

Types of Vehicles

What do terms like ‘sedan’, ‘king cab’ & ‘softroader’ mean? Below is a simple, generalised guide. Please note that the silhouetted icons are deliberately crude in order to keep the explanation as simple as possible. They may not look at all like the vehicle in front of you but they will probably share its vital characteristics.

Please note also that there is no universal agreement as to what many common vehicle terms actually describe, so we can't guarantee that everyone will agree with our descriptions or even the names we give types of vehicles.

You may get strange looks if you ask a car salesman how many ‘semi-bonnet’ vans he's got in stock (we did not invent the term, but it is not widely known outside of certain sections of the motor trade).

However, terms such as *sedan* & *saloon* are given their most commonly understood meanings.

Some terms, like ‘yuppie four-wheel drive’ and ‘yuppie four-wheel drive’, are less widely used because we invented them (the terms, not the vehicles). We believe that yuppie four-wheel drive describes this type of vehicle far better than near-meaningless terms like sport-utility vehicle, which originally meant an offroad vehicle built onto the chassis of a pickup truck. Few American ‘sport-utility vehicles’ are either sporty or practical, so that term does not usefully describe them. Nor does sport-utility vehicle adequately describe the Range Rover or the Honda CRV. For that matter, the other popular and equally misleading term, offroader, is also pretty useless to describe the current crop of vehicles, given that they are rarely used offroad. We keep the term offroader to describe vehicles primarily designed to be used offroad, or at least to be used offroad for a reasonable percentage of the time. A Range Rover is thus a yuppie four-wheel drive, while a Land Rover Defender is an offroader.



Sedan / saloon

‘Sedan’ and ‘saloon’ generally both describe a four-door car with a separate boot



Coupé

Coupé is a French word meaning *cut*. In the car world a coupé is a car that has been cut off diagonally at the back. A sloping rear end helps the car slip through the air more gracefully. However, one of the other main reasons that coupés have their backs cut off is to make them look cool.

Although coupés generally have rear seats, they often (but not always) have only two doors. A coupé may be similar to a sportscar; the major differences are that a coupé has a fixed roof (as opposed to a removable roof) and is often a sporty, somewhat upmarket variation of an existing mainstream car. The correct pronunciation is *coo-pay*, not *coop*, which is where you keep chickens.



Five-door hatchback / liftback



Three-door hatchback / liftback

A hatchback / liftback is a passenger car with two or four side doors and a hinged door (which includes the rear window) covering most of the back of the vehicle. This door lifts upwards to give easy access to the rear luggage storage area. The terms liftback and hatchback mean roughly the same thing.

Three-door hatchbacks aren't really suitable for families because the rear passengers have to climb in through the front doors, which is an absolute pain if it's a regular occurrence.

Five-door hatchbacks are very practical for small families because they can generally carry up to five passengers, and when there's no one in the back, the rear seats usually fold flat for increased luggage storage.



Station wagon / estate

A station wagon / estate is a passenger vehicle with a large luggage compartment behind the seats and an extra door at the rear. The difference between a station wagon and a hatchback is mainly one of size.

Four-door station wagons are very practical for small families because they can generally carry up to five passengers, and when there's no

one in the back, the rear seats usually fold flat for increased luggage storage.

Two-door station wagons (rare these days) aren't really suitable for families because the rear passengers have to climb in through the front doors, which is an absolute pain if it's a regular occurrence.



Panel van

A panel van is a two-door station wagon (or sometimes an actual van) that left the factory without side windows (some had windows put in later). The reason for the lack of windows on early station wagon-based panel vans was a post-World War II tax regime that favoured commercial vehicles. By leaving out the windows, a station wagon could be classified as a ‘van’ for tax purposes and thus be sold far cheaper to businesses. With time, panel vans became a style of vehicle that outlasted the original reason for their creation.



Sportscar / convertible

Typically good-looking, sportscars are also expected to have brisk performance, precise handling and good braking. A sportscar is designed primarily to be fun to drive and is thus typically impractical for more than two people. Most sportscars have only two doors. Although a sportscar may have four seats, the rear seats are often too small for comfort and are therefore usually used mainly for storage.

Sportscars commonly have removable roofs. If so, they're usually called either convertibles, cabriolets, or softtops. In a traditional sportscar, the owner will often fit the foldable softtop in spring. Softtops commonly leak, so in autumn the owner may fit a more robust roof made of a stiffer material such as hard plastic or fibreglass. These harder, not-foldable roofs are called convertible hardtops or removable hardtops.

Some modern sportscars have sliding metal roofs that convert the vehicle from an open car to a closed car at the press of a button. Those convertibles with sliding metal roofs tend to be more comfortable and practical than conventional softtops.



Flat-deck utility / ute

The word *utility* means roughly *practicality*, and a utility vehicle was originally a light truck based around a passenger car.



Many utes such as the Toyota Hilux now have little in common with their passenger car siblings, but in Australia, Ford and Holden still build utes the old-fashioned way, that is, based on an existing passenger car. The model above is a flat-deck ute because it has a flat deck and sometimes removable sides. A ute that is sold without a tray is called a *cab and chassis*.



Wellside utility / ute

A wellside ute has factory-installed sides on the tray that cannot be removed and a rear tailgate that can be opened.



Extended cab utility / ute

An extended cab ute has a passenger cabin that is a bit longer than in a single cab ute. This extended cabin may contain a kiddie-sized seat and/or be used for storage.



Double-cab / dual-cab / king cab utility / ute

A double cab ute has a passenger cabin that is roughly twice the size of a single cab ute and contains an extra passenger seat.



People-carrier / people-mover / multi-purpose vehicle / MPV

Usually based on an existing passenger car (but sometimes based on an existing van), a people-carrier is a vehicle designed primarily for carrying people and their luggage in reasonable comfort.

What distinguishes a people-carrier from a conventional car is that on a conventional car appearance is often more important than practicality. Also, on a conventional car the rear passengers are often treated as second class citizens. In most people-carriers, the rear passengers get a far more pleasant ride. People-carriers often have a higher roof than a passenger car, in order to give more headroom to its occupants.

People-carriers also usually have a significant rear luggage compartment and often have sliding

side doors to make it easier to get people in and out of the rear seats, especially in tight spaces such as carparks.

On many people-carrier versions the rear seats can be folded in multiple ways in order to increase the practicality of the vehicle. Typically, the rear seats fold flat to increase luggage storage.

Small people-carriers have two rows of seats (generally seating five passengers) and larger ones have three rows, seating six to nine people.

Smaller people-carriers are of limited use: the main reason people buy people-carriers is to carry more than five people in safety and comfort (most conventional passenger cars have seatbelts for five). Above five, however, you're stuck unless you buy a people-carrier. Because they only seat five, five-seater people-carriers often offer little safety advantage over a conventional station wagon.

Because people-carriers are aimed at families, they are widely regarded as uncool. Therefore, sales have suffered in recent years. However, in their place, trendy families have often bought seven-seater yuppie four-wheel drives.



Offroader

An offroader is a vehicle, such as the Land Rover Defender, that is designed primarily for offroad use, even though it can also be driven on public roads. Genuine offroad vehicles tend to be very rugged and not very comfortable.



Yuppie four-wheel drive / sport-utility vehicle / SUV

A yuppie four-wheel drive is a purpose-built urban four-wheel drive vehicle that sits higher off the ground than a passenger car and often has credible offroad ability.

The original yuppie four-wheel drives were for the rich only, but they have gradually become mass-market vehicles. The more expensive ones like the Range Rover are both very luxurious and generally capable of extremely good offroad performance.

However, all versions – expensive or cheap – are usually used on sealed roads because their owners are mainly city yuppies.



Softroader / crossover SUV / compact SUV

A softroader is a lightweight yuppie four-wheel drive based on an existing passenger car. For example, the Honda CRV is essentially a Honda Civic on stilts with a crude four-wheel drive system added. Few softroaders are capable of sustained offroad use and are primarily designed to be used around town. Some softroaders don't even have four-wheel drive: they just look the part.



Puppy four-wheel drive / mini SUV

A miniature yuppie four-wheel drive.



Semi-bonnet / front-wheels-forward van

Semi-bonnet designs have a somewhat car-like front and the engine and wheels in front of the driver. These vans tend to be both safer and more comfortable than forward-control vans.



Forward control van / cab forward van / COE (Cab Over Engine)

A forward-control van has its front wheels mounted below the cab and the engine mounted underneath the middle front seat. They're generally noisy, sometimes hot, sometimes uncomfortable and mostly very unsafe because there's not much between the driver and the road in front except for some thin sheet metal and the occupants' knees •

