

# FIRST IMPRESSIONS

## 2002 Ford Explorer



*Edona, Ariz.* - Ford says 90 percent of Explorer owners would purchase a new version of the sport-utility if it were not equipped with Firestone tires. If they did, they would find a night and day difference between the old and new Explorer.

The 2002 Explorer has a new independent rear suspension that gives the sport-utility a much smoother ride than the previous model. The new version is also 2.5 inches wider, with a wheel base that is two-inches longer. Both changes increase stability and provide more interior space.

The new Explorer will be available with an optional third row of seats.

Ford dumped the Explorer's 5.0-liter V8, which provided an anemic 210 horsepower and replaced it with the corporate 4.6-liter, 240-horsepower V8. This more modern engine makes a lot of difference when a little extra oomph is needed.

A 210-horsepower V6 is the standard engine for the 2002 Explorer, which is quieter and more ergonomically friendly than the current model. The new Explorer's base price is \$24,620.

- Frank S. Washington

## 2001 Audi allroad quattro



SUV-like as it could without making it an SUV.

As standard equipment, the Audi allroad has a four-level air suspension with four different ride heights and automatic ride height control. So if you want to sit up high and have the feel of a SUV, you can do so. Standard is Audi's permanent four-wheel drive system (quattro).

You can take it off-road, and I did. It didn't start shaking and quaking over rough terrain, and it wasn't jostling and bouncing over smooth terrain.

It's a welcome change for those who are tired of the sport-ute craze, but don't want to give up some of the attributes.

*Colorado Springs, Colo.*  
- Don't let the "allroad" part fool you. While Audi talks about it like it's an SUV or some new hybrid, it really is a contemporary station wagon that wants to be an SUV. And Audi made it as

The 2.7-liter V6 biturbo pumps 250 bhp. That's right, this vehicle responds effortlessly. At the rear of the allroad quattro, the double-wishbone suspension has been designed for compact dimensions and maximum directional stability. Taking a curve posed no problem for this station wagon, oops, I mean allroad.

Seriously, this is a nice alternative to a sport-ute. It looks sharp; think of a muscular A6 Avant. The interior is inviting and it's comfortable, whether you are navigating the road in the front seat or leisurely taking in the sights in the rear.

The base price is \$41,900

- Jacqueline Mitchell

## 2002 Bravada, Envoy & TrailBlazer SUVs



*Cabo San Lucas, Mex.* - Aiming to own the mid-size SUV segment, the General introduces a triumvirate of vehicles that should appeal to every facet of that market. The Chevrolet Trailblazer, GMC Envoy and Oldsmobile Bravada.

Using an all-new 270-horsepower in-line six as the heart of the new model range was a great start. The engine is remarkably smooth, has prodigious torque and excellent power. Bolted into an all-new chassis, it is a superb complement to these three vehicles.

While the three share basic engineering, they all manage to have separate personalities and should appeal to different buyers. The beautifully styled Bravada, for example, is optimized for on road performance. It comes standard with street tires, and a rear air suspension that not only smoothes out the ride but also gives it front to rear - as well as side-to-side - leveling abilities.

The Chevy TrailBlazer lives up to the Chevrolet credo "Like A Rock." The vehicle is ruggedly styled, and its appointments are more workmanlike.

A great performer both on and off road, the TrailBlazer is a tremendous step forward from the Blazer it replaces.

Bridging the gap between the luxurious Bravada and the utilitarian TrailBlazer is the GMC Envoy. Handsomely tough in a sophisticated way, the Envoy is both stylish and ready to take a punch. It's the Muhammad Ali of SUVs.

GM hadn't announced prices at press time.

- Randi Payton