lock system works when four-wheel drive is engaged. Some systems do not.

One of the biggest but most delectable problems faced by consumers this year is the huge variety of sport utilities available. That's why Robb Report recently gathered a six-pack of the top contenders for back-to-back testing. We drove these vehicles along city streets, two-lane roads, and interstates, and then bumped, slid, and clawed our way (with varying degrees of success) through the mud and sand in the forests around Cadillac, Mich. During the off-road tests, we were advised and assisted by veteran Michigan four-wheelers Tim Sytsma, Mike Kurtti, John Seurynck, and Jim Mazzola, all of the Great Lakes Four-Wheel Drive Association.

The results of those tests follow. Essentially, we've analyzed the strengths and weaknesses of the various vehicles. Now it's up to you to choose the one that best suits your needs.

## FORD EXPLORER

EDDIE BAUER EDITION
BASE PRICE: \$23,499
PRICE AS TESTED: \$26,234

Introduced in April 1990, the Explorer is a newcomer to the sport-utility

The Explorer also had a wonderfully simple method for engaging fourwheel drive or the low range of four-wheel drive: push two buttons on the dash. No muss. No fuss.

The only complaints were that the steering felt

somewhat numb and vague when the Explorer was pointed straight ahead, and the Explorer's anti-lock braking system works only on the rear wheels. Tsk, tsk.

## **GMC TYPHOON**

BASE PRICE: \$28,995 PRICE AS TESTED: \$29,255

The strength of the two-door Typhoon is its speed—this is the Corvette of sport utilities. The Typhoon's turbocharged 4.3-liter V-6 engine generates 280 horsepower at 4,400 rpm and 350 ft lbs of torque at 3,600 rpm. The vehicle's 4-speed automatic transmission (no manual is available) matches up well with the turbocharger



A B O V E: THE JEEP CHEROKEE LIMITED IS EQUIPPED WITH A 4.0-LITER, 6-CYLINDER ENGINE THAT IS IMPRESSIVELY SMOOTH AND RESPONSIVE.

B E L O W: THE TOYOTA LAND CRUISER GOT HIGH MARKS FOR BEING STOUT AND SOLID, AND IT WAS EASY TO DRIVE OFF-ROAD.



## DKEERANGEROVERCOUNTYGMCTYPHOONOLDSMOBIL DEXPLORERGMCTYPHOONRANGEROVERCOUNTYTOYOT NDCRUISERJEEPGRANDCHEROKEEGMCTYPHOONOLDSM

field, but it has been giving the venerable Cherokee some serious competition. Although Ford provided us with the most expensive Eddie Bauer model for our test, the Explorer was the least expensive model of the six we drove.

The Explorer drew universal praise for being comfortable, quiet, and easy to drive, both on- and off-road. Its 4.0-liter V-6 engine is rated at 160 horsepower at 4,400 rpm and 225 ft lbs of torque at 2,400 rpm. Overall, the power plant is flexible and refined, and is far superior to the rough 4.3-liter V-6 (without the balance shaft) used by General Motors in some of its sport utilities.

to create acceleration that would be impressive in a car and is stunning in a truck. There is every reason to believe GMC's claim that the Typhoon will cover 0-to-60 mph in six seconds. This is one fast truck.

The Typhoon has full-time four-wheel drive, with the power split between the front and rear wheels in a 35-65 ratio. While most sport utilities have a four-wheel-drive "low" setting for traction in really nasty stuff, the Typhoon does not. That's because GMC says the Typhoon, with its relatively low ground clearance and high-performance tires, is not designed for off-road use. Well, there are lots of definitions of "off-

road," but the Typhoon is able to handle muddy, sandy roads with ease, assuming the driver uses some caution on the rougher stuff.

On smooth dirt the truck was enormous fun. Where it ran into trouble was on some sandy hills, where its high-performance tires were out of their element. One also suspects the Typhoon's high-performance tires may not handle snow very well.

On pavement, the Typhoon handles remarkably well, far better than other sport utilities. Within limits, it is the exception to the rule of not

driving sport utilities as if they are sports cars.

The major downside to the Typhoon is that it is extremely noisy; there's a lot of wind noise, tire noise, and engine noise. The 4.3-liter V-6 engine also has a well-deserved reputation for vibration. Powerful, yes. Smooth and refined, no.

The vehicle's leather-lined interior offers reasonable room for four adults and some luggage. Four-wheel anti-lock brakes are standard equipment. One driver commented that the brake pedal on the test vehicle had a soft feel.

## RANGE ROVER COUNTY

BASE PRICE: \$44,500 PRICE AS TESTED: \$44,500

Without question, the Range Rover is the most elegant sport utility sold in the United States. It is the classiest vehicle of the field—and by far the most expensive.

The County offers room for four adults in a rich environment that includes leather upholstery (yes, it is Connolly) and walnut on the dash. The electrically heated seats are comfortable. There is a huge sunroof for that big-sky feel and a compact disc player with first-rate speakers. There's room for four adults and lots of luggage.

On the road, the Range Rover's steering seemed a little soft. On the highway, the vehicle needed fairly constant attention to keep it tracking straight. However, once one becomes accustomed to these little driving idiosyncrasies, one can cruise along quite happily at 75 or 80 mph.

The Range Rover's 3.9-liter V-8 engine, combined with a 4-speed automatic transmission, provides good, smooth response; its 178-horsepower (at 4,750 rpm) and 220 ft lbs of torque (at 3,250 rpm) cope adequately with the County's 4,400-pound curb weight: The County's power is more than adequate, but more would always be nice.

The vehicle has a sophisticated full-time four-wheel drive with a console-mounted shifter for moving into low range should the going get tough. Four-wheel anti-lock brakes are standard.

The County's strength was its remarkable overall refinement. That was particularly evident off-road, where the County's occupants rode along in plush, quiet surroundings. Even over the roughest terrain, the County's suspension guaranteed a comfortable, gentle ride, so much so that its occupants could easily have served tea.

If you're worried about British vehicles' reputation for mechanical problems, a personal testimonial might help. Two years ago, we drove a stock Range Rover almost 4,000 miles through some of the roughest sections of Australia's Outback without a problem. Well, the driver's side mirror did fall off, but that might have been related to our sliding the vehicle up against a tree.