

The best cars, SUVs, and crossovers we drove in 2020

Collage by Aurich Lawson

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Like most of us, 2020 turned out quite differently than we might have expected back in January. By the end of February, it was clear that COVID-19 was going to be a serious problem as auto shows and drive events started being cancelled *en masse*. But our local press fleets have remained in operation, and a calendar free of travel has meant more time to test cars here at home. Luckily, sitting in a car by one's self meets the requirements for social distancing, and a car interior can be a welcome change from spending all day every day at home.

All that means we've managed to test drive a respectable amount of new vehicles despite the new realities. These are the highlights of a year spent behind the wheel.

Hybrids, plug-in hybrids, and EVs

Just under half (15 out of 32) of the cars I reviewed this year were hybrids, plug-in hybrids, or battery electric vehicles. I logged the most miles in one of the more exotic hybrids on the list—the Acura NSX supercar. Ohio to Florida in three days remains a memorable trip, but it was hard work. Runner-up would be the Toyota Venza that took us to Cooperstown, New York and back in a day. Unlike the NSX, the

Venza had very comfortable seats and adaptive cruise control. This plush crossover was one of my unexpected delights of the year.

I did expect to be impressed by the Hyundai Sonata Hybrid, and yet it still surprised me. It was the only thing that really stood out at this year's Chicago auto show, as the vehicle delivered all that promise and more on the road. It's handsome, it's got some useful driver assists, and it really does get 52mpg (4.5l/100km)—all for less than \$28,000.

- In 2020 we logged more miles in this Acura NSX supercar than anything else, when we ferried it from its factory in Ohio to Daytona, Florida. It's a beautiful car and the powertrain is very interesting, but it would not be my first choice for driving hundreds of miles a day on the highway.

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- Most miles in a day would go to this Toyota Venza hybrid, which I drove from DC to Cooperstown, NY, and back again. Unlike the NSX, I would highly recommend the Venza for long road trips.

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- A styling sedan that sips fuel? The 2020 Hyundai Sonata Hybrid really impressed us in testing.

Jonathan Gitlin

- Behind the wheel of a preproduction prototype Volkswagen ID.4 electric crossover.

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- The Volvo XC40 was already a compelling luxury crossover, and the addition of an all-electric powertrain only improves it.

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- I promise I did not seek out Battery Heights Blvd on purpose. But it was too good a coincidence not to stop and get a photo.

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- Next year, the Bolt EV will look a bit different because it's getting a styling refresh that should also bring faster DC fast charging, as well as adaptive cruise control (but maybe not Super Cruise, which will only be on the longer-wheelbase Bolt SUV that's also in the works).
- The Kia Niro EV is another battery electric vehicle that proves the Korean car industry is on top of its game right now.

Jonathan Gitlin

- It looks like any other Mini Cooper, but the presence of this one at an electric charger is a clue to the fact that the Mini Cooper SE is a battery electric Mini.

Jonathan Gitlin

- On the road with the new Polestar 2.
- The interior of the Polestar 2 is one of the car's best features.
- Audi has given its e-tron electric car a fancy new look—this is the Audi e-tron Sportback.
- An e-tron Sportback will cost between \$70k-\$90k depending on trim or options, but I can't think of a better EV interior for the money.
- This dayglo assault of orange and volt green is the (deep breath) 2020 Porsche Cayenne Coupé Turbo S E-Hybrid. It's the top-of-the-range Cayenne and also a plug-in.

Jonathan Gitlin

- The houndstooth interior trim comes with the Lightweight sport pack. The adaptive front seats are brilliant, as is the racetex-covered steering wheel.

Jonathan Gitlin

- This was a good way to see a sunrise.

Jonathan Gitlin

Seven of the 32 cars we reviewed this year were BEVs. We'll have more to say about the Volkswagen ID.4 and Volvo XC40 Recharge in the future, for we spent less than an hour with

each. And expect a Ford Mustang Mach-E review in the new year—we just scheduled a week in January with that electric pony. The pandemic postponed the planned facelift for the Chevrolet Bolt EV. The Kia Niro EV is highly competent, and one of the few BEVs to approach Tesla when it comes to range efficiency. The Mini Cooper SE was a hoot to drive, the Polestar 2 impressed with a great interior, as did the Audi e-tron Sportback, although at a price that's another rung up the ladder.

Money no object, however, I'd have the Porsche Cayenne Coupé Turbo S E-Hybrid. And I never thought I'd see myself typing those words. Yes, it's a big SUV, and yes, I'm the kind of annoying writer who never stops telling you the reader how much he dislikes big SUVs. But the Cayenne Coupé's power to weight ratio means it doesn't feel like a big SUV to drive. Its battery pack is big enough to cover most of my normal journeys. And that houndstooth interior might be my favorite of all the cars I've driven this year.

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