

Used Luxury vs New Mid-spec

If you shop around the used vehicle sites you'll find that it possible to pick up a pre-loved luxury 4x4 wagon for the same money you'd shell out for a base or mid-spec machine.

OK, so you're about to take the plunge into a 4x4 purchase and you've worked out your budget. One way to maximise the bang for your buck is to hunt around for a top-shelf used 4x4, rather than settle for less equipment in a brand new machine.

A used vehicle can be a much better value for money proposition than a brand new machine if you intend to make a bush-touring 4x4 out of it, because you won't fret when you pick up a scratch or two in the scrub. The money you save can be spent on bush essentials.

Let's look at some price bracket alternatives.

Less Than 20 Grand

There's buggers all in the new vehicle market in this price range, so the used market is your only shopping centre. If you're in the market for a luxury 4x4 with low range gearing there's not much on offer, but there are some well-loved 10-year-old Discoverys, Patrols and 'Cruisers to pick over.

Younger luxury 4x4s are also around, if you don't mind shopping in the 'grey import' arena: Toyota Surfs and Delicas with high equipment levels are available in this price range.

20-30 Grand

The only new 4x4s in this price bracket you'd take seriously off-road are Suzuki Jimny 1.3 and Grand Vitara.

Probably the best value for money used luxury wagon in this price range is the Mitsubishi Pajero Exceed, which comes with leather and all the expected 'fruit'. There are 2001 and 2002 models around and most have done no off-road work at all.

The 2003 Hyundai Terracan Highlander is also a well-specified 4x4 wagon in this price bracket.



Mercedes-Benz ML320 petrols are excellent value, dating from 2000.

Land Rover Discoverys, Jeep Grand Cherokees and Jackaroo Equipes from 2001-2002 are available.

Nissan Patrol STs are most likely to be early GU models and Prado Grandes are the previous-shape model.

30-40 Grand

Younger Mitsubishi Exceeds are good value in this bracket, as are Toyota Prados dating back to 2002-2003.

There are quite a few 'Benz ML270 diesels from 2003.

Most Patrols are STs and it's wise to avoid the ZD30 three-litre, which has proved somewhat fragile. The older 4.2-litre commands a price premium. Dual-fuel petrols are cheaper to run than diesels these days.

Discoverys are 2002-2004 vintage and some have the troublesome rear air suspension that's easily replaced by coils.

Range Rovers in this price bracket are most likely to be 4.6-litre petrols, of 2002 vintage.

There are some high-mileage 2003-2004 petrol 100 Series LandCruiser Saharas and Kakadus in this price range.

Prado Grandes are scarce, because of their high initial retail price, but there are a few well-equipped VX examples around.



40-50 Grand



For this amount of money it's possible to pick up a luxury 4x4 that still has some factory warranty. That's important if you're chasing a 2006-2007 ST-S or ST-L Patrol with three-litre diesel power.

There's a range of used luxury 4x4s in this price bracket and the most off-road capable are a 2004 VW Touareg or a 2006-2007 Jeep Grand Cherokee Limited.

Most 2005 Prado VX turbo-diesels are in this price bracket.

There are a few used Land Rover Discovery 3 price leaders – the V6 petrol S model with coil springs – in this price segment.

50+ Grand

Most 100 Series Saharas and Kakadus are 50+ grand buys, especially turbo-diesels. Expect to cough up at least 55 grand for a 2005 example and up to 85 grand for a 2006-2007 model.

There are a few Land Rover Discovery 3 SE air-suspended models entering the used market, with prices starting around 52 grand.

Range Rovers from 2003-2004 with BMW three-litre diesels are great buying at 60-70 grand.

The best 'savings' are at the top end, where you can pick up a used Porsche Cayenne from around 120 grand!



Some 'Luxury' Isn't

Vehicle makers are getting more desperate in their search for items that lift their luxury models above the heads of the hoi polloi, because the equipment list in basic vehicles has lengthened dramatically in recent years.

It's quite normal these days to find a mid-spec' 4x4 that comes with an electronically controlled automatic transmission, ABS/EBD brakes with emergency brake assistance, multiple airbags, cruise control, power windows and mirrors, climate-controlled air conditioning, remote central locking, traction control and stability control. These features used to be reserved for the luxury end.

To justify the price difference between base, mid and top shelf vehicles, 4x4 makers add 'fruit' in increasing quantities. Favourite add-ons are leather interiors, powered 'memory' and heated seats, high-quality sound systems, Bluetooth phone connection, sunroofs, colour-keyed body trim panels, roof rails, flash wheels, super-low profile tyres, DVD kits, navigation systems, reversing cameras, parking assistance sensors, headlight washers and auto-dipping rear vision mirrors.



Some of this stuff is very expensive to buy in the after-market – powered, heated memory front seats, for example - while other items are very expensive to install – a sunroof, for instance. So it's probably uneconomic to try to fit these luxury items into a base or mid-spec' vehicle.

The first owner has done you the favour of copping depreciation when he traded in his top-shelf machine, so if the embellishments in a top-shelfer are important to you, go for them. Live it up, and save money in the process.

However, some of the so-called 'luxury' kit can be sourced relatively cheaply. Take a DVD player, for a start. If you buy a vehicle that boasts one it's very likely in the high-price bracket, but you can pick up a 12-volt DVD player for around \$200.

Our testing of factory-fitted and after-market navigation systems shows that even the cheapest over-the-counter nav systems are at least as good as the factory-fitted ones and some of them are considerably better.

