

Fresh • Family Faves

*Spring's Multitasking Vehicles
that Are New to Katy*

Written by Don Armstrong





Jeep Grand
Cherokee

3.6L V6
5-speed
automatic

The start of the spring season brings with it a sense of renewal, which can include the family ride. Multipurpose vehicles that serve the entire family's needs are among the most popular choices. With manufacturers offering more and more standard features, you can be sure to find an off-roading family hauler that's also luxuriously designed. Here are some new models perfect for Katy families.

Exploring a New Design

Ford not only didn't ask for bailout help from the U.S. government, but they have single-handedly shown the world that we Americans can be competitive on a global scale. Enter the 2011 completely redesigned Ford Explorer. No longer a body-on-frame SUV, but rather a lighter, larger, and more fuel-efficient crossover, the Explorer is positioned to be competitive once again in the most popular family hauler segment in Katy.

Built on the Ford Flex platform, the new Explorer is one of the best looking on the market today; distinctly Ford, with the company's upscale, truck-like grille. The interior is equally modern with soft-touch plastics, pleasing ergonomics, and a fit and finish that compares to those high-priced European competitors. Couple that with the My Ford Touch driver and vehicle interface, and you have a big winner.

Two engines are available, a 290-horsepower, 3.5-liter V-6 or the EcoBoost 2.0-liter I-4 that delivers 237 horsepower to either two or four wheels through engine-specific, six-speed automatic transmissions. Pricing starts at \$28,190.

Going the Extra Mile

For the rugged Katy types, Nissan brings us the all-new PRO-4X version of its popular Xterra SUV. This truck-based sport utility just may be the perfect compromise for the young Katy family on the go. Dad will love the tougher look and off-road capability for hunting, camping, or fishing, while mom will like the versatility of an SUV for grocery shopping and soccer practice. Everyone will love the ride and the thumbs-up looks from envious admirers.

Xterra PRO-4X models feature roof-mounted off-road lights in the air dam, black bodyside molding, fold-down front passenger seats with backboard, unique gray and red cloth seats, PRO-4X badging, and a leather-wrapped steering wheel. Unique PRO-4X performance equipment includes off-road tires on 16-inch wheels, hill descent control and hill start assist (automatic transmission only), electronic locking rear differential, high performance Bilstein gas-filled shocks, and oil pan, fuel tank, and transfer case skid plates.

All Xteras come with a 4.0-liter V-6 that gets 15 miles per gallon city and 20 miles per gallon highway. The Nissan Xterra PRO-4X starts at \$30,100, while the entry-level, two-wheel drive model begins at \$23,850.

An Rx for Luxury

The Lexus RX 350, the little vehicle that started the whole crossover revolution, continues to be the number one seller for Toyota's premium label, and for a good reason. Here is luxury on a grand scale. The RX was completely redesigned last year, so not much has changed on the 2011 version, but that doesn't make it any less desirable. Although its egg-shaped silhouette from the first generation model has grown considerably, it is still one of the best looking crossovers on the road today.



Nissan Xterra
PRO-4X

4.0L V6
5-speed
automatic

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Lexus is known for luxury interiors, and the RX doesn't disappoint. Standard features include keyless ignition and entry, 10-way power front seats, a power tilt-and-telescoping steering wheel, second-row seats that slide and recline, wood interior trim, dual-zone automatic climate control, Bluetooth phone and audio connectivity, and a nine-speaker stereo.

A 275-horsepower, 3.5-liter V-6 delivers front-wheel power through a super smooth six-speed automatic transmission. That combination gets 18 miles per gallon city and 25 miles per gallon highway. All-wheel drive is optional. Pricing on the Lexus RX 350 begins at \$38,375. KM

DON ARMSTRONG'S knowledge and life-long love affair with motorsports has earned him the reputation of being one of the area's most respected automotive journalists. He's a member of the Texas Auto Writers' Association.

More Faves

GMC Terrain

With a starting price of \$24,250, this compact crossover is worthy of a test drive. New last year, the Terrain ushered in a new era for GM, which showed that it's serious about producing competitive vehicles in a crowded segment.

Jeep Grand Cherokee

The all-new 2011 redesign of this popular SUV was long overdue, but worth the wait. Towing capability is enhanced with a new V-6 engine, plus a roomier interior and plentiful options make this a great do-all. Pricing begins at \$30,215.

Volkswagen Touareg

Completely redesigned for 2011, the Touareg is VW's answer to similar offerings from BMW and Mercedes, and is priced as such. In addition to gasoline V-6 and V-8 power, VW will offer a hybrid for the first time. Pricing for gas models start at \$44,450.



GMC
Terrain

2.4L, 4-cyl.
6-speed
automatic



VW
Touareg 3.6L

V6 4x4
8-speed
automatic



Lexus
RX 350

3.5L V6
6-speed
automatic



Ford
Explorer

3.5L V6
6-speed
automatic

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