

Ranking the Best and Worst Small Cargo Vans

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2018 Ram ProMaster City. (Photo: FCA)

There's much more to the van lifestyle than super-spacious models like the Mercedes-Benz Sprinter and Ford Transit. Small cargo vans are also great options for living on the road.

These smaller models offer an impressive amount of space and capability with better fuel economy and maneuverability than their larger, thirstier siblings. They'll also leave you with a bigger budget for more of the camping, skiing and surfing gear that you want in the first place.

In order from worst to best, here are our picks for the top small cargo vans. Read on and tell us which model you'd pick in the comments section below.

4. NISSAN NV200



2018 Nissan NV200 compact cargo van. (Photo: Nissan)

Size may not be everything. But in this class, it's vital to versatility. The Nissan NV200 is the smallest van in the class, with 122.7 cubic feet of space, but it has a tall maximum cargo height of 53 inches and tight turning radius of just 36.7 feet.

Therefore, the NV200 makes great use of its size and is easy to maneuver to boot. But it is the least powerful, with a 2.0-liter four-cylinder engine making 131 horsepower and 139 pound-feet of torque. The NV200 uses the only CVT automatic transmission in the segment.

As a result, capability is light-duty at best, with a maximum payload of just 1,480 pounds. This might work for a couple of surfboards and wetsuits, but more extensive gear will overload the Nissan quickly.

The upside is that the NV200 has strong fuel economy ratings, at an Environmental Protection Agency certified 24 mpg in city driving and 26 mpg on the highway. Its warranty is a class-leading five years or 100,000 miles.

3. FORD TRANSIT CONNECT



2018 Ford Transit Connect. (Photo: Ford)

Ford's popular Transit Connect van is the second smallest in the class, offering 128.6 cubic feet of space. However, the Transit Connect offers a 49.7-inch interior height, and its rear doors open 180 degrees for easy loading. Its turning radius is 40 feet, and the Ford offers a rearview camera and front and rear parking sensors. Maximum payload is a respectable 1,620 pounds.

Ford offers two engines in the Transit Connect: a 2.5-liter four-cylinder that makes 169 horsepower and 171 pound-feet of torque; and a turbocharged 1.6-liter EcoBoost four-cylinder that cranks out 178 horsepower and 184 pound-feet of torque – though it requires premium gasoline. Both are backed by a six-speed automatic transmission, and the EcoBoost engine is EPA rated at 22 mpg city and 29 mpg highway, about the same as the Ram and better than the Mercedes.

The Transit Connect makes a strong case against the NV200, but its cargo space and payload capacity aren't large enough for it to function as the ultimate traveling toy box. Still, at a starting price of \$23,010, which is about \$500 less than the Ram and undercuts the Mercedes by \$3,000, the Ford packs quite a bit of value.

2. RAM PROMASTER CITY



2018 Ram ProMaster City. (Photo: FCA)

The Ram ProMaster City makes impressive use of its space, with 131.7 cubic feet of cargo room, which is more than the Ford or Nissan. It also has a higher maximum payload at 1,886 pounds, and is taller than the Transit Connect at 51.8 inches of interior height. The ProMaster City's rear cargo doors even open to 180 degrees.

The van is powered by a naturally aspirated 2.4-liter four-cylinder engine. Output is 178 horsepower and 174 pound-feet of torque – very similar to the Transit Connect. It's backed by a nine-speed automatic transmission, which boosts fuel economy to EPA ratings of 21 mpg city and 28 mpg highway. Like the Ford and Mercedes, the ProMaster City is front-wheel drive.

One issue could be driveability, however. The ProMaster City is more than a foot longer than the Ford, and its turning radius of 42 feet is much higher than the Nissan. The added space and payload capacity make it a great choice, but tight urban parking needs to be considered as well. Still, the ProMaster City packs plenty of appeal for lifestyle buyers.

1. MERCEDES-BENZ METRIS



2018 Mercedes-Benz Metris. (Photo: Mercedes-Benz)

More powerful and more capable than its competitors, the Mercedes-Benz Metris is the best small cargo van for the lifestyle buyer looking for a weekend on wheels. But it comes at a cost. Prices start at \$26,000 for the Metris Worker and jump to nearly \$29,000 for the Metris Cargo Van.

The Metris is powered by a turbocharged 2.0-liter four-cylinder engine producing 208 horsepower and 258 pound-feet of torque, paired to a 7-speed automatic transmission. The combination creates a class-leading maximum payload of 2,502 pounds and a maximum tow rating of 5,000 pounds – 3,000 more than the Ford or the Ram. The Metris also leads the class in interior height (55 inches) and cargo space (186 cubic feet). And while the others offer 180-degree rear cargo doors, Mercedes offers three configurations and up to 270-degree doors.

The drawback is size. Parking could be tight as the Metris has the largest wheelbase, length, width and height in the class. At 21 mpg city and 24 mpg highway, it also trails in fuel economy.

Still, the Metris offers heated seats and safety technology unique to the class such as Blind Spot Assist, Lane Keeping Assist and Collision Prevention Assist. It may be larger and more expensive than other small vans, but the Metris offers capability and amenities that simply aren't matched.