

The sub-240k seven-seater club

By  Ané Theron

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While we'd all prefer to drive a large, luxury seven-seater SUVs such as the Audi Q7 or Mercedes-Benz GLS, most of us are not in a financial position to do so. So, if you sorely need a seven-seater for carpool duty, here's a list of the least expensive choices on offer in South Africa.

1. Datsun Go+ 1.2 Lux (R139,900)



When the Go launched in 2014, it was slammed for not having any airbags and ABS.

The 210mm longer and 5mm higher Go+ now provides seven seats for seven bottoms, and one side airbag for the driver.

The question is, will you be able to drive the Go+ at highway speeds when you know full well that there's no ABS? Under severe braking, the lack thereof will mean that the Go's wheels will lock, skid, and loss of control is probable. Doesn't instil much confidence when you're driving your little darlings to school 20km away.

Inside, you'll find the same hard plastics and flimsy seat material as the original Go. At least you get air-con, electric windows, power steering, a trip computer and follow-me-home headlamps as standard. Space in the third row is cramped and is only equipped with lap belts. At R139,900, this is what you can expect. On the plus side, the rev-happy 1.2-litre engine proves to be very competent.

2. FAW Sirius S80 1.3 Comfort (R179,995)



Built on the previous Toyota Avanza platform, the Sirius S80 offers the most spec for the least dosh. It's not too ungainly either, looking like the real deal with its outdoorsy scuff plates.

Agreed, FAW isn't very well-known or particularly popular, being a Chinese brand, and come re-sale time you'll probably regret your choice. But it does offer air-con, remote central locking, USB/MP3 audio player, an alarm, dual front airbags, ABS and alloy wheels.

While the gearbox feels a little notchy, the ride is a comfortable one. But I'd rather spend a few bucks more if I could, and look a little further.

3. Suzuki Ertiga 1.4 GA (R193,900)



The fun-to-drive Ertiga is the perfect school runabout, offering solid handling, good build quality, and a frugal, peppy 1.4-litre engine. The only pain is the lightly coloured seat material - it doesn't mix well with messy children. The Suzuki will certainly hold its value better than the cheaper Chinese alternative.

As for safety and convenience features, the Ertiga is equipped with air-con and power steering, and ABS with EBD and two airbags. When the Ertiga received a facelift a year ago, its audio system was improved to offer Bluetooth functionality, but only on the more expensive GL-variants.

4. Toyota Avanza 1.3 S (R219,100)



South Africa's staple people-mover, the Toyota Avanza, has benefited from a facelift in October 2016. Now looking slightly less like a breadbin, and a little more Chinese than Japanese from the front, the Avanza always had ABS but sees a significant amount of safety kit added to its latest model: Vehicle Stability Control, Brake Assist, as well as traction control.

The interior layout is functional but sorely needs a designer with some *pizzazz* to make things look a little more current. However, that Toyota badge is a valuable thing, and those who are loyal to the brand will probably look no further. And with good reason: it won silver in the 2016 Kinsey report, meaning that it's not just priced right, but also one of the most cost-effective cars to service, maintain and repair (see kinseyreport.co.za).

5. Honda BR-V 1.5 Trend (R238,900)



Now here's a seven-seater that looks much more upmarket than the rest of the club. The BR-V's dapper stance and athletic exterior styling belie its humble price tag. It's also the only other budget-orientated seven-seater here with Bluetooth connectivity.

The layout is typically Honda - the buttons and dials are all large and easy to use and the stylish, minimalist dashboard are angled towards the driver. The six-speed manual gearbox is a delight, and the naturally aspirated 1.5-litre engine is keen to get going. The second row of seats can recline. But best of all - the front seats recline to 180 degrees, ie. as flat as a business class bed, enabling you to have a nice long nap if sleeping upright doesn't work for you. It has ABS, EBD and Brake Assist, with two airbags.

At this price point the BR-V truly stands out, so if your budget can stretch to R238 900, you'll be buying a real winner. The BR-V also won Car Magazine's Top 12 Best Buys 2017 in the Light SUV/Crossover department, beating both the Kia Soul as well as the Mazda CX-3.

The Trend-variant doesn't come standard with a service plan, while the other contenders have 4- year/60,000km plans. However, the Honda boasts a 5-year/200,000km warranty, while the above-mentioned MPV's only have 3-year/100,000km warranties.

ABOUT ANÉ THERON

Ané Theron started her career in motoring journalism at Rapport, and moved over to City Press after a few years, before settling into a full time career at AutoTrader SA. She's at her happiest driving along twisty coastal roads, or crawling across rugged terrain in a beefy 4x4, or driving through the desolate Karoo. And taking photos along the way, of course.

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