

Australia's New-4WD Market Improved During 2010

Overall new-4WD sales of wagons and utes picked up considerably during 2010, with wagon sales as recorded by VFACTS up a healthy 28.6 percent and ute retails up by 13 percent. As always, within market segments there were winners and losers.

The small-wagon segment was up a whopping 35 percent, but nearly all sales were softroaders: wagons without off-road features and low-range gearing. The sole 'real' Japanese 4WDs in this segment, the Suzuki Grand Vitara and Jimny, actually lost ground, so it will be interesting to see how far into the future Suzuki will continue to produce these excellent little vehicles.

The other small wagon with low-range gearing, the Chinese-made Great Wall X240 wagon, scored more than 3000 retails in 2010, putting it fifth overall in the 'real 4WD' wagon stakes. A combination of reasonable looks and finish, with very attractive pricing, should see the Great Wall clock up even more sales in 2011, despite modest performance from a 100kW / 200Nm petrol four.

The medium/ large/ luxury wagon segment grew by around 25 percent and the clear market leader was Toyota's Prado, with sales up a whopping 36 percent on 2009 figures, thanks to a resurgent market and a reskinned body shape. Of the other wagons with low-range gearing Toyota's bulky 200 Series was next, ahead of the Mitsubishi Pajero.



Combined Range Rover Sport/ Discovery sales were next, ahead of Nissan's aged Patrol, Jeep Wrangler and the new Mitsubishi Challenger that's already in front of the Nissan Pathfinder. Pathie sales have been sliding for the past year, but should be buoyed in 2011 by new V6 diesel models.

In the 4WD ute market Toyota's HiLux is still king of the heap, but its former crushing lead has been reduced by Nissan Navara success in 2010. HiLux improved 9.5 percent on its 2009 figures, but Navara increased growth by 20 percent.



In assessing the market it's essential to combine the figures of the mechanically identical Mazda BT-50/ Ford Ranger and the Holden Colorado/ Isuzu D-Max when checking out the true pecking order.

The Mazda/Ford pair slotted into third place, behind the Navara and the Holden/Isuzu double was fourth, pushing the Mitsubishi Triton down to fifth slot. Once-dominant LandCruiser utes slumped to sixth place as buyers opted for medium-sized utes that are perceived as much better value for money.

With every real 4WD being an import and the strong Aussie dollar buying more bang for our buck, the market in 2011 looks set to be at least as healthy as 2010's effort. New wagon and ute models being launched in 2011 should see the 4WD proportion of the overall vehicle market continue to increase.

Although horrendous flooding has been tough on the residents of Southeast Queensland the resulting dip in Australia's 2011 GDP should put a brake on the Reserve Bank's interest rate hike program, so 2011 could be a good 4WD-buying year.

Expect demand for diesel vehicles and LPG conversions to increase as the global financial recovery fuels higher oil prices.