

# Urban, suburban, exurban—it's all about having some serious fun.

By Joe Sage  
Photos by Randall Bohl

The 13th annual Carspendent.com Active Lifestyle Vehicle of the Year (ALV) awards program was held in late October, based out of the San Marcos Hotel in Chandler. With both off-road and on-road drives, ALV is the only such competition where outdoor enthusiasts, athletes and professional automotive journalists have their evaluations combined to pick the winners.

The program was expanded this year to have a separate media day on Friday, October 21, the day before the athletic civilians would drive, with an emphasis on off-roading. Media did each drive a vehicle on-road from Chandler past Saguaro Lake on the Bush Highway and Beeline Highway to an early lunch in Fountain Hills, then a second one back to But-

cher Jones Recreation Area at Saguaro Lake in the Tonto National Forest, and a third one back to Chandler at the end of the day.

But at Butcher Jones, the emphasis was on a full afternoon of challenging off-roading on a 20-minute out-and-back course with moderate elevation gain and a variety of surfaces including loose sand and rock. Manufacturers could tailor the course for specific capabilities of their vehicles by adding more challenging spurs off the main route.

Each journalist made an effort to drive every vehicle entered—27 total—with ten competing in off-road categories, while on-road vehicles could be driven on twisting local paved two-lanes.

"As the sales of models with AWD increases, so does the interest in off-pavement exploration among adventurous buyers," notes automotive



engineer Eric Noble, who helped oversee the program with his colleagues from CARLAB and acted as a jury panel member. "This feature of ALV is intended to bridge the gap between normal pavement testing and the sort of extreme crawling that requires spotters and is prone to damage vehicles."

Saturday, October 22, brought more than 50 athletes and outdoor enthusiasts from all over the country to evaluate the same vehicles on the pavement. "Individuals with active lifestyles don't want the vehicles they drive to limit where they travel, or the amount of gear they can carry," says

event cofounder Nina Russin, saying they seek vehicles that perform equally well on- and off-road, with spacious, configurable cargo areas useful for those who venture off the grid, carrying their bicycles, kayaks and camping equipment with them.

Athletes on Saturday drove and scored on-road vehicles, as well as off-road-capable vehicles on-road. Off-roading scores from the media drive on Friday were factored in with athletes' on-road scoring for the same vehicles on Saturday. A couple of categories were reportedly won by less than 1/10th of a point. The results are:

- Best Value Family** .....Ford Explorer
- Best Value Off-Road** .....Ram 1500 Rebel
- Best Value On-Road** .....Volkswagen Golf
- Extreme Off-Road** .....Nissan Titan XD
- Green** .....Jeep Grand Cherokee EcoDiesel
- Luxury Family** .....Nissan Armada
- Luxury On-Road** .....Kia Cadenza
- Urban** .....Kia Soul

The ALV awards were co-founded by Bob Babbitt, a member of the Ironman Hall of Fame, Jim Woodman, longtime journalist, triathlete and founder of Active.com, and Nina Russin, longtime distance runner and automotive journalist. ■

