



SMALL SUV SHOOTOUT

WHICH OF THESE TOP-SELLERS HITS
THE TARGET?





**STORY
TESTERS
STARTERS**

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HYUNDAI KONA ACTIVE, MITSUBISHI ASX LS ADAS, NISSAN QASHQAI ST, SUZUKI S-CROSS GLX TURBO

“**LIFE,” ACCORDING TO** Forrest Gump’s mum, “is like a box of chocolates. You never know what you’re gonna get.” And that could well apply to many of our multi-car comparisons. While we endeavour to match up three or four cars as closely on price and specification as possible, vehicle availability is often the true determining factor in what we get.

Take our two-wheel-drive compact SUV line-up. We aimed for entry level vehicles of the respective specification ranges, and that is what transpired with the Hyundai Kona Active and Nissan Qashqai ST. However, the Mitsubishi LS equipped with ADAS (Advanced Driver Assistance System) is one step up. Moreover, the GLX is top of a two-level Suzuki S-Cross turbo range.

Despite being something of a mixed grill, it still makes for a relevant and interesting comparison, pitching a relative wild card (S-Cross, the only forced-induction car in the field), a completely new model (Kona) and a recent major upgrade (Qashqai) against the biggest-selling small SUV in the Australian market for 2017 (ASX).

Come along for the drive...





Nissan Qashqai.

VALUE FOR MONEY

With a price advantage of between \$4000 and nearly \$5500 to its opposition, the Kona gets off to a flyer. Retained value after three years/60,000km also favours the Korean, 50 percent to the Mitsubishi and Nissan's 48 and Suzuki's 46.

The S-Cross costs less per service, averaging \$236 to the ASX's \$240, both cheaper than the Kona (\$279) and Qashqai (\$307). The latter's capped price servicing, though, extends to 6yrs/120,000km, superior to the Suzuki (5yrs/100,000km), Hyundai (5yrs/75,000km) and Mitsubishi (3yrs/45,000km). But what ultimately determines how much your hip pocket nerve twitches is the frequency of scheduled servicing. Nissan and Suzuki buyers will be visiting their service centre up to twice as frequently as Hyundai and Mitsubishi buyers who enjoy 12mth/15,000km intervals.

It's a similar deal with warranty. Nissan and Suzuki offer 3yrs/100,000km coverage, Mitsubishi is more generous at 5yrs/100,000km but Hyundai is tops with 5yrs/unlimited km.

At \$646.50pa, the Kona shapes as some \$150 to \$300+ cheaper to insure.

According to their ADR combined cycle fuel figures, the ASX is the thriest, followed by the Qashqai, Kona and S-Cross. However, our 500km+ test had the order: S-Cross 7.3 litres/100km, Kona

8.0, and the Qashqai and ASX line-ball at 9.3 and 9.4 respectively.

Each is well equipped with an inventory too extensive to list here but, as is often the case, there are some haves and have nots. As the only range topper, the S-Cross is alone in boasting satellite navigation, leather seats, keyless entry and start, paddle gearshift and dual climate control aircon (ASX is single operation).

All have a reversing camera and rear parking sensors; the Qashqai also has front parking sensors.

...WHAT ULTIMATELY DETERMINES HOW MUCH YOUR HIP POCKET NERVE TWITCHES IS THE FREQUENCY OF SCHEDULED SERVICING.

DESIGN & FUNCTION

Importantly, all are rated five-star for safety by ANCAP. Special mention should be made of the Mitsubishi's Advanced Driver Assistance System that includes forward collision mitigation and lane departure warning.

The Suzuki emits the least CO₂, 138 grams per kilometre to the Nissan's 159, Hyundai's 169 and Mitsubishi's 179.

Seating comfort is very much subjective, but testers concluded that the Nissan's deep and plush front pews were the best by some margin. It's also the only one to provide lumbar and height adjustment on both front seats. Though firmer, the Hyundai and Suzuki seats supported well and felt better overall than the Mitsubishi's flatter offering.

The Qashqai also does space generously, too. It and the S-Cross line up identically in cargo capacity at 430 litres, but drop the rear seats and the Nissan expands to at 1598 litres, some 229 more. Our measurements and general feel have the former ahead in driver and passenger room, too. The other pair are not so well endowed, with the ASX offering 393/1193 litres capacity, slightly up on the Kona (361/1143).

Significantly, a full-sized spare wheel is an omission all round, with a less practical space saver as standard.

Each of our test quartet is ergonomically sound, with controls that

fall to hand nicely, are intuitive and easy to use. The Qashqai has a few items that make life easier: electric park brake, push button start, proximity entry, remote open/close and one-touch windows all round. However, it lacks rain-sensing wipers and dusk-sensing headlights, something the high-spec S-Cross has.

While all are nicely fitted and finished with no major flaw, it could be argued that the Qashqai and Kona, by dint of being the more recent builds, look and feel a tad more modern.

ON THE ROAD

The combination of a ripper little turbo engine and lack of mass (1170kg kerb weight – the lightest on test) makes the Suzuki the ‘gun’ performer, despite its smaller displacement. There’s some lag initially before the 1.4-litre Boosterjet comes on strong on its way to 103kW

peak power at 5500rpm. But it’s the broad torque curve that delivers its optimum of 220Nm at 1400rpm and stays true up till 4000rpm, which gives it such impressive driveability. The six-speed auto is a good match, though abrupt downshifts when slowing detract from its smoothness.

The Kona’s 110kW/180Nm 2.0-litre engine and six-speed auto combine effectively to deliver adequate performance across the range. It doesn’t go as hard as the S-Cross, but it’s never found wanting, either.

With 110kW and 197Nm, the ASX’s 2.0-litre unit looks okay on paper, but feels a little ‘doughy’ at times down low despite having a sport drive mode. Its CVT seems not as resolved as the Nissan’s Xtronic CVT.

The Qashqai also puts out acceptable power and torque numbers

(106kW/200Nm) and feels solid enough, but having to haul the most heft (1375kg) blunts its response somewhat.

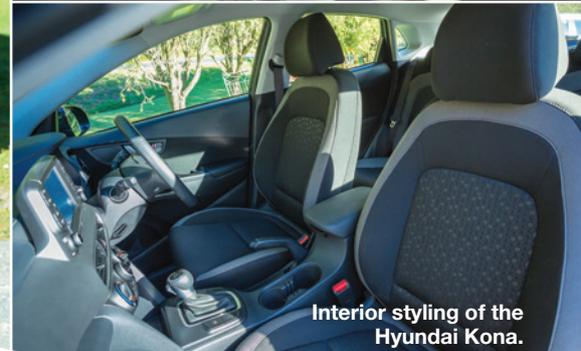
Plaudits for the most dynamic drive goes to the Kona, which impressed with its ride and handling ability. It felt controlled, composed and comfortable, no doubt helped by Hyundai’s localised suspension tune and the smallest (16-inch) wheels of the four. The steering is nicely weighted and consistent and although a little road shock can be felt through the wheel occasionally, it’s no big issue.

Not so the ASX, which suffers more noticeably from the aforementioned malady and lacks ride composure over rough going on its 18-inch rubber. In our opinion, the damping seems a little underdone. At lower speeds, the steering feels light and vague. The weighting and consistency improves at open road speeds, but it’s still short on feedback.

Hyundai Kona’s cargo area is the smallest.



Mitsubishi ASX LS rides on 18-inch alloys.



Interior styling of the Hyundai Kona.

Suzuki S-Cross boasts turbo power.



Kona’s distinctive front.





Mitsubishi ASX uses CVT.



Nissan's restyled Qashqai.



It corners reasonably well, though not without exhibiting some body roll.

The S-Cross rides firmly, but agreeably, on its 17-inch rubber. It changes direction responsively and feels light on its feet. The steering, though, is overly light, over assisted, and seems vague either side of centre.

Also on 17-inch tyres, the Qashqai

offers a relaxed, big car ride, soaking up the lumps and bumps in the road. It's no Kona or S-Cross – throw it around under cornering and its weight becomes apparent – but overall dynamics are still good for the segment. The steering is nicely weighted and consistent, though more road feel wouldn't go astray.

When braking, all perform to standard,

offering reassuring progression and feel.

As we expected, there are some NVH (noise, vibration and harshness) issues with each, primarily tyre roar, wind rustle from around the external mirrors and engine flare up under heavy acceleration. Testers considered the Qashqai the most refined, marginally ahead of the Kona and S-Cross, with the ASX trailing.

COSTS + RATINGS

HYUNDAI KONA ACTIVE



Price	\$24,500 [^]
ANCAP safety rating	★★★★★
Warranty	5 year/unlimited
Capped price servicing	\$279 (avg per service 5yrs/75,000km)
Annual insurance costs	\$646.50 ^{^^}

MITSUBISHI ASX ADAS 2WD



Price	\$28,500 [^]
ANCAP safety rating	★★★★★
Warranty	5 year/100,000km
Capped price servicing	\$240 (per service 3yrs/45,000km)
Annual insurance costs	\$853.03 ^{^^}

NISSAN QASHQAI ST



Price	\$28,990 [^]
ANCAP safety rating	★★★★★
Warranty	3 year/100,000km
Capped price servicing	\$307 (avg per service 6yrs/120,000km)
Annual insurance costs	\$788.08 ^{^^}

SUZUKI S-CROSS GLX TURBO



Price	\$29,990 [^]
ANCAP safety rating	★★★★★
Warranty	3 year/100,000km
Capped price servicing	\$236 (avg per service 5yrs/100,000km)
Annual insurance costs	\$803.82 ^{^^}

[^] PRICES ARE MANUFACTURERS' LIST PRICES UNLESS OTHERWISE NOTED AND DO NOT INCLUDE STATUTORY AND DELIVERY CHARGES. PRICES CORRECT AT TIME OF PRINTING.

^{^^} BASED ON AN RACQ INSURANCE COMPREHENSIVE POLICY FOR A 35-YEAR-OLD MALE, MAXIMUM NO CLAIM BONUS, VEHICLE FINANCIALLY UNENCUMBERED, AND \$650 EXCESS. MULTI POLICY AND RACQ MEMBER LOYALTY DISCOUNTS MAY APPLY. DISCOUNTS OF 2.5-15 PERCENT MAY BE AVAILABLE TO RACQ MEMBERS DEPENDING ON LENGTH OF MEMBERSHIP.

CONCLUSION

It could be said there is a sub-segment developing within compact 2WD SUVs. Call it compact and not-so compact. Mitsubishi's recent addition of the Eclipse Cross is evidence of this, launched into the same segment but being slightly bigger than the ASX. We would put the latter and the Kona into the smaller segment, alongside the likes of Mazda's CX-3, Ford's EcoSport, Renault's Captur and Nissan Juke.

Looked at this way, and based on our test, the Kona beats the ASX and beats

it well. We have the Hyundai superior in terms of price, forecast retained value, warranty, insurance, fuel economy, environment, comfort, build and finish quality, performance, ride, handling and smoothness and quietness. The Mitsubishi has the edge in servicing costs, standard features, safety and space.

The gap between the Qashqai and the S-Cross is narrower. We scored the former higher for price, forecast retained value, comfort, space,

ergonomics, build and finish quality, ride, and smoothness and quietness. The Suzuki took the points for servicing costs, insurance, fuel economy, standard features, environment and performance. The pair were line-ball on warranty and (for different reasons) handling.

But, there can only be one winner and that is the Hyundai Kona – albeit by the narrowest of margins from the Nissan Qashqai. Then follow the Suzuki S-Cross and Mitsubishi ASX. Let the arguments begin. ■

REVIEW DEB ECCLESTON



ANOTHER SET OF EYES...

WE ARE AT two extremes of the automotive spectrum at the moment, with a small hatchback and a people mover occupying the driveway.

What I wouldn't give for something in between, with enough room to ferry

around three kids comfortably yet compact enough to cope with city traffic and unforgiving car parks.

I've learned that the term 'small' means different things to different people in the SUV world. When I saw the Hyundai Kona I questioned whether I'd confused the brief, as it looked more like a hatchback than an SUV. That said, though, there was enough room to seat three passengers in the back relatively comfortably. And in terms of manoeuvrability, it was a dream to drive. Solid braking and steering, excellent visibility, attractive interior and exterior styling (including side mirrors that fold down automatically upon parking) completed the package.

The Nissan Qashqai was next level in terms of size and comfort. Far bigger than the Kona, it was a head-turner both inside and out. I wasn't a fan of the push-button start and push-button handbrake, but aside from that it was definite contender. With a centre console and armrest combo

providing lounge chair comfort for the driver, I could have driven it for miles.

Overall, the Mitsubishi ASX was like vanilla ice cream – satisfying in flavour but in need of some additional toppings. The exterior styling was nice, but the interior was very basic. The ASX offered a smooth ride and handled in the way you'd expect from an SUV.

Rear split seats provided plenty of additional storage space.

The saying 'don't judge a book by its cover' certainly applied to the Suzuki S Cross Turbo. The exterior wasn't anything to write home about, but inside was a different story with its full leather interior and high-end dash.

Turbo in name and turbo in nature, the vehicle was not only smooth and comfortable on the school run, but had the grunt to satisfy the lead foot in the family.

My pick of the bunch? The Nissan Qashqai. ■

The Road Ahead thanks Dayboro Shed Antiques for its assistance with the photo shoot. thedayboroshed.com.au

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