

Recommendation Report on the Purchase of the Safest 1997 Sport Utility Vehicle

This is a recommendation report for any individual looking to purchase a 1997 sport utility vehicle with safety in mind. More and more people today are drawn to utility vehicles for reasons such as durability, roominess, and invulnerability. These vehicles may give the user a false feeling of security and pose serious danger to other vehicles. Many families today are trading in their minivans and purchasing sport utilities with the impression they have bought a safe vehicle. These families want luxury and safety from their sport utilities. The purchase of a sport utility vehicle would need to take into consideration the following criteria:

- Overall driving experience
- Vehicle cockpit
- Safety
- Price

The four vehicles that were tested all fell in the price range of \$25,000 to \$35,000. The vehicles were equipped with either all-wheel drive, which can be used at all times, under any driving condition, or four-wheel drive, which should be used only part time on loose surfaces such as mud. All of the vehicles were of the highest luxury model available.

Comparisons

There are many so-called sport utility vehicles on the market today. Some of these such as the GMC Jimmy and the Chevrolet Blazer do not fit into the luxury category but are very good sport utility vehicles. The Land Rover and the Toyota 4Runner are not considered because they fall out our price range [1:53]. The four sport utility vehicles that will be considered are the Jeep Grand Cherokee, the Mitsubishi Montero Sport, the Ford Expedition, and the Ford Explorer.

Overall driving experience. The Jeep Grand Cherokee rides more comfortably than most utility vehicles even with a full load. The ride is overall pretty quiet but there is an occasional gear changing sound from the transmission [1:56]. The jeep's handling is sound. The Mitsubishi Montero Sport rides more like a pickup truck than a luxury sport utility. Bumps in city driving are pronounced and highway driving is jittery. The interior sound is overall quiet and the handling is less than graceful. The Ford Expedition, despite its size, is a responsive vehicle. Sharp turning does not cause the Expedition to do excessive leaning. The ride is firm and a bit jittery, but with a full load it gets better [1:57]. The Ford Explorer handles soundly. The body doesn't lean in turns and when the vehicle turns wide it is easy to recover. The ride is stiff and when on bumpy roads it is choppy [1:55]. Overall the Ford Explorer and the Jeep Cherokee performed above average compared to the other vehicles.

Vehicle cockpit. In the Jeep Grand Cherokee the optional power seat helps tall and short people get comfortable, with a good view of the road. The rear seat offers adequate room with average comfort. The steering wheel hides some of the instruments for any size user. The Mitsubishi Montero Sport cockpit offers average leg and head room, and the driver side seat adjustment will

fit almost any user. The rear seat is a split bench and in a pinch can hold three six-footers [1:58] . The gages are readable and are within reach. Just about anyone should feel comfortable in the Ford Expedition's driver seat. The Expedition comes with added seat and steering wheel adjustments. Getting to the back seats of the Expedition can be somewhat of a task. There are numerous latches one must undo to arrive at the split bench back seat. The controls are easy to see day or night. The Ford Explorer is equipped with a six-way power driver's seat which should help any user get comfortable [1:55] . The Explorer has a split rear bench seat which will hold three adults. The gages on the Explorer are easy to read but at times some switches are hard to reach. There is no question here the Ford Expedition superseded all vehicles on the inside due to its size compared to the other vehicles.

Safety. Safety equipment on the Jeep Grand Cherokee includes dual air bags along with four three-point safety belts. Each seat has four head restraints that do not lock in their raised position. The Mitsubishi Montero Sport is equipped with dual air bags and four three point safety belts. The four head restraints are high enough even when lowered and they lock in place. The Ford Expedition comes with dual air bags and three-point seat belts with adjustable height positions. The head restraints on the Expedition are fixed and are high enough. The safety equipment on the Ford Explorer includes dual air bags and four three-point safety belts. The rear three point belts on the Explorer have an adjustable latch for child safety seats. The fixed head restraints are adequate [1:55-58] . All compare the same in safety but the Explorer offers the child safety seat option.

Price. The Jeep Grand Cherokee tested price was \$29,885. The Mitsubishi Montero Sport tested price was \$29,554. The Ford Expedition tested price was \$32,465 and the Ford Explorers tested price was 29,535 [1:55-58] . The Expedition is considerably more expensive than the other three, which have close to the same price.

Summary

The following is a summary of the comparison of the Jeep Grand Cherokee, the Mitsubishi Montero Sport, the Ford Expedition, and the Ford Explorer:

1. All four vehicles fall under the sport utility vehicle category.
2. The Ford Explorer and the Jeep Cherokee outperformed the other two in handling and maneuvering.
3. The Ford Expedition crushed the other competition when it came to the inside leg room, head room, and overall instrument layout.
4. The Montero Sport and the Ford Expedition did not handle as well as the other two but made up for this in the overall comfort of the interior.
5. All three vehicles except the Ford Expedition had equal amounts of comfort for the driver and the passengers.
6. The Ford Explorer gained an advantage overall with the child safety seat restraint option.
7. Three out of the four fall within \$400.00 of each other which is the lowest prices of the tested vehicles. The Ford Expedition is much higher priced than the other three.
8. Although the Ford Expedition is superior in terms of comfort and cockpit layout, these advantages do not justify its greater cost.

9. Because it meets the requirements stated earlier in this report and because of its relatively lower price, the Ford Explorer is best choice of the four vehicles compared.

Table 1. Testing results of the Jeep Grand Cherokee, the Mitsubishi Montero Sport, the Ford Expedition, and the Ford Explorer.

Category	Jeep Grand Cherokee	Mitsubishi Montero Sport	Ford Expedition	Ford Explorer
<i>Performance</i>	2	2	2	2
<i>Comfort</i>	2	2	3	2
<i>Ride</i>	2	1	3	3
<i>Noise</i>	3	2	2	3
<i>Controls and display</i>	4	4	4	4
TOTAL	2.6	2.2	2.8	3.0
<i>Note: 1 - Poor, 2 - Good, 3 - Very good, 4 - Excellent</i>				

Recommendations

Based on the testing results previously discussed in this report and the ratings from Table 1, I recommend the following:

- Purchase a Ford Explorer which meets all the minimum safety requirements along with the added child safety option. The Explorer performs well in the luxury and the performance test and is reasonably priced.

Material Cited

1. "Four Foul-Weather Friends." *Consumer Reports* (June 1997), 52-58.