "MotorWeek"

We also had a family of four, the Koch (pronounced "cook") family of Hoffman Estates, Ill., joining us as judges.



No. 1 2012 Honda Pilot EX-L **752.1 points**

What we liked:

The Pilot is "way roomy," Healey said. "It really delivers on the space promise," a point of view echoed by Wiesenfelder and Varela. "Switches, stalks and controls are nicely weighted and portray a high level of refinement and precision," Davis said. "I loved the large LCD screen in the center console," Thomas said. "It had huge type, displayed all your music information and it came loaded with great iPod integration, Bluetooth audio and a DVD player in back for the kids." "It has more features than I'd expect of a Honda at this price," Wiesenfelder said. "There are also tons of little nooks and crannies to store all of the stuff that families haul around with them on a daily basis," Varela said. "However, most of them are uncovered, meaning your clutter will forever be visible."

What we didn't: As she asked with the Traverse, Varela was stunned by one Pilot shortcoming: "I have to

Features common to all seven:

All models have Bluetooth phone connectivity, power windows and locks, antilock brakes, traction and stability control, and front-, side-impact and side curtain airbags.

Key Pilot features:

- o As-tested price: \$36,170
- o 18/25 mpg city/highway
- o Can seat eight (most, tied with Traverse)
- o Backup camera, no backup warning
- o Auto climate control, front & rear
- o Max. tow capacity: 2,000 pounds
- o Rear entertainment system (only one in Shootout with it)
- o Power liftgate
- o USB input for MP3 player

use a key in the ignition? Isn't this 2011?" Others disliked the truck feel and level of road and wind noise. "The ride is firm and there's noticeable wind noise at highway speeds," Wiesenfelder said, an opinion seconded by Davis and Thomas. Thomas attributed some of that noise to the Pilot's boxy shape, a design that drew darts from others, too. "The Pilot's clunky, squarish

styling is no gift to the eye," Healey said. At least, he said, "the new grille finally axes that atrocious 'heating element' that has uglified Pilot's face for years."

The verdict: "The Pilot remains a nice balance of size, roominess, efficiency and versatility," Wiesenfelder said, "and it appears that Honda is becoming more generous with features for the money." "A great choice for growing families with a sense of adventure," Davis said. "The Pilot is the winner for me because of the high level of quality and comfort teamed to all the great entertainment features," Thomas said. "I'm not sure how you top it."