

# AUTOPIA

## Here's Our Pick for Car of the Year. What's Yours?

By Chuck Squatriglia  December 18, 2007 | 8:21:42 PM Categories: [Car Culture](#)



Choosing the best car from among the [scores of new models](#) introduced each year is invariably dicey because there are always people who say you got it wrong. But that doesn't stop the motopress from doing it at about this time each year, and for the first time, we'll join them.

We didn't see any big trends that took the auto industry in a new direction this year, but a renewed focus on diesel engines and [smaller cars](#), particularly in Europe and Japan, suggests the industry finally realizes it must produce cleaner, more fuel-efficient vehicles. If this was the year the auto industry woke up to that fact, 2008 will be the year it gets out of bed and [does something about it](#).

The industry is on the cusp of great change. Sales are falling in [America](#) and [Europe](#). Rising fuel prices have consumers [favoring thriftier cars](#). American and European policymakers are poised to significantly [tighten fuel economy](#) and [emissions standards](#). It's not at all clear how this will shake out, and the major automakers are scrambling to find their way.

And so it is that a survey of the cars various magazines and juries named the best of the year reflects the transition we're seeing in the industry, and explains how cars as

different as the [Audi R8](#) super car and [Fiat 500](#) micro car both can be considered the best of the year.

Before we name our pick for the best car of the year, we'll take a quick look at what others are saying.

Motor Trend [gave the nod](#) to the [Cadillac CTS](#), calling it the "star of a new GM revival." The editors of Playboy - not exactly known as a bellwether of auto trends, but we'll mention it anyway - also liked the Caddy but gave [top honors](#) to the Audi R8. Britain's [Evo](#), a magazine that stresses performance above all else, said the Porsche [911 GT3 RS](#) is number one. (We agree the '3 is a sweet car, but we think the [911 GT2](#), a 600-horsepower bare-knuckle brawler that is not for the weak or the stupid, remains the best 911 ever.) Car and Driver offered up a laundry list of cars as its "[10 Best](#)". With cars ranging from the [Honda Fit](#) to the Porsche [Cayman](#) and [Boxster](#), it's got something for everyone.

These are all fine cars, particularly the R8 - which isn't as good as you've heard, it's better. They're exhilarating. They're technologically advanced. And they represent some of the best work their respective manufacturers have done in years.

But they don't lead the auto industry into the future. We're not suggesting automakers stop building insanely fast cars like the 911 GT3 RS or luxurious performance sedans like the CTS. But they need to begin expending at least as much effort producing cars at the other end of the spectrum - cars an increasing number of consumers want. Subcompacts are the [fastest growing market segment](#) in the United States, and, with hybrids, clean diesels and electrics, the only ones sure to meet the tougher fuel economy and emissions regulations the automakers know are coming.

That's why it's refreshing to see the "car of the year" choices by juries of auto industry journalists, insiders and engineers. They were unanimous in selecting small, clean and efficient cars. A panel of 58 jurors from 22 countries [named](#) the Fiat 500 the European car of the year. Sixty jurors in Japan [selected](#) the Honda Fit. The Automotive Researchers and Journalists Conference of Japan [chose](#) the Mazda Demio, also called the [Mazda2](#). It's too bad only the Fit is available in North America.

And so in keeping with that theme, we offer our choices for the car of the year.



The runner up: the Fiat 500. Perhaps no car better sums up the smaller, cheaper, more efficient ethos than this update of the iconic [Cinquecento](#). It's fun, it's reasonably quick (it's a safe bet it won't be long before [Abarth](#) makes it quicker) and no car, including the [Mini](#), so perfectly pays homage to the past while looking

to the future. [Car Magazine](#) named it car of the year - over the Rolls Royce [Phantom DHC](#), Audi R8 and BMW [M3](#), among others - and said it is a car "every right-thinking enthusiast ought to be encouraging at this time." We couldn't agree more.

The 500 isn't available in America; if it were, it almost certainly would be our car of the year. We're big supporters of alternative fuels and hybrid drivetrains, but we also realize the gasoline-fueled internal combustion engine will be around for a long time to come. We'd like to see more of them in cars like the 500.

And Autopia's 2007 Car of the Year is...



The [Tesla Roadster](#). Yes, it's got a price tag approaching six figures. Yes, the first run is sold out. And yes, it's been in the pipeline for more than two years, so strictly speaking it isn't really "new." But this was the year the Tesla finally [hit the road](#) - the company is letting journalists [test drive](#) it this month - so we're including it.

The Tesla is our pick for two reasons. First, it's easily the coolest alternative fuel vehicle ever made, one that proves electric cars can be every bit as breathtaking as the finest fossil-fuel guzzling super cars. Granted, the [TZero](#) and [Venturi Fetish](#) are in the same vein, but they haven't had the impact - or the hype - of the Tesla.

But more importantly, the Tesla best represents the direction the auto industry must go. Too many automakers have churned out the same old cars year after year, growing fat and lazy on the profit margins offered by SUVs and pickup trucks. That won't work anymore, and they know it. It's time for new thinking and new ideas. It's time for *innovation*. The Tesla has those things in spades, and there's a reason Silicon Valley is emerging as [a leader in electric vehicle technology](#).

And so because of what it is and because of what it represents, the Tesla Roadster is the Autopia car of the year.