



SHOPPER INSIGHTS REPORT

Media Contact: Julie Shipp · 404-568-7914 (O) · 404-558-7837 (M) · julie.shipp@autotrader.com

The Shopper Insights Report, brought to you by the AutoTrader.com Trend Engine, delivers insights on a new topic related to car shoppers each month.

Leveraging AutoTrader.com’s strengths in automotive expertise, consumer research and site traffic analysis, the Shopper Insights Report offers a unique perspective on timely and important issues facing today’s car shoppers.

With the tax filing deadline fast approaching, this edition of the Shopper Insights Report focuses on shoppers’ expectations for their tax refunds and provides AutoTrader.com’s picks for Eight Great American Cars.

In the March 2012 issue:

- Majority of Car Shoppers Expecting Big Tax Refund
- “Made in the USA” is More Important than Made by U.S. Manufacturer
- Experts Name Eight Great American Cars to Spend a Tax Refund On

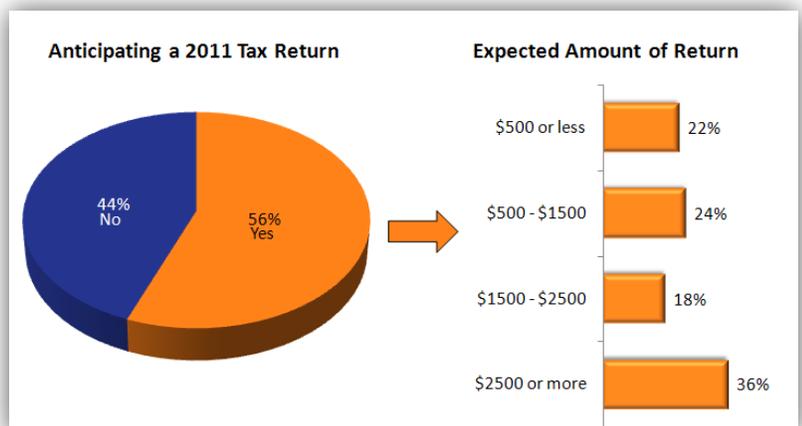
Refunds & Rides: AutoTrader.com Names Eight Great American Cars to Spend a Tax Refund On

Tax time means big refunds for some, and the availability of these extra funds often results in a boost for automotive shopping in March and April. The average tax refund in 2011 was \$2,913—enough to put a 10 percent down payment on a new car worth almost \$30,000. According to a new survey conducted by AutoTrader.com, a majority of respondents are expecting a large refund in 2012. Additionally, the survey indicated that a substantial proportion of car shoppers have a desire to keep the money they spend on a car in the domestic economy, so the AutoTrader.com experts made their picks for Eight Great American Cars to Spend a Tax Refund On.

Majority of Shoppers Expecting Big Tax Refund

One big question that’s likely on the minds of many Americans is whether or not they’ll be getting a tax refund this year. According to a recent survey conducted by AutoTrader.com, the majority of respondents (56%) are anticipating a tax return, and a full 36% of those expect their refunds to be \$2500 or more. That’s certainly a large chunk of change to many people, so researchers dug deeper to discover how those who are expecting a refund plan to utilize it.

Figure 1: Tax Return Expectations

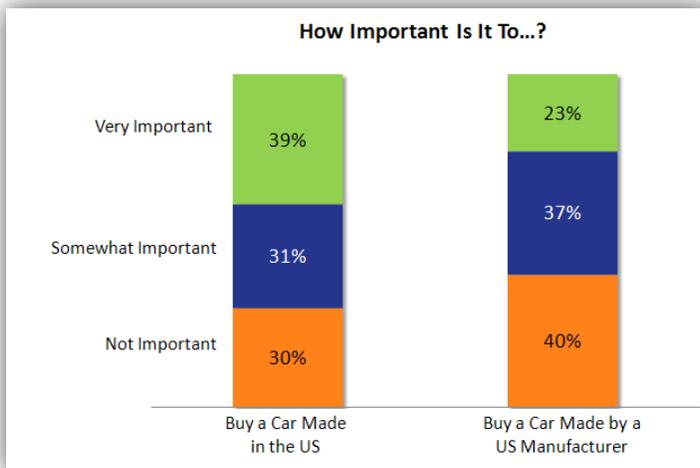




“Made in the U.S.A” is More Important than Made by U.S. Manufacturer

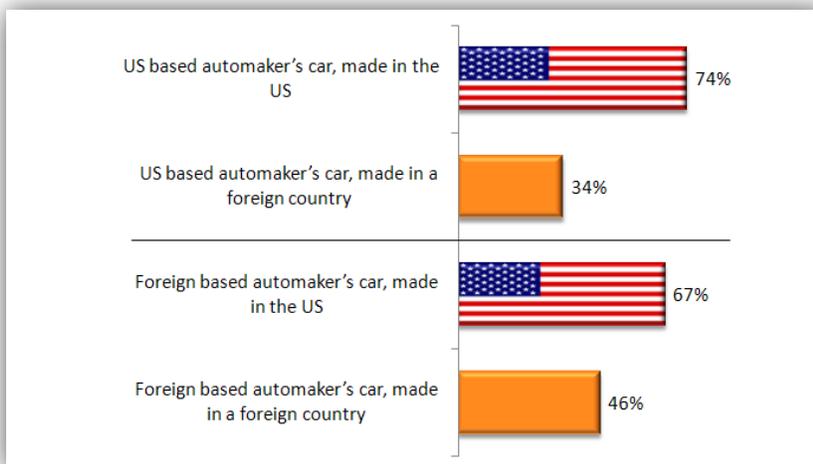
With the global nature of the auto industry, the experts at AutoTrader.com took the opportunity during this American tax season to survey shoppers on their attitudes toward buying vehicles that are either made in the U.S. or made by a U.S.-based manufacturer—an important distinction. Interestingly, more shoppers indicated that it was important to buy a car actually built in the U.S. than it was to buy a vehicle from a U.S. manufacturer. Fully 39% said that it is “very important” to buy a car that's simply built in the U.S. compared with 23% who said it is very important that the car be from a domestic automaker. This suggests that Americans are significantly more interested in buying cars when the physical production of those cars contributes jobs to the U.S. economy.

Figure 2: Importance of Buying American



This attitude was further supported by respondents’ selections when asked about what types of vehicles they would consider purchasing. Seventy-four percent of respondents said they would consider buying a vehicle that was from a domestic manufacturer *and* was made in the U.S., while 67% said they would consider a vehicle from an import brand but that was made in the U.S. The percentage of shoppers saying they would consider a vehicle made outside the U.S. is lower – 34% for domestic brands and 46% for import brands.

Figure 3: Type of Vehicle Considering





Eight Great American Cars to Spend a Tax Refund On

With shoppers' interest in buying domestic, the experts at AutoTrader.com recommended picks for "Eight Great American Cars to Spend a Tax Refund On." With 18% of vehicle shoppers expecting a tax refund of \$1,500 - \$2,500 and 36% expecting a check for \$2,500 or more, the experts kept all their picks between \$15,000 and \$25,000 (assuming a typical 10 percent down payment for vehicles). Most of these cars—with the exception of the Ford Fiesta and the Dodge Journey—benefit from being both made in the U.S.A. and made by an American automaker.

Below are the expert's picks, along with the reasons they selected each vehicle and information on how the vehicles have been performing on the AutoTrader.com site:

Buick Verano

- **Expert Opinion:** Want a little luxury for your hard re-earned money? Check out the new Buick Verano. It's smaller than a Regal but still packed full of the expected Buick touches. Technically, the Verano shares some of the more budget friendly Chevy Cruze's components but it gets a larger, more powerful engine. The Verano is a lot of little car for its \$23,000 base price, but even if you step up two levels to the Leather package with its heated steering wheel, heated seats, keyless ignition and a nine-speaker Bose sound system, you'll still be in the \$25,000 neighborhood.
- **Shopper Behavior:** As a brand, Buick has been increasing its share of new vehicle shopper attention on AutoTrader.com. While still being ranked low (No. 188) according to shopper interest when compared to other new vehicles on the site, the Verano, in particular, is beginning to attract more attention. It was the biggest mover on the site, according to the latest [New Car Insights Report](#), having more than tripled its share from December into January.

Chevrolet Sonic

- **Expert Opinion:** Some small cars offer features, and some offer attitude – the Chevy Sonic does both. Plus, the Sonic is one of those cars that has such a low base price that you can load it up with options and still spend around \$20,000. If you want a rock bottom price, look to the base Sonic sedan priced at around \$14,000. The cooler looking hatchback is a little more, but you get 15-inch alloy wheels, tilt and telescoping steering wheel, OnStar and a six-speaker stereo.
- **Shopper Behavior:** Chevrolet achieved a moderate bump in share of interactions among new vehicle shoppers in January 2012, rising to 12.75% (a 5% gain over December), and the Sonic was one of the models that demonstrated the most substantial gains in share among new vehicle shoppers. Currently sitting at the No. 48 spot on the list of Most-Viewed New Vehicles on AutoTrader.com, the Sonic has been gaining substantial consumer interest lately. Its ranking is up 16 spots from December 2011. With the recent rise in gas prices, this increase in shopper interest is likely due in part to the Sonic's fuel efficiency.

Ford Fiesta

- **Expert Opinion:** The Fiesta is smaller than the Focus but still feels like a fairly premium car. Of course, the price is small, too. A Fiesta sedan is just over \$13,000 and the hatchback is just \$900 more. Available Sync for hands free phone calls and streaming Bluetooth audio give the small Fiesta a more premium feel. Even if you opt for the top of the line Fiesta SES with turn-by-turn navigation, LED Parking lights and satellite radio, you're still well under the \$25,000 mark.
- **Shopper Behavior:** Ford's share of interactions among new vehicle shoppers on the AutoTrader.com site remained strong at the beginning of 2012, though its supremacy on AutoTrader.com was challenged by



Chevrolet, which narrowly surpassed Ford in January for the first time since July. However, the Fiesta reached a share of interaction level not seen since April 2011. The Fiesta is currently ranked at No. 70 on the list of Most-Viewed New Vehicles on AutoTrader.com. While that is down 28 spots year-over-year, the Fiesta has been gaining interest lately, moving up 14 spots from December to January.

Ford Focus

- **Expert Opinion:** When it comes to small cars, the recently redesigned Focus is the standard bearer. It's the small car we always knew Detroit could build. The base price is just under \$17,000, but the interior is filled with quality materials, and there are plenty of high-tech options to please even the most ardent technophile. The Focus is also fun to drive; while it's not a hot rod by any means, the 155 horsepower, direct injection four-cylinder engine paired with a six-speed, dual clutch transmission provides more than enough power for any driving situation. Opt for the Super Fuel Economy Package, and you could get as much as 40 miles per gallon.
- **Shopper Behavior:** As the most popular new compact vehicle on AutoTrader.com in January, the Focus ranked at No. 17 on the list of Most-Viewed New Vehicles in January, up 12 spots month-over-month. It was the only compact to break into the top 20 on that list. Its No. 17 ranking is also up 33 spots from January 2011.

Ford Mustang

- **Expert Opinion:** The Mustang doesn't look or act like an affordable car, but the base model with a V6 is just under \$23,000. And that's not a weak-kneed, skinny tire stripped model either. Even base Mustangs have the same cool look as the pricier versions. Plus, the V6 that comes in the base car makes an impressive 305 horsepower. If you want a little more bang for your tax-refund buck, get the V6 Premium. It's a hair over our self-imposed \$25,000 mark, but you get 17 inch wheels, Bluetooth, leather, Sync and power driver's seat.
- **Shopper Behavior:** As Ford's emotional icon, the Mustang has been a perennial favorite on AutoTrader.com among new vehicle shoppers. In January, the Mustang ranked No. 2 on the list of Most-Viewed New Vehicles on AutoTrader.com, a position it held throughout much of 2011.

Dodge Dart

- **Expert Opinion:** The new Dodge Dart will go on sale later this year as a 2013 model year car. The Dart is the first Dodge to fully integrate parent company FIAT components. In fact, the Dart is based on the lovable FIAT 500. Although the Dart has an Italian soul, the look is all American. Like the Ford Focus, the Dodge Dart is a small car that feels like it's built to a higher standard than compact cars of the recent past. A choice of three engines should keep things interesting. A 2.0 liter four-cylinder engine is available, as is a more powerful 2.4 liter four-cylinder engine. Those looking for a fuel sipper will want to check out the turbo 1.4 liter engine that should deliver 40 miles per gallon on the highway.
- **Shopper Behavior:** Since the Dart has not yet gone on sale, site behavior analysis is not available for this vehicle. However, the Dodge brand overall has seen slight increases in new vehicle shopper interactions recently, which bodes well for the domestic automaker. January's share of interactions among new vehicle shoppers was up slightly over December to 6.23%, which is the highest level since October 2011 and up 9.9% year-over-year.



Dodge Journey

- Expert Opinion:** There are plenty of crossover SUVs to pick from, but the Dodge Journey comes off as just a little different. It's useful without being too big, and it gives the driver that commanding view of the road without the truck-ish driving dynamics. Opt for the American Value Package and you'll be rolling in a slick looking crossover SUV with seating for up to 7 people.
- Shopper Behavior:** Currently ranked at No. 85 on the list of Most-Viewed New Vehicles on AutoTrader.com, the Journey has been steadily gaining interest from shoppers over the last year. The vehicle is ranked 26 spots higher than in January 2011. From December to January alone, the vehicle moved up 14 spots.

Jeep Wrangler

- Expert Opinion:** Iconic looks, go-anywhere ability and way more fun than your average economy car, the Jeep Wrangler is great on many fronts. As much as there is to like about the Wrangler, it's the SUV's new engine that really transforms it into something you can live with every day. A new direct-injection, 285 horsepower V6 gives the Wrangler plenty of kick and smoothes out its formerly rough edges. Base price for a two-door Wrangler Sport is \$22,945, including destination fees.
- Shopper Behavior:** A perennial favorite among car shoppers, the Jeep Wrangler is currently ranked at No. 3 on the list of Most-Viewed New Vehicles on AutoTrader.com. This is one spot up from its December 2011 ranking, and up two spots from January 2011. This vehicle has been one of the primary drivers of consumer interest in vehicles from the Chrysler Group, as noted in the [February New Car Insights Report](#). As a brand, Jeep has continued a steady pace of growth in share of interactions among new vehicle shoppers for the ninth straight month, reaching a 4.66% share, which is 10.6% over December and 26.2% above January 2011.

Figure 4: Site Analytics for Eight Great American Cars

Make	Model	Jan 2012 Rank	Dec 2011 Rank	MOM Rank Change	Jan 2011 Rank	YOY Rank Change
Buick	Verano	188	236	↑ 48	N/A	N/A N/A
Chevrolet	Sonic	48	64	↑ 16	N/A	N/A N/A
Ford	Fiesta	70	84	↑ 14	42	↓ -28
Ford	Focus	17	29	↑ 12	50	↑ 33
Ford	Mustang	2	2	→ 0	2	→ 0
Dodge	Dart	N/A	N/A	N/A N/A	N/A	N/A N/A
Dodge	Journey	85	99	↑ 14	111	↑ 26
Jeep	Wrangler	3	4	↑ 1	5	↑ 2

About AutoTrader.com

Atlanta-based AutoTrader.com, created in 1997, is the Internet's ultimate automotive marketplace and consumer information website. AutoTrader.com aggregates in a single location millions of [new cars](#), [used cars](#) and [certified pre-owned cars](#) from thousands of auto dealers and private sellers and is a leading online resource for auto dealers, individuals and manufacturers to advertise and market their vehicles to in-market shoppers. The company also provides a robust suite of software tools for dealers and manufacturers to help them manage and market their vehicle inventory and display advertising on the Internet. AutoTrader.com continues to grow key business metrics, including revenue, profitability and site traffic. Today, AutoTrader.com attracts millions of unique monthly visitors who utilize the site to review descriptions, photos and videos of vehicles for sale; research and compare vehicles; review pricing and specials; and read auto-related content like buying and selling tips and editorial coverage of major

auto shows and automotive trends. AutoTrader.com operates one other auto marketing brand, AutoTraderClassics.com. AutoTrader.com also owns used vehicle management software company vAuto, Kelley Blue Book (Kbb.com), HomeNet Automotive, a leading provider of online inventory management and merchandising solutions for the automotive retail industry and VinSolutions, a leading provider of end-to-end solution platforms for dealers. AutoTrader.com is a majority-owned subsidiary of Cox Enterprises. Providence Equity Partners is a 25 percent owner of the company and Kleiner Perkins Caufield & Byers is also an investor. For more information, please visit www.autotrader.com.