

Consumers Believe SUV Criticism Is Hype According to New Study

New Poll of In-Market Car Buyers Reveals Consumer Views of SUVs, Media and Terrorism

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A New Vehicle-Buyer Attitude Study on SUVs released today shows more than half of its respondents feel the negative press around SUVs is hype and more than 70 percent felt that groups criticizing SUVs ignored the vehicle's positive aspects. The study was conducted by Kelley Blue Book (KBB), the trusted resource for used and new car information.

Journalist Arianna Huffington, activist group Earth Liberation Front, and Chairman of the National Highway Transportation Safety Association (NHTSA), Jeffrey W. Runge, have said that SUV owners are making our country oil dependent and creating unsafe highways, and in extreme cases -- claiming consumers purchasing SUVs support terrorism. Other statements imply that SUV drivers are vain, self-absorbed and have little interest in their community. NHTSA's Runge urged consumers in a Jan. 15 speech to 'educate themselves' before purchasing these rollover prone vehicles. The Kelley Blue Book study shows six out of 10 shoppers still feel positively toward SUVs and of those considering an SUV the number rises to eight out of 10.

Currently, large utility vehicles account for most of the manufacturer's annual earnings. The negative comments have auto manufacturers worried that consumer demand for the SUVs would decline. While sales of SUVs declined one-tenth of a percent in January, analysts say the drop is minor in comparison to the overall decline in vehicle sales last month.

When it comes to the attitudes of current car shoppers, survey results show that manufacturers have little to worry about at this time. Based on the study results, rollover statements made by Runge may be the only issue reaching consumers. The Kelley Blue Book study shows shoppers rank rollovers as their No. 1 concern in purchasing an SUV. Four out of 10 surveyed say that concerns of rollovers could even keep them from buying an SUV, yet more than half rate the vehicles high for safety.

"We have not seen an effect on SUV values or sales due to recent news. Any effect thus far can be attributed to uncertainty in the economy," said Charlie Vogelheim, Executive Editor, Kelley Blue Book. "We do expect to see a drop among larger SUVs but attribute the decline to market saturation as well as the growth and popularity of crossover vehicles, not necessarily criticism or hype."

The other issues appear to have been dismissed by in-market car-buyers. Kelley Blue Book survey respondents, who represent the opinions of one out of every four new car-buyers in America, disagree with the assertion that SUV drivers are vain and have little interest in their community. Results show the No. 1 attribute assigned to SUV drivers is "family oriented" with "safety oriented" coming in at number three out of 12 attributes. Few shoppers believe SUV drivers are selfish or irresponsible.

With the looming possibility of war, oil dependency issues have become a major topic in the press, but those currently shopping for SUVs ranked environmental concerns and oil dependency issues last among their concerns in buying an SUV. In-market car-buyers understand SUVs are less fuel efficient than compact vehicles, however it does not appear to be a deterrent to purchase.

"America saw a major decline in vehicle sales and values during 1991's Gulf War. We expect to see similar trends and a drop in SUV values should we go to war in

coming weeks," said Vogelheim.

The issue of terrorism arose in the press through journalist Huffington, as well as activist group Earth Liberation Front (ELF). The ELF organization, religious groups and Hollywood celebrities link gas-guzzling vehicles to oil dependence on the Middle-East and the support of terrorism. The groups point out that U.S. oil imports have increased 60 percent since the Gulf War. On terrorism, only one in 10 survey participants felt purchasing an SUV actually supported terrorism.

The KBB New Vehicle-Buyer Attitude Study on SUVs was administered on the company's Web site www.kbb.com, the No. 1 Internet site among car-buyers who are within 90-days of purchasing a new vehicle. Survey respondents include those considering buying an SUV as well as those that are not. The study was completed over a four-day period at the end of January 2003 to determine the attitudes and views of SUVs amidst heavy criticism of the vehicle segment by influencers.

"The targeted nature of our visitor base allows Kelley Blue Book to uncover factors important to in-market car buyers in the middle of their purchase decision process," said Rick Wainschel, Director of Marketing Research at Kelley Blue Book.

For more information on future KBB New Vehicle-Buyer Attitude Studies or the complete results of this study, please contact Robyn Eckard at 949-770-7704 x8349.

About Kelley Blue Book

Kelley Blue Book's kbb.com has been named first visited and No. 1 automotive site according to J.D. Power and Associates five years running and is the most trusted vehicle information resource, providing comprehensive automotive research tools and up-to-date pricing on thousands of used and new vehicles. Since 1926, car buyers and sellers have relied upon Kelley Blue Book for timely and accurate information to make well-informed automotive decisions. The company also offers objective vehicle pricing via products and services for both the auto industry and consumers, including the famous Blue Book Official Guide, software and the Internet. Rated No. 1 automotive information site by Nielsen//NetRatings, no other medium reaches more in-market car-buyers than kbb.com; one in every four people who purchase vehicles visit Kelley Blue Book.

Safe Harbour Statement

This release contains factual data from recent news reports as well as a Kelley Blue Book New Vehicle-Buyer Attitude Study and does not reflect the opinions of Kelley Blue Book employees, management or any person associated with the company. The data presented herein reflects only the attitudes and opinions of consumers and in-market car-buyers participating in the online survey.

SOURCE: Kelley Blue Book

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