

# urbane warriors?

*Steve Williams shifts into gear about SUVs, and encounters beer-soaked hit-and-run drivers, gladiatorial assassins, and a rather domineering German.*

BY STEVE WILLIAMS

CAUTION  
CAUTION  
CAUTION



**BELOW:**  
The Suzuki Grand Vitara SUV, confines the debate, is the SUV a fuel-guzzling hazard to the environment or a safe and compact people mover?

**I USED TO TOLERATE THEM.**

People who bitch about SUVs/four-wheel drives in the city. “Who the hell needs one when you’re living in a city anyway”... blah, blah, blah.

That was until I met the “Australian of The Year”.

Let me rewind slightly –a few years ago, I was still living in Sydney, driving a Suzuki Vitara through a quiet suburban area one night with my wife and daughter. I noticed a guy in a sedan hurtling down a side street at right angles to the straight stretch we were driving on. Instead of slowing down, stopping and turning like a normal person, he accelerated through the intersection, back of the car fishtailing out, ending up on the same side of



the road as we were, heading straight towards us. It was like a bad car chase in a bad movie. I had nowhere to go, there were cars in the other lane. Split second. That wrenching, sickening sound of metal-on-metal. Head on. Then that awful silence. I checked my wife and daughter, shaken up – but thankfully not badly injured. The vehicles were locked together in that ugly embrace/twist of steel, clichéd steam rising up from under the hoods. The driver gets out, dazed, bleeding, staggers around the back of his car, reaches into his passenger window, then picks up half a carton of beer off the seat and pisses off down the road! I double-checked if my wife and daughter were okay; my wife was calling the cops, so I chased the guy down a side street. I had him bailed up in a front yard of a house, restraining myself from making his profusely bleeding skull bleed even more, when the cops ring me and tell me to get back to my car! I suggested they actually do their job and come and grab this guy, but they said I’d be charged with leaving the scene of the accident! That was a real WTF moment. Reluctantly, I trudged back to my car, the guy obviously vanished. Stolen car. He was never caught. I was very impressed.

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**BELOW:** The Porsche Cayenne SUV and Audi Q5 luxury SUV are the models now hitting the motoring marketplace. The latest models of SUV's are equipped with new designs, upgraded features and performance.

I submitted an official nomination on his behalf for "The Australian of The Year" award, citing the fact that he thought to grab his precious half-carton of the nectar of the gods after breaking about 67 road rules, being in a head-on accident and running away from the scene bleeding to death. Very Australian. Sadly, he didn't win.



Why have I bored you senseless with this story? Even though my wife, daughter and I suffered minor injuries and a bit of whiplash, the police said we were very lucky we were in a four-wheel-drive, if we'd also been in a sedan, the injuries could have been a hell of a lot worse. That's good enough for me. Sold.

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Some "experts" will argue that being higher than sedans, there is a higher centre of gravity and these vehicles have more chance of rolling. I don't know or care about that, it's all about perception and I feel safer in a four wheel drive/SUV.

Time to clarify that term. Four-Wheel-Drive/SUV/Crossover/Permanent Four-Wheel-Drive/Part-Time Four-Wheel-Drive/4WD/All-Wheel-Drive – though obviously technically different, from a car marketing point of view, they appear to have become basically interchangeable in a bizarre sort of way. I suppose the point is SUVs are more for city driving, four-wheel-drives are

for dirt. Well, they probably should be, that's a bit like saying luxury European sports cars that cost the GDP of a small country should only be on the race track, instead of screaming down Orchard Road on a Thursday night. But, hey, whatever turns you on.

"SUV" (Sports Utility Vehicle) used to be only an American term, but like the omnipresent Kardashian sisters, has infiltrated the world. You see a real mix of 4WDs and SUVs in Singapore. There are those rugged, testosterone-fuelled, full-on four-wheel drives like the Jeep Wranglers and Land Rovers ferrying around the equally indestructible Gurkhas. Then there are other versions including the Suzuki Grand Vitara, then you get into the SUV's. Pretty much every car manufacturer rolls them off the production line – BMW, Porsche, Range Rover, Lexus, Nissan, Ford, Mazda, Toyota, Hyundai, Volvo, Mercedes-Benz, Kia, Audi, Subaru, SsangYong, Renault, Volkswagen... I'm sure I've missed a few. They range in luxury levels, power, price and size from compact to "Hummer".

So what's the attraction? Perceived safety, check. Higher off the road, check. Luxury ride, check. In some, a nuclear plant-worth of power, check. The ability to transport the family in style that

isn't an embarrassingly-fugly "people mover", check. And of course, there's good old-fashioned ego – that insatiable beast that drives the motor industry globally, including Singapore. I hear the Lamborghini *Kiasu* SUV with interiors by Louis Vuitton and Hello Kitty is in production.

Are SUV's necessary in Singapore? Probably not. Apart from the hard-core four-wheel-drive diehards (see *box*) the biggest hill most of these would go anywhere near is Emerald, and the only flooded river they'd cross is if Orchard Road goes all Nile-like in a freak downpour. But who cares, it doesn't matter, it's totally a preference thing. As I said, whatever turns you on, so let's turn one on now.

Well, in the BMW X6 M you actually push, rather than turn it on.

Once you press that start button, and the M tinkered V8 4.4 litre TwinPower Turbo engine growls into life, you know you're sitting in something a bit different. Which it is – a rather unique-looking vehicle – slightly schizophrenic – part SUV, part coupé with the sharply sloping roof to a rather large butt (see earlier Kardashian reference). Reminded me a bit of Billy Ray Cyrus' 80's hairstyle – "business at

the front, party at the back". It definitely gets noticed on the road, it sits nice and high and is one big hunk of metal weighing in at over 2.3 tonnes. Imposing comes to mind, nobody cut in or pulled out in front of me.

It's when you plant your foot, you forget you're in an SUV (sorry, BMW like to call it a Sports Activity Coupé) – those 555 horses start galloping with outrageous torque and no turbo lag at all. It's a rather pleasant experience. You're red traffic light to 100km/h in 4.7 seconds. The day I drove it there were those random violent thunderstorms, with a lot of water on the road, and the X6 M stuck to the road like naughty chewing gum. Give that M button on the steering wheel a poke, and individual performance settings (which you've programmed through the car's setting menu) kick in – you can adjust the engine's characteristics, suspension and other fun stuff.

The cockpit is very comfortable, all leather and carbon-fibre goodness with the "what does this button do?" electronic gadgetry you've come to expect from our Bavarian friends. The head-up display projected onto the windscreen is a nice touch, displaying your speed, tachometer in M mode, and also telling you where to go (in the nicest possible way) when you activate the GPS. The X6 M seats four, the rear passengers have individual aircon controls, so no more arguing from the back. Vertically challenged drivers will appreciate the automatic opening and closing tailgate.

To sum up, I wish I'd been driving the BMW X6 M when I met the "Australian of The Year". He wouldn't have been running off anywhere. Experience it at Munich Automobiles ([www.munichauto.com.sg](http://www.munichauto.com.sg)) Buy the red one.

If you want to checkout the latest model SUVs in Singapore, and anything else with wheels – wander over to [www.sgcar mart.com](http://www.sgcar mart.com)



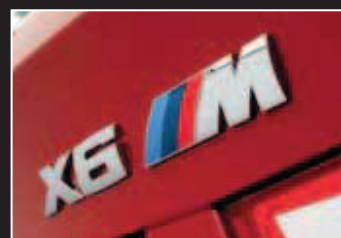


Singapore does have a few 4WD clubs although actually finding them clubs can be another matter. Not sure about all the secrecy – maybe they spend more time driving than setting up clubs and designing websites.

One of them that is definitely out there, not hiding in the greenery they like to drive in, is 4x4.sg, a club that's been operating for a few years. 4x4.sg (no prizes for guessing what their website is) holds regular events, about one every two weeks. The crew organise drives in forested areas of Singapore and Malaysia and even head up to Thailand to source parts for their vehicles.

4x4.sg pride themselves on being a true 4WD club – they prefer bouncing around off-road then sticking to the black stuff of the bitumen. The club's members – a mix of men and women – are behind the wheel of vehicles such as the Land Rover Defender, Jeep Wrangler, Toyota Rav 4, Mitsubishi L200 and SsangYong Musso. Check out 4x4.sg and head to the forum page to find out more details about upcoming events and how to join.

If you've just bought a four-wheel-drive and are looking for someone to play with, check with the car dealer about 4WD clubs for your vehicle. There are a stack of other car clubs in Singapore, some dedicated to SUVs, and also pretty much every brand of vehicle you can think of. 📍



## UNDER THE HOOD:

**MODEL :**

BMW X6 M

**ENGINE :**

4395cc, eight cylinders

**POWER :**

408kW / 555hp @ 6000rpm

**TORQUE :**

680 Nm from 1500–5650rpm

**FUEL CONSUMPTION :**

13.9 ltr / 100 km

**CO2 :**

325 g/km

**ACCELERATION :**

0 – 100 km/h in 4.7 seconds

**TOP SPEED :**

250 km/h

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