



2011
Toyota Camry

Smoldering **SUMMIER SEDANS**

New Family-Friendly Models Heat up the Katy Roads



2011
Nissan Leaf



2011
BMW M3



2011
Audi S4

The ever-popular sedan still rules Katy's roads, offering both a sporty and family-friendly ride. In the thick of summer driving season, what better time to take a look at some of the hottest and newest models zooming around Katy?

An Electrifying Option

One of the most anticipated and hyped vehicles in the past century has finally arrived in dealer showrooms, the Chevrolet Volt. And we have great news to report: This car is a winner. Even though the Volt is a hybrid, powered by two sources, what makes it different is that it is propelled only by electricity. Although the Volt is capable of speeds up to 100 miles per hour and a range of 344 miles, only 40 to 50 of those miles will be traveled using a completely charged battery pack. The rest of those miles rely on the 1.4-liter on-board gasoline engine powering a generator.

With only overpass and freeway interchange elevations in our area, chances are pretty good that you'll be able to commute from Katy to downtown Houston and back on a single charge, which will tack on about \$1.50 to your electricity bill per charge. Fuel mileage is hard to determine, since it's based on how far you go, whether you are using battery or generator power, and how aggressive your driving habits are, but will fall somewhere between 37 and 93 miles per gallon. Pricing starts at \$40,280.

A People Pleaser

The Toyota Camry is best described as a car for everyone. I mean, really, what isn't to like about it? You see them everywhere, and there's good reason: value. This mid-size sedan is for the family that wants long-lasting, affordable transportation and isn't interested in slalom speeds, g-forces, and all the muscle that goes with cutting-edge, performance-oriented rides.

Written by Don Armstrong



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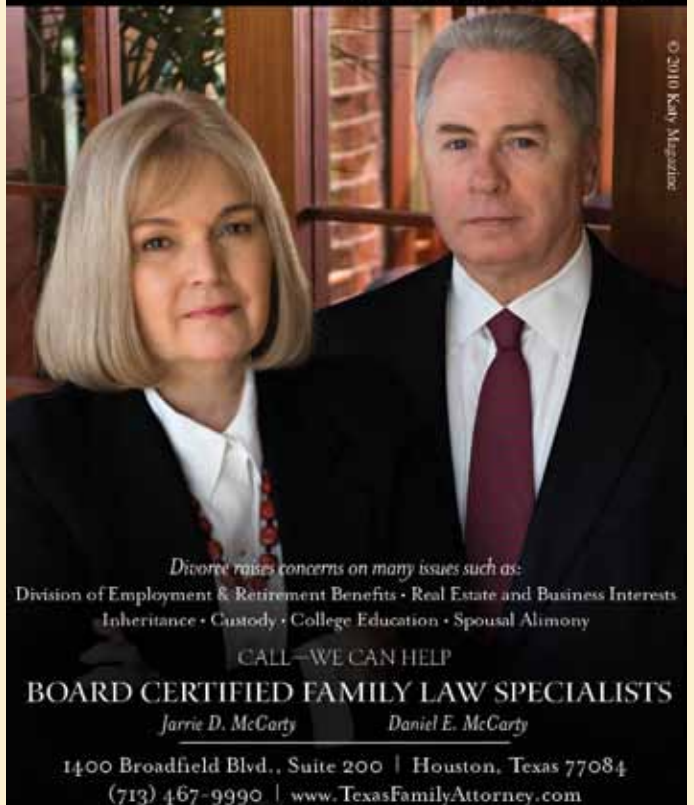
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Two engines are offered, including a respectable I-4 that gets up to 32 miles per gallon highway and the 268-horsepower V-6 that returns 29 miles per gallon highway. Both are connected to six-speed manual transmissions. Automatics are optional. The body style continues over from last year, and the interior remains basically the same, too. That's not a bad thing, as our test car proved one of the most comfortable rides in recent memory. Although the base model starts at just \$20,195, for about \$1,500 more you'll bump up to the LE model and get a V-6. There are a total of four trim levels, so you know there's one that will fit your Katy family's budget. A hybrid model is also available.

The Strong, Sophisticated Type

We know there are those that like the ability to skirt in and out of traffic – only when necessary, of course – and nothing does it quite better than the 2011 Audi S4 Quattro. With mechanical sophistication hidden under its sleek, conservative skin, the S4 is really a wolf in sheep's clothing. Gone is the old V-8 heavyweight power plant, replaced with a state-of-the-art, supercharged V-6 that delivers its 333 horsepower to Audi's famous full-time, all-wheel drive system. A six-speed manual or racer-style, seven-speed, dual-clutch automatic transfers the grunt. This is one bad little machine, going zero to 60 in five seconds, while still getting 18 miles per gallon city and 28 miles per gallon highway for the S-tronic automatic.

The S4's interior is what you'd expect in this \$47,100 Bavarian beast. Nicely bolstered leather seating for four, beautiful instrumentation, and just the right amount of brightwork come together to create a true driver's cockpit. Its rather complex controls for audio, climate, and navigation can be easily mastered after just a few days. This car looks best when driven with dress shirt sleeves rolled up.

More Hot New Rides

Nissan Leaf

The Nissan Leaf is the only real direct competitor to Chevy's Volt, except there is no gasoline motor powering an on-board generator for extended trips. After about 100 miles, you have to plug into a 220-volt AC supply. Pricing begins at \$32,780.

Ford Fusion

Ford's answer to the Camry, the Fusion goes head-to-head with four trim levels and a choice of I-4 or V-6 power. However, the driver interface award goes to Ford with its award-winning My Ford Touch option. The Fusion starts at \$19,820.

BMW M3

The M3 is BMW's small performance sedan that derives its 414 horsepower from a thirsty V-8. With a starting price of \$55,900, you have to ask yourself if the 81 more horses than the Audi S4 is really worth all of the extra dollars. **KM**

DON ARMSTRONG'S knowledge and lifelong 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.

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