

BEYOND THE BADGE: MAZDA SURVEY UNCOVERS HOW REGIONAL DRIVERS TRULY DEFINE AUTOMOTIVE LUXURY

From tech-forward to value-driven, consumers across Albany, Columbus, Denver, Indianapolis, and Kansas City seek vehicles that align with their lifestyles

IRVINE, Calif. (April 13, 2026) – New research commissioned by Mazda North American Operations (MNAO) provides a granular look at how modern drivers in five key U.S. markets are redefining what makes a vehicle feel premium. While a significant 93% of Americans nationally prioritize personalized features over a costly luxury badge, drivers in Albany-Schenectady-Troy, Columbus (OH), Denver, Indianapolis, and Kansas City articulate distinct regional interpretations of what premium truly means.

Indianapolis: The Practicality Powerhouses

Drivers in Indianapolis stand out for their pragmatic view of vehicle ownership. More than half (65%) of respondents in Indianapolis consider a vehicle primarily as a way to get from point A to point B. This is 14% higher than most Americans.

This focus on the fundamentals translates into an aversion to paying a premium for brand status. 54% of Indianapolis respondents stated they "would not pay anything more" for a luxury brand vehicle if it were identical in every other aspect to a mainstream option, significantly surpassing the national average of 43%.

Indianapolis respondents are also likely to consider "vehicle dupes," as this market showed a strong inclination (24%) to "prefer alternatives that look and feel premium, even if they aren't well-known brands," indicating a clear preference for substance over label.

Columbus: Value-Driven and Space-Conscious Leaders

Columbus residents are keenly focused on receiving premium quality without the premium price tag. In defining "more" in a vehicle, this market was the most cost-conscious, with 35% defining value as "getting premium quality without overpaying."

This mindset remains the same even if respondents received a cash windfall. When asked what they would put a cash windfall of \$75,000 toward, with only 38% of Columbus respondents indicated they would put it toward a new vehicle, demonstrating a strong emphasis on fiscal responsibility compared to the 49% national average.

When purchasing a vehicle, practicality reigns supreme for Columbus drivers. The top priority for 45% of respondents was "more space and practicality for my lifestyle."

Denver: Where the Drive is the Destination

Denver drivers are very much connected to the driving experience, displaying a willingness to make lifestyle sacrifices for their ideal vehicle. Denver respondents agree that "how a vehicle feels to drive, not the badge or logo on the hood, is what makes it stand out" (82% vs. 78% nationally).

In addition to how the vehicle feels, drivers in Denver are prioritizing safety with 80% ranking "the most advanced active safety and driver-assist features" as the top features that make a vehicle feel high-quality and well-made.

When asked what they would give up for a year to drive their dream car for free, respondents in Denver were significantly more likely to forego their "favorite podcast" (67%), "dating apps" (67%), and even "manicures/pedicures" (68%), underscoring the impact their vehicles have on their lifestyles.

Kansas City: Tech-Forward, Performance Driven

In Kansas City, the definition of "more" in a vehicle is all about advanced capabilities and quality performance. When asked

what truly matters in a vehicle, 38% of respondents prioritize "more advanced technology and connectivity features" and 18% prioritize "more horsepower and performance capabilities."

Kansas City drivers also showed a strong appreciation for responsive handling, with 80% identifying "the responsiveness of the steering" as an "essential" or "very important" indicator of a high-quality vehicle.

Aligning with the national findings, nearly a quarter (26%) of Kansas City drivers define "more" as "getting premium quality without overpaying," merging their desire for performance and tech with a smart financial perspective.

Albany: Smart Tech and Value Minded

Drivers in the Albany-Schenectady-Troy area place a premium on advanced technology. When considering what "more" means in a vehicle Albany respondents were most inclined (41%) to prioritize "more advanced technology and connectivity features."

While Albany drivers prioritize technology, a car's brand or logo falls to the wayside. They are among the highest respondents to strongly agree they'd rather own a vehicle with "more of what truly matters to me, than own a vehicle with a luxury nameplate that costs thousands more" at 65%.

In line with their cautious approach to financial windfalls, with only 34% would put a cash windfall to a new vehicle, further cementing their prudent, value-conscious mindset.

About Mazda North American Operations

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