

# Home turf comparo

Evolutionary event holds its first run BY JOE SAGE

This event is based upon the Active Lifestyle Vehicle Awards event of the prior 14 years, but reengineered in several ways. Formerly held on a mix of off-road and on-road courses (both of which varied over time), in its first year, the Southwest Lifestyle Media Drive was held adjacent to the Bob Bondurant School of High Performance Driving, on the Gila River Indian Community south of Chandler, utilizing local paved roads, and—for a few vehicles of an off-road-enough nature—also a dirt course built inside Bondurant's west track.

ALV had mixed automotive and lifestyle media judges with local marathon runners and other active people representing the event's targeted demographic. That demographic remains at least a subset, though all drivers are now professional automotive media. As with the prior ALV, the new SLMD is a privately-owned and -run venture, as opposed to a formal press association event.

Vehicles were evaluated in five categories: two for cars, two for SUVs and CUVs, one for trucks. All are 2019 models unless noted otherwise.

## CAR OF THE YEAR: BEST VALUE

### Fiat 124 Spider Abarth

160-hp 1.4L turbo - 6-spd manual.....26/35/30 mpg  
.....\$28,195 / \$38,210

A two-door roadster, the Fiat 124 Spider is in a world of its own in this group. As an Abarth, it is in a higher orbit than a regular 124 Spider. It's one of just three 6-speed manuals in the event. With precise handling, engineering and build and 184 lb-ft of torque, this car is all fun.

### Kia Forte EX Launch Edition

147-hp 2.0L 4cyl - iVT trans .....30/40/34 mpg  
.....\$17,690 / \$26,220

Forte, Kia's number one seller for first-time buyers, has style and feature cues from Stinger in this new gen-three model, and this top-trim EX Launch Edition adds 17-in graphite alloys, 320-watt harmon/kardon premium audio, LED lights in and out, power sunroof, rear spoiler and more. A 6-speed manual is available on the base model.

### Toyota Corolla Hatchback XSE

168-hp 2.0L 4cyl - dynamic CVT.....30/38/33 mpg  
.....\$19,900 / \$27,823

Hot hatches are coming on strong, and this new Corolla, here in top XSE trim with many more add-ons inside and out, is ready to rumble. Ours here had a CVT automatic, but note that it's available with a 6-speed manual.

**Volkswagen Golf Alltrack TSI SE w/ 4Motion**  
168-hp 1.8L turbo - 6-spd manual.....21/30/24 mpg  
.....\$29,765 / \$30,910

(2018 model) Bearing one of three manual transmissions at the event, this all-wheel-drive German SportWagen bears all the personality and skill Europe has to offer, at a fraction of the cost of its cousin the Audi quattro.

**WINNER:** With the lowest base price, lowest as-built price and highest fuel mileage of the group, the Kia Forte apparently had the winning formula.

**1ST PLACE:** Kia Forte EX

**RUNNERUP:** Volkswagen Golf Alltrack (2018)

## CAR OF THE YEAR: PERFORMANCE

### Dodge Challenger SRT Hellcat Redeye WB

797-hp 6.2L V8 suprchg - 8-spd auto...13/22/16 mpg  
.....\$69,650 / \$81,331

The name on this one is a mile long (Widebody completes it) and its engine spec is a good quarter-mile—Supercharged 6.2L HEMI Hellcat High Output V8. Fortunately, covering a mile or quarter-mile in no time is this car's distinct forte. Its Widebody treatment echoes the outgoing 840-hp Demon, which this effectively replaces in the lineup, with a bit more daily-driverish demeanor.

### Ford Mustang Bullitt

480-hp 5.0L V8 - 6-spd manual.....15/24/18 mpg  
.....\$46,595 / \$51,290

(2018 model) This third-ever Mustang Bullitt arrives on the 50th anniversary of the classic Steve McQueen film of the same name (with what is still considered an all-time best car chase scene). With 20 more horses and a higher top speed than a regular Mustang GT, Bullitt is distinguished by its lack of badging and Highland Green paint job (black is also available). This is the third of the three cars at the event with a 6-speed manual.

**WINNER:** Mustang lovers, take heart, as Bullitt won at Run to the Sun (also in this issue), but on our home turf, Challenger SRT Redeye took the gold.

**1ST PLACE:** Dodge Challenger SRT Redeye

**RUNNERUP:** Ford Mustang Bullitt (2018)

## SUV/CUV OF THE YEAR: BEST VALUE

### Chevrolet Traverse FWD 3LT Leather

310-hp 3.6L V6 - 9-spd auto .....18/27/21 mpg  
.....\$41,700 / \$44,490

(2018 model) The three-row Traverse, updated for 2018, starts at just under \$30,000 and is available as a front- or all-wheel-driver. This is the middle of seven trim levels. Its wide-angle-zoom rear camera mirror is a stunner.

### Honda Pilot AWD Elite

280-hp 3.5L V6 - 9-spd auto .....19/26/22 mpg  
.....\$31,450 / \$48,020

Once boxy and trucklike, the three-row Honda Pilot received more streamlined styling in 2016 for its third generation and a styling refresh for 2019, as well as receiving a new transmission and a range of new tech features.

### Jeep Wrangler 4-Door Sahara 4x4

270-hp 14 turbo - 8-spd auto .....22/24/22 mpg  
.....\$38,295 / \$50,045

(2018 model) The SUV that needs no introduction, Jeep Wrangler is entirely new this year, with weight savings, the option of this potent yet fuel-saving four-cylinder turbo, and off-road credentials second to none (though not much pushed at this event). Sport. Utility. Vehicle.

### Kia Niro PHEV EX Premium

139-hp 1.6T+elec - 6-spd DCT .....48/44/46 mpg  
.....\$27,900 / \$35,575

(2018 model) Kia Niro is the brand's fully dedicated hybrid model, here with an added layer of plug-in hybrid (PHEV) technology, all in a neat, trim yet capacious package—and with the lowest price and highest MPG in this group.

### Subaru Ascent Premium

260-hp 2.4L turbo boxer - CVT .....21/27/23 mpg  
.....\$34,995 / \$36,630

This entirely new Subaru (see elsewhere in this issue) distinguishes itself from the rest of their lineup by its significantly larger size and capacity, a true three-row SUV.

**WINNER:** Unlike the prior ALV event from which this sprang, there was not a distinct off-road category, surely costing the Jeep Wrangler, nor Urban and/or Green categories, surely costing the almost-50-mpg Kia Niro PHEV. Among three mainstream three-row SUVs, the newest took the prize.

**1ST PLACE:** Subaru Ascent

**RUNNERUP:** Kia Niro PHEV (2018)

## SUV/CUV OF THE YEAR: LUXURY

### Infiniti QX50 Essential AWD

268-hp 2.0L var compres turbo - CVT ...24/30/26 mpg  
.....\$45,150 / \$59,085

Infiniti's second-to-smallest SUV, the QX50's new-this-year variable compression turbocharged engine (runner-up for Best Powertrain at the Texas Truck Rodeo) gives this top-trim all-wheel-driver ample horsepower and 30 mpg highway fuel mileage at the same time.

### Lexus LX 570

383-hp 5.7L V8 - 8-spd auto .....13/18/15 mpg  
.....\$90,380 / \$98,445

(2018 model) The largest of four Lexus SUVs, the LX was

last fully revised in 2007, but has received three facelifts in the interim, most significantly in 2015, along with an all-new interior. Available in just two models, two-row or three-row, both AWD, this is the top model.

**WINNER:** The degree to which price is considered at a comparo event is often debated, even in a luxury category such as this, though there's no way to gauge it in final results. But this category's winner goes for about twice as much as its competitor.

**1ST PLACE:** Lexus LX 570 (2018)

**RUNNERUP:** Infiniti QX50

## SOUTHWEST TRUCK OF THE YEAR

### Chevrolet Colorado 4WD ZR2 Crew Short Box

308-hp 3.6L V6 - 8-spd auto .....16/18/17 mpg  
.....\$42,500 / \$44,885

The midsize Chevy Colorado has generated much buzz among those who don't want or need a full-size cab or bed in their pickup, and the new ZR2 off-road-intensive model (think factory Baja) has created a new level of buzz. There is also a diesel (see elsewhere in this issue).

### Ford F-150 4x4 SuperCrew Platinum Diesel

250-hp 3.6L V6 turbo diesel - 10-spd ...22/30/25 mpg  
.....\$57,910 / \$67,380

(2018 model) This exact truck, with F-150's plushiest cab and top trim, is reviewed elsewhere in this issue. This is the first diesel F-150, which, along with a 10-speed automatic, delivers by far the highest mpg in this group.

### GMC Sierra 1500 AT4

420-hp 6.2L V8 - 10-spd auto .....15/19/17 mpg  
.....\$53,200 / \$62,885

This AT4 model is a purpose-built off-roader, new this year, but not at the expense of any other creature comforts or capabilities. Standout features include a multi-talented tailgate that works as a seat, step or eight-foot materials stop; and multiple trailer settings memory. Six engines are available for Sierra, three for AT4 (a 5.3L V8, this 460-lbft 6.2L V8 and soon a 3.0L inline-six diesel).

### Ram 1500 Laramie Longhorn Crew Cab 4x4

395-hp 5.7L V8 - 8-spd auto .....15/21/17 mpg  
.....\$53,695 / \$67,335

Ram 1500 is entirely new for 2019, top to bottom, inside and out (see our May/June issue), with extensive use of lightweight high-strength steel boosting its payload and tow capacity. This sample is next-to-top trim (by just \$2600) and has a HEMI multi-displacement VVT engine (an eTorque 5.7L HEMI MDS VVT is also available).

**WINNER:** This was a tough category, with four highly capable trucks on-road or off. This seems to be Ram's year, though, as the 1500 also won Truck of the Year (with Ram 2500 runnerup) at the Texas Truck Rodeo, where this Ram 1500 Laramie Longhorn model also won the Luxury Pickup category.

**1ST PLACE:** Ram 1500 Laramie Longhorn

**RUNNERUP:** Ford F-150 Diesel (2018) ■

## CAR—BEST VALUE .....2019 Kia Forte EX Launch Edition



## CAR—PERFORMANCE .....2019 Dodge Challenger SRT Hellcat Redeye Widebody



## SUV/CROSSOVER—BEST VALUE .....2019 Subaru Ascent



## SUV/CROSSOVER—LUXURY .....2018 Lexus LX 570



## TRUCK .....2019 Ram 1500 Longhorn Limited

