

# Are larger cars the stars?

When you emigrate to Canada it's almost taken for granted that you'll end up living in a much larger house compared to the one you lived in in the UK, writes **David Fuller**.

Properties in Canada tend to be much bigger than their UK equivalents – the average Canadian property has 3.5 bedrooms compared to just 2.5 in the UK – and the equity gained from selling your British home should comfortably enable you to afford a far more sizable abode across the Atlantic, complete with plenty of outdoors space, for a similar amount of money.

However, what you may not realise, or have even given much thought to, is that the car or, as is quite likely, cars parked on the driveway or in the double garage of your new home, may also be bigger than what you've been used to in Britain.

Canada's wider roads, adverse weather conditions, poorer road quality – especially in the winter – and longer driving distances – towns are often miles and miles apart from each other – mean that large vehicles are more common in Canada than they are in the UK, with many drivers viewing them as a necessity.

## TOP OF THE TRUCKS

One need only look at the top ten selling vehicles in Canada last year (see table on the right) to gain some idea of just how popular large cars or 'trucks' are in the country.

According to DesRosiers Automotive Consultants, the Ford F-Series pickup truck has been the biggest-selling vehicle in Canada for the past four years, with 281,843 being sold between the start of 2003 and the end of 2006. The F-Series is even more popular south of the border, in the United States, and has been America's best-selling car for the past 23 years. Moreover, the truck is currently responsible for making up half of the Ford Motor Company's total sales profits.

Not that the F-Series is the only large pickup truck popular with Canucks. The Dodge Ram, GMC Sierra and Chevrolet Silverado also all feature in the list of top ten selling cars in Canada for 2006, while the Dodge Caravan, which is classed as a 'small van' (people carrier), also features in the list.

Compare this with Europe's top ten most purchased cars last year (also shown in the table on the right), a list dominated by compact / small family cars like the Peugeot 307, Volkswagen Golf and Ford Focus, and you can start to see just how different car purchasing trends are on either side of the pond.

"We both now drive bigger cars than we did in the UK," confirms Darren Hobden, who emigrated to Vancouver Island with his wife Mette in early 2004. "I drive a Chevrolet Silverado 2,500HD Crew Cab Truck and Mette drives a Honda Odyssey Van (people carrier)."

"I use my truck primarily for work [landscape gardening], while Mette is a realtor and uses her van for driving clients around when she's showing them houses," Darren continues. "The van is also useful for ferrying our children and their friends about, and for driving visitors around who come over from abroad for a holiday."

Paul and Elli Looker, who emigrated to Edmonton, Alberta in January, have also quickly found the need to upsize in the car stakes.

"We now own and drive a 2004 Dodge Grand Caravan – Special Edition," explains Elli.

"It's much bigger than the Citroen Picasso we used to drive in the UK. It has a 4.5 litre engine, seven seats and tonnes of room. The kids (six and four years old) have individual captain seats and this gives them space and prevents them from arguing."

Elli continues: "We chose to purchase a bigger vehicle as we can use it for longer trips – we can fit loads into it – and it's really handy for transporting the kids and their friends. We also wanted a larger car due to the bigger roads and the vast amounts of snow we have. It's been so good this winter."

The desire to own a bigger car in Canada certainly appears to be common amongst Brits. Last month we heard from the Williamson family who now live in Nova Scotia and the Wood family from Alberta. Since they emigrated across the Atlantic both these families have also purchased larger vehicles compared to what they owned in the UK – a Ford Escape and a Dodge Ram respectively.

So, does driving a bigger vehicle in Canada take some getting used to and can it be a daunting proposition? It would appear not.

"I wasn't daunted by the larger car and I'm only 5 foot 2 inches tall," says Elli. "I actually feel safer as I'm higher up and the car holds the road well, while the larger windows make for great visibility. The snow tires do help, too."

The Hobdens were similarly unperturbed. "Neither of us were daunted as we had driven bigger vehicles at some stage of our lives before," answers Darren. "Also, the roads are bigger and wider here so they compensate the bigger vehicles."

## DOWNSIZING

However, while larger vehicles have for many years dominated the car sales market in Canada, in recent years there has been a shift towards a preference for smaller vehicles.

In fact, figures from DesRosiers reveal that 50.4 per cent of new cars bought in Canada last year could be classed as 'entry level' vehicles – subcompact cars, compact cars, compact SUVs, and small pickup trucks. In 1997 just 34 per cent of buyers bought vehicles of this size.

One need only look at the rise in small vehicle sales in the past few years to be aware of just how quickly times are changing in Canada.

Last year a Toyota Yaris (a subcom-



Big trucks such as the Chevrolet Silverado, owned by Darren Hobden (above), have long been popular in Canada – but small cars are starting to rival their popularity

compact car) was purchased by 34,202 Canadians – a 453.7 per cent increase on the number sold the year previously. In 2002 just 3,425 Mazda3s were sold to Canucks, while last year 47,933 of that particular model were snapped up by Canadian drivers, making it the fourth most popular car in Canada.

Moreover, the sales number for many popular larger vehicles, such as large vans and intermediate SUVs, are plummeting. For example, the Ford Explorer, which has been Canada's number one selling intermediate SUV for many years has experienced a dip of 14,984 in the number sold since 2002, with just 9,234 being sold to Canadians last year. Despite this, however, it remains the country's most purchased vehicle of its kind.

So what are the reasons for this shift towards smaller vehicles?

The quick and obvious answer is cost. It works out a lot cheaper to buy a new small car than it does a new truck / larger vehicle.

The average price of a new passenger car in Canada at the end of 2006 was CDN\$25,553 (approximately £11,175), while a truck was CDN\$40,480 (approximately £17,705). That said, those who are prepared to buy a larger vehicle second hand will be able to save money.

The Hobdens, for example, spent around CDN\$25,000 on each of their vehicles, both of which are 2003 models, while the Lookers paid CDN\$15,000 for their Dodge Caravan and got a set of summer tyres and a built-in DVD player with individual headsets as part of the deal.

But a lower cost isn't the only factor fuelling the Canadian desire for smaller cars.

As in the UK, the Canadian government is now placing greater emphasis on reducing the CO2 emission rates

in the country. So by choosing to purchase a smaller car, Canucks feel that they are starting to do their bit for the environment.

And, also like in the UK – where Gordon Brown's recent budget means owners of the biggest emission producing cars will now pay £300 a year just to tax it, while the drivers of the most environmentally friendly vehicles pay nothing – the Canuck government is also getting tough on owners of large cars and encouraging the ownership of smaller ones.

In the country's budget for 2007, announced in March, a rebate of up to CDN\$2,000 was made available on the purchase of a new fuel-efficient vehicle – such as a Toyota Yaris – while a Green Levy was placed on new fuel-inefficient vehicles.

This means that owners of 'gas guzzling' vehicles like large SUVs and supercharged sports cars, could face a levy of up to CDN\$4,000.

Drivers of cars over 20 years old may also face extra charges in the future as part of an attempt to get them into newer, more environmentally friendly vehicles.

Reports show that it takes 37 new cars to create the emissions produced by just one 1987 model car. According to Statistics Canada there are currently around one million vehicles older than 20 years on Canadian roads.

So just how much will these new Green levies affect those of you who have your sights set on owning a truck in Canada? Will it simply now be too expensive to purchase a large car? Next month we'll be looking at just how these new taxes work, and what Canadians themselves think about them.

■ With thanks to [www.desrosiers.ca](http://www.desrosiers.ca) and [www.caa.ca](http://www.caa.ca)

## TOP SELLERS

The following were the top ten most purchased vehicles in Canada and Europe during 2006

### CANADA (UNITS SOLD)

1. Ford F-Series (72,128)
2. Honda Civic (70,028)
3. Dodge Caravan (61,901)
4. Mazda3 (47,933)
5. Toyota Corolla (44,182)
6. Dodge Ram (39,837)
7. GMC Sierra (37,834)
8. Chevrolet Silverado (36,480)
9. Toyota Yaris (34,202)
10. Toyota Camry (28,039)

### EUROPE (UNITS SOLD)

1. Vauxhall Astra (437,673)
2. Renault Clio (431,595)
3. Ford Focus (418,490)
4. Volkswagen Golf (417,894)
5. Fiat Punto (401,022)
6. Ford Fiesta (353,296)
7. Volkswagen Passat (331,414)
8. Peugeot 307 (306,558)
9. Volkswagen Polo (294,762)
10. BMW 3-series (289,053)

Source: [www.desrosiers.ca](http://www.desrosiers.ca)  
[www.cars.uk.msn.com](http://www.cars.uk.msn.com)