

Cars for Dogs: 2009 Ford Flex

Editor of Auto Restorer magazine gives the scoop on the best new cars for dog owners.

By Ted Kade

The new Ford Flex is a crossover vehicle that crosses over in so many directions it's almost in a class by itself. Ford describes the Flex as a vehicle that dares to be different, with a distinctive design that "provokes and polarizes opinions." But for those who like to stand out in the crowd while hauling themselves and their furry friends in comfort, the Flex is worth a second look.

Cargo capacity: 20 cubic feet behind the third row of seats, 43.2 cubic feet with the third row folded, and 83.2 cubic feet when you fold the second-row seats, leaving lots of room for your dog. The vehicle's back is squared, and the liftgate opens easily to accommodate your dog's crate.

Safety: Flex has earned five-star crash ratings in National Highway Traffic Safety Administration tests. It has dual front air bags, headliner-mounted side-curtain air bags, and four-wheel anti-lock brakes, with stability and roll stability control systems.

The basics: 3.5-liter (213 cubic inch) V-6 engine; 6-speed automatic overdrive transmission; fuel economy: 17/24 with front-wheel drive, 16/22 with all-wheel drive; independent suspension systems and stabilizer bars front and rear, so you can be assured that this vehicle drives like a car, not a truck.

Luxury features: Three trim levels are available, culminating in the top-of-the line Limited, which offers luxury but also works as a pet hauler because the soft surfaces and woodgrain appliques don't extend beyond the second row of seats. Also available is a compressor-driven refrigerated center console with room for seven 12-ounce cans or four half-liter bottles — plenty of space for your dog's food and water.

The Flex starts at \$28,295.

Ted Kade is the editor of Auto Restorer magazine.