

Resisting the mini-van's siren call

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And then there were two. Our new daughter, seven weeks old as of this typing, is doing great; our older daughter is adjusting nicely considering we didn't name the baby "Avenue."

As for my husband and me, we are seeing double. We now have two sets of oversized plastic age-appropriate toys. Two loads of laundry, two bath times, two bed times, a recent Craigslist purchase of a jogger stroller for two from a nice family down on Lovett street, and last but not least, two enormous car seats.

Unless you can flatten into four square inches, you're not getting into our back seat. Our once-roomy Honda Accord can now only seat two adults: The driver and a passenger. Or, put another way, my husband and me. Friends and family need not apply. The back seat belongs to children, as evidenced from the near compost quality the floor mats have taken on. So recently the discussion at Casa Baird has been about whether we relinquish our car in lieu of the ultimate child-raising concession: The minivan.

We have a number of reservations. Naturally price is a big one. Our Accord is almost paid off and a minivan would take us back to the dim land of car payments. But, while price should be the main factor, it's honestly not.

"I just can't be the owner of a minivan, it's . . ." my husband struggled for the word, ". . . a minivan!"

I nodded.

Minivans are a symbol. Minivans mean you are unlikely to be dining out in the city or going to the late movie very often, if ever. Minivans mean that the music being played inside will involve puppets singing perky tunes that claw their way into your head and never, ever, ever stop. Minivans mean that there is a bag of crushed goldfish or damp graham crackers in the side of your door that you will forget about until next Christmas, or worse, I absentmindedly snack on. Minivans are the final, final step.

"Ok, then." I said. "We'll stick with our car and whenever anyone visits us we'll just rent." I added, "And, when we go on vacation you can choose whether our girls sleep in the pack-and-play or in your golf bag since both won't fit in the trunk."

My husband got a pained look at this point in the discussions and began to mumble about roof racks.

“Well yes,” I agreed. “Roof racks *are* cool. They in no way cement us to the suburbs and our domestic life. But, by the way, even with a roof rack I don’t think we can fit suitcases, so you’ll need to ship your clothes to our final destination.”

On top of all this, my husband recently bought a pressure washer. He explained that it will pay for itself if he uses it more than four times — plus we can take it to my family’s camp in the Adirondacks.

“Soooooo,” I mused, “perhaps, since the trunk will be holding your golf clubs or the pack-and-play, depending on who packs the car, and the suitcases will be on my lap, and the stroller and week’s supply of diapers will be in the roof rack, I guess maybe we could tow the pressure washer in a trailer. That’s pretty hip looking — to have a roof rack up top and a trailer in tow.”

We test drove two minivans.

Both felt like spaceships to me. They were gigantic and full of glowing, ergonomically correct buttons and knobs that, I don’t know, communicated with the International Space Station. My 6-foot, 6-inch husband fit into them with an ease he has never had with our Accord. He floored them on the highway and admitted they had a nice pickup to them. And with all the interior room, our car seat collection would be a mere blip.

And yet, as I type, I’m staring out the window at our Accord. Recently, when my parents came to see the new baby, I rented a car so that they didn’t have to walk to Ipswich when we went to church. And this Memorial Day when we go and open the family camp, I’ve rented — wait for it — a minivan.

The cost of renting is still less than buying our own terra-firma spacecraft. Plus, driving a rental minivan is waaaaayyy cooler than driving one that we actually own.

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