

MUDFEST!

UTILITIES AND PICKUPS PUT TO THE TEST IN THE PACIFIC NORTHWEST

By Joe Sage / Photos by Doug Berger for NWAPA

ONE of our don't-miss events every year is the Northwest Automotive Press Association's Outdoor Activity Vehicle of the Year Awards, more commonly known as Mudfest. The group has several major events per year: this, an off-road-centric comparo (though with vehicles also run on a paved course), usually in the spring; Run to the Sun, a couple of days of open highway in a variety of convertible, super performance and super luxury vehicles, usually in the fall; and Drive Revolution, centered on increasingly mainstream powertrains once known as alternative, in the summer. Last year's events all fell victim to pandemic restrictions, one by one, and this year was more of the same—till this. For various reasons, the decision was made to forgo fall's Run to the Sun event, instead moving Mudfest from spring to fall.

The Pacific Northwest is a great place to spend a few days with some great people,

putting the latest hardware to some serious tests. The differences between rainforest and desert aside, they also share many commonalities of both driving conditions and vehicle preferences with Arizona.

This year's event was held for the fifth time at The Ridge Motorsports Park, northwest of Shelton, with overnights along Hood Canal (a natural body of water) near Union, Washington. The 170-acre facility features a 2.47-mile, 16-turn track with 300-foot elevation changes (which we don't use); a one-sixth-scale version of that as a kart track (which we do use); and off-road acreage modified or specially built for our purposes.

We were all set to go, our first time back on a plane in many months, when our plans hit a roadblock—a fresh Covid test would be required upon arrival. Okay, we could do that. Except that, as it turns out, we couldn't achieve it on Labor Day Week-

end, which was necessary for the test's turnaround timing. Thus we, like you, will live vicariously through the event's results.

DAY ONE, paved testing, uses the kart track for acceleration, braking, steering and handling evaluation. Day two is all off-road, with a primary course of dirt, mud, ascent, descent and embankments, plus a separate Extreme Capability course with logs, rock-crawling and generally more challenging conditions.

Vehicles are judged both days by all drivers, with scores assigned to drivetrain and performance; comfort, function and technology; styling; off-roading; fuel efficiency; and value. These tallies are very specific, but are used just as reference, as each judge then subjectively votes a 1st-2nd-3rd choice in each category. Algorithms used in vote tabulation apply balancing factors between the collective votes for paved and off-road days.

Vehicles are designated by their manufacturers to compete in any of five categories that apply for both the on-road and off-road days. SUVs and crossover utilities are split by family or luxury determination, then split again by smaller or larger size. Pickups comprise the fifth group.

Any vehicle the manufacturers choose

to run on the Extreme Capability course (on the off-road day only) is eligible for this sixth award category.

Finally, an overall Outdoor Activity Vehicle of the Year winner is voted from the overall slate of entries, separately from individual category voting.

FIFTEEN manufacturers entered 19 vehicles—six from the Detroit Three, six from Japan, five from Korea and two from Europe. The smaller family utilities were all Asian; the larger luxury utilities were both from the US; and the other utility categories were represented from all regions. The traditionally all-American pickup category had two Japanese entries, one Korean and just one from Detroit.

When normally run in the spring, this event usually has few of next year's models. Moving to the fall meant more of these, though production bottlenecks lingering from the pandemic still kept the 2021-2022 mix to about half and half.

A fewer-than-usual sixteen NWAPA members drove and voted. Votes get tight, and casual favorites are not always statistical winners or vice versa.

Results follow, with low and high noted for the range of price, horsepower, torque and highway fuel mileage within each category, to help you gauge where the winners fall.

Model year is noted for each.

(cont'd)



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SUBCOMPACT/COMPACT FAMILY UTILITY

Hyundai Tucson Limited AWD (2022)
 Mazda CX-30 2.5T Premium Plus Pkg AWD (2021)
 Toyota RAV4 Prime XSE AWD SUV (2021)

PRICE RANGE\$35,400 Mazda > \$49,776 Toyota
 POWER RANGE ...HP187 HP Hyundai > 302 HP Toyota
TORQUE.....178 LBFT Hyundai > ** LBFT Toyota

COMB MPG RANGE.....25 MPG Mazda > 38 MPG Toyota
 **This RAV4 has 165 lbft of engine torque and 199+89 lbft of electric torque front/rear, though they don't state net output.

ANALYSIS: Once the domain of economy models, the higher end of this top-selling segment attracted the most interest, with the high-powered Toyota RAV4 Prime taking the trophy. At the more affordable end, though Mazda has a lower price and higher power, Hyundai come in number two.

WINNER: 2021 Toyota RAV4 Prime XSE AWD
 302 HP, ** LBFT, 38 MPG comb, \$49,776 as tested
Runnerup: 2022 Hyundai Tucson Limited AWD

MIDSIZE/FULL-SIZE FAMILY UTILITY

Ford Bronco 2-Door Advanced 4x4 Badlands (2021)
 Jeep Wrangler Unlimited Rubicon 392 (2022)
 Kia Sorento X-Line AWD (2021)
 Subaru Outback Wilderness (2022)
 Volkswagen Atlas 2.0T SE w/Technology (2021)

PRICE RANGE\$38,120 Subaru > \$83,095 Jeep
 POWER RANGE ...HP235 HP VW > 470 HP Jeep
TORQUE.....258 LBFT VW > 470 LBFT Jeep

COMB MPG RANGE.....14 MPG Jeep > 24 MPG Kia-Subaru-VW
ANALYSIS: This special build of Wrangler skews overall price, power and fuel economy, though this special build of Bronco at \$56,150 heads to good degree in those same directions. Reflecting dazzle more than mainstream market, these two extreme vehicles swept first and second.

WINNER: 2022 Jeep Wrangler Unlim Rubicon 392
 470 HP, 470 LBFT, 14 MPG comb, \$83,095 as tested
Runnerup: 2021 Ford Bronco 2-Dr Adv 4x4 Badlands

COMPACT/MIDSIZE LUXURY UTILITY

Acura MDX SH-AWD A-Spec (2022)
 Genesis GV70 AWD 3.5T Sport Prestige (2022)
 Jeep Grand Cherokee L Overland 4x4 (2021)
 Kia Telluride SX V6 AWD (2022)
 Mercedes-Benz GLB250 4MATIC SUV (2021)

PRICE RANGE\$49,725 MBenz > \$65,045 Genesis
 POWER RANGE ...HP221 HP MBenz > 375 HP Genesis
TORQUE.....258 LBFT MBenz > 391 LBFT Genesis

COMB MPG RANGE.....21 MPG Acura-Jeep-Kia > 26 MPG MB
ANALYSIS: Price and power stats tell a tale of apples and oranges, as Mercedes-Benz brought their economy end and Genesis brought their top end. Top end again took top prize.

WINNER: 2022 Genesis GV70 3.5T Sport Prestige
 375 HP, 391 LBFT, 25 MPG comb, \$65,045 as tested
Runnerup: 2021 Mercedes-Benz GLB250 4MATIC

FULL-SIZE LUXURY UTILITY

Cadillac Escalade 4WD Sport Platinum (2021)
 Wagoneer Series II 4x4 (2022)

PRICE RANGE\$82,075 Wagoneer > \$113,065 Cadillac
 POWER RANGE ...HP392 HP Wagoneer > 460 HP Cadillac
TORQUE.....404 LBFT Wagoneer > 623 LBFT Cadillac

COMB MPG RANGE.....16 MPG Cadillac > 17 MPG Jeep
NOTES: Here, Cadillac brought a top trim, while Wagoneer entered their non-Grand model. An all-new vehicle lineup

with a notable price advantage won the day for Wagoneer.

WINNER: 2022 Wagoneer Series II 4x4
 392 HP, 404 LBFT, 17 MPG comb, \$82,075 as tested
Runnerup: 2021 Cadillac Escalade 4WD Sport Platinum

PICKUP TRUCKS

Honda Ridgeline AWD Sport (2021)
 Hyundai Santa Cruz Limited AWD (2022)
 Ram 1500 TRX Crew Cab 4x4 (2021)
 Toyota Tacoma TRD Pro (2022)

PRICE RANGE\$40,860 Honda > \$87,020 Ram
 POWER RANGE ...HP280 HP Honda > 702 HP Ram
TORQUE.....262 LBFT Honda > 650 LBFT Ram

COMB MPG RANGE.....12 MPG Ram > 22 MPG Hyundai
ANALYSIS: Price and power of the Ram TRX skewed the range of this group, while Honda was the low-end reference point for most vitals. Yet Hyundai Santa Cruz also benefited from the magic of an all-new vehicle. Urban leanings of this region may have also played their part—we have a hunch Ram's pricey big beast would have won on our home turf.

WINNER: 2022 Hyundai Santa Cruz Limited AWD
 281 HP, 311 LBFT, 22 MPG comb, price TBD as tested
Runnerup: 2021 Ram 1500 TRX Crew Cab 4x4

EXTREME CAPABILITY

From any class, as long as they were evaluated on the extreme course, making the vast majority contenders.

ANALYSIS: These results reinforce the idea seen in the Mid-size-Full-size Family Utility group: though Extreme Capability is a subset vote of all others, the judges loved the vehicles that put the Mud (and the Fest) in Mudfest.

WINNER: 2022 Jeep Wrangler Unlim Rubicon 392
 470 HP, 470 LBFT, 14 MPG comb, \$83,095 as tested
Runnerup: 2021 Ford Bronco 2-Dr Adv 4x4 Badlands

OVERALL WINNER

NWAPA Outdoor Activity Vehicle of the Year

These are also from any class, any at all. It's a separate preference vote, not a retally of categories.

ANALYSIS: Despite (or equally due to) deep analysis of a great set of entries, all-new vehicles often do well at such events, and this was no exception. In-depth analysis shows it's not just the "new and shiny" factor that prevails. Mathematically and scientifically, this is generally accompanied by any number of real world innovations and evolutions.

WINNER: 2022 Genesis GV70 3.5T Sport Prestige
 375 HP, 391 LBFT, 25 MPG comb, \$65,045 as tested
Runnerup: 2022 Hyundai Santa Cruz Limited AWD

Which categories take the overall trophy and runnerup give insights into the segments' collective direction. The expansion of this event to give equal emphasis to paved driving, despite the thematic emphasis on getting dirty, has shifted the balance between vehicle use that leans toward urban versus toward outback. Winners continue to skew toward newer releases, reflecting people's general fascination with the new and shiny, as well as advances and trends in lifestyle and real world application. How this all applies to each individual remains subjective—and is why we are all fortunate to have several hundred options available in the vehicular wonderland we all inhabit. ■

Best Subcompact/Compact Family Utility



Best Midsize/Full-size Family Utility



Best Compact/Midsize Luxury Utility



Best Full-size Luxury Utility



Best Pickup Truck



Best Extreme Capability



Best Overall : NWAPA Outdoor Activity Vehicle of the Year

