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Consumer Survey 2024

Vehicle Ownership, and Its Role as a 'Third Space,' Alive, Well and Enduring

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Consumer Survey 2024

Personal vehicle ownership is important to 92%, nearly half view their vehicle as a third space and 62% predict it will eventually become an extension of living room or office

In the years before the pandemic, when self-driving vehicles seemed around the corner and ride-sharing was hitting its stride, some pundits and industry players predicted the demise of personal vehicle ownership, with the disruption expected as soon as 2021 [in one accounting](#) and private car ownership destined to [“all but end” by 2025](#). Then came the pandemic, and the personal vehicle became the only Covid-safe way to get around, while also offering consumers one of the few refuges away from home as the world shut down. Meanwhile, self-driving vehicles have not taken over the roads as rapidly as [some expected](#). And while, according to current survey data, a slim majority of consumers anticipate using a self-driving vehicle in the distant future, they continue to have worries: 70% say they do not trust self-driving technologies.

So, it is hardly surprising that this report reveals that personal vehicle ownership is alive, well and enduring, and that car owners are continuing to view their vehicle as an important third space, a place to relax and escape the stresses of work or home. But, as the pandemic has challenged traditional ideas about both living and work spaces, car owners also see a future where their personal vehicle can become an extension not only of their living room, but also of their office.

This report, commissioned by DTS, Inc., presents the findings of a survey of 3,217 U.S. consumers, at least 18 years old, who currently own or lease a vehicle. The survey was fielded from September 5-9, 2024.

Importance of Having a Vehicle



Not Likely to Give Up Personal Vehicle in Next Few Years



**65% of Gen Z
and 63% of
Millennials**
consider their
vehicle as a
'third space'.

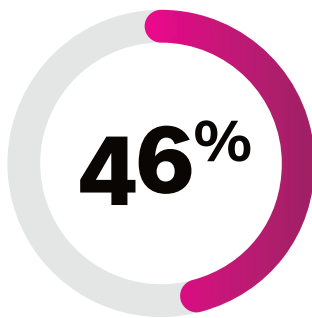


Personal Vehicle Ownership Is Strong, Nearly Half View It as a 'Third Space'

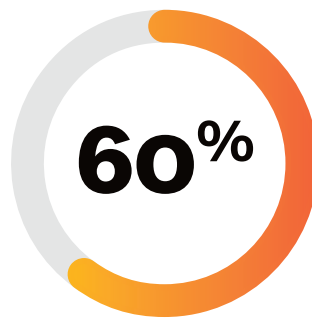
A [survey conducted by DTS in 2021](#), just as the world was starting to emerge from the worst of the pandemic, revealed that close to half (47%) of all vehicle owners felt their personal vehicle, had become more important than ever, with discomfort with public transportation or ride-sharing, and a perception of their vehicle as a place of refuge, cited as key reasons, with over one-third viewing their vehicle as a place of refuge. In 2022, [DTS' followup report](#) showed that nearly half of drivers (49%) were *more likely* to view their vehicle as a third space (after the first space of home and second space of work), than they were pre-pandemic.

While ride-sharing has returned and autonomous vehicles are gradually appearing, neither will be replacing the personal vehicle any time soon. 92% say their personal vehicle is important and only 19% expect to give it up in the next few years. And, hand in hand with this, what consumers expressed as a likelihood in 2021, has become today's reality: 46% of today's respondents say they view their vehicle as a third space, with the vast majority of luxury/ultra-luxury vehicle buyers, and two-thirds of Gen Zers, also viewing it that way.

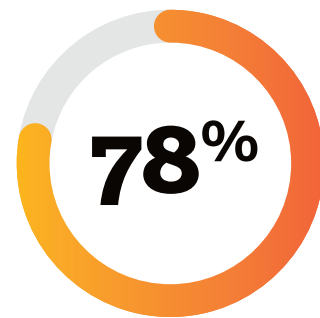
Consider Car a 'Third Space'



Overall Car Owners



Luxury Car Owners

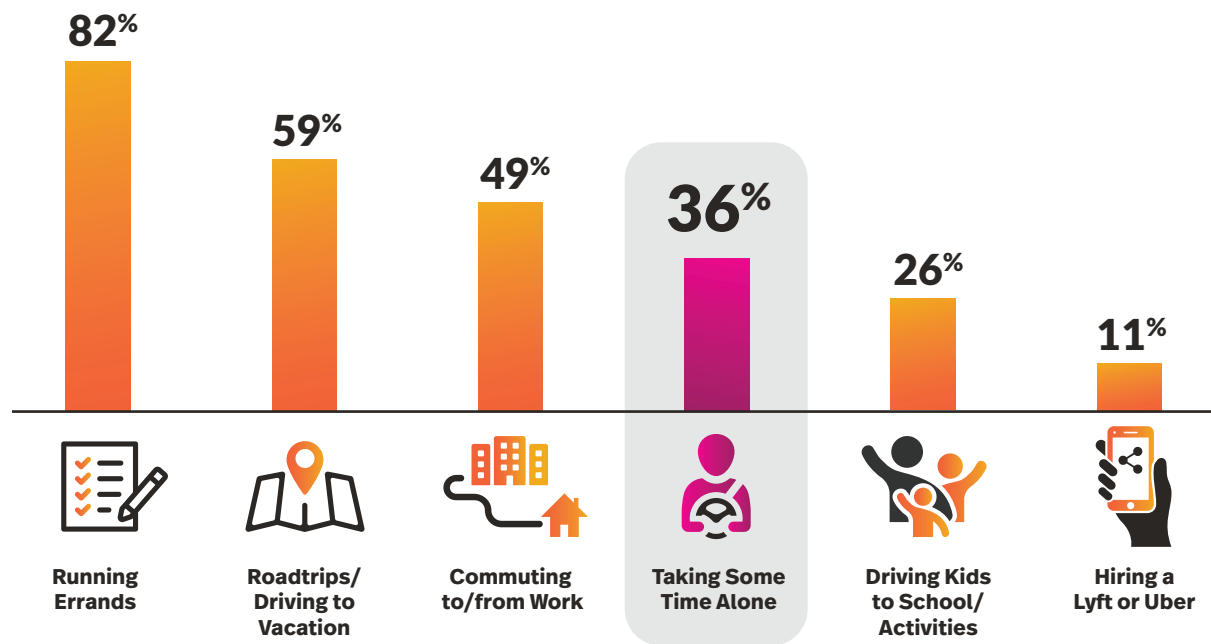


Ultra-Luxury Car Owners

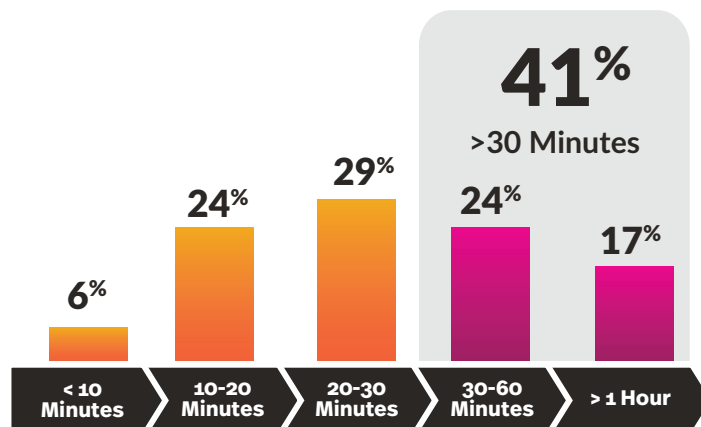
One in Three Use Their Car for ‘Alone Time’

Clues as to why many view their vehicle as a third space can be found in some of the reasons for spending time in a car. Predictably, running errands around town, commuting and road trips dominated the list but, notably, 36% cited ‘taking some time to get away alone’ as a reason for spending time in the car. Apart from time spent for vacation trips, it indexed the highest for time spent before arriving at their destination, with 41% saying they spend 30 minutes or more ‘taking time alone’.

Reasons Drivers Spend Time in a Car



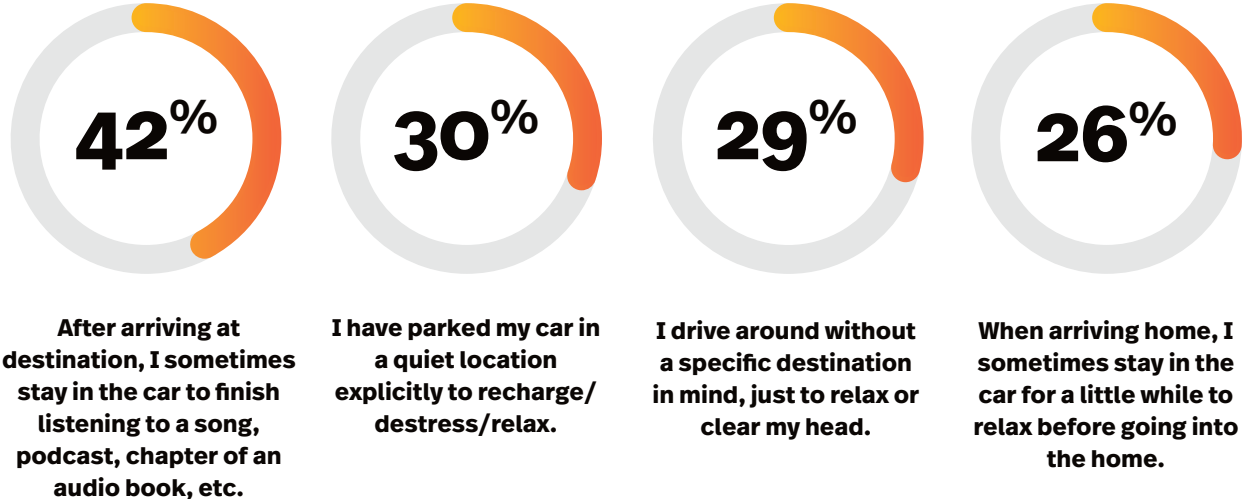
Time Drivers Typically Spend in the Car When Taking Alone Time



Consumers Report Using Their Vehicles to Destress/Relax

Four years after the pandemic, the vehicle’s role as a place of refuge remains. Consumers say their vehicles are not just for getting to a destination, but often function as a third space for relaxation. In line with the over one-third of consumers who spend time in the car for alone time, 30% have parked their car in a quiet location to recharge, destress and relax, and over one in four (29%) have driven around *without* a specific destination, just to clear their head or relax. Respondents also report they have stayed in their car past arriving at their destination to relax before going into the house (29%) or to finish listening to a song, audiobook chapter, podcast, etc. (42%).

‘Third Space’ Activities Done in Car



Audio Is the Most Important Entertainment

When asked what kind of entertainment they prefer when taking some time alone in the car, audio entertainment had the highest number of respondents (88%), with 21% using video. In fact, audio was the entertainment of choice, regardless of why respondents were spending time in their vehicles, except for Lyft/Uber riding which, understandably, indexed higher for video. Overall, 44% of respondents say they have watched video in a car, but while it was parked.



88% Of drivers use **audio entertainment** when alone in the car.

62%

of consumers
will not buy a
vehicle without
AM/FM radio



Interestingly, the main reasons video is watched in the car are to pass the time while waiting (58% of video watchers) or to keep children entertained (38%). Most video sessions in the car are under 20 minutes and primarily use short-form video, with the exception of road trips, which rely more on longer-form video like TV shows and movies.

Respondents' desire for audio entertainment comports with results showing that 62% of consumers would not even consider buying a vehicle if it did not have AM/FM radio available. And, when it comes to the kinds of audio consumers want, 71% cited music as essential to the driving experience – which is to be expected, given that this format is the most traditional for vehicles.

Comfort Ranks as Top Third Space Improvement

Given the importance to consumers of their personal vehicle for relaxation away from the stress of home and work, automakers might want to take note of features consumers say would make their vehicle a better third space. Not surprisingly, making the vehicle more physically comfortable inside ranked the highest, closely followed by intuitive personalization – automatically adjusting seat position, lighting and temperature to their preferences when they get in. A system able to respond to verbal commands, having as many entertainment choices on their vehicle's infotainment system as on their TV or mobile device and being able to automatically pay tolls, parking fees, etc. rounded out the top five.

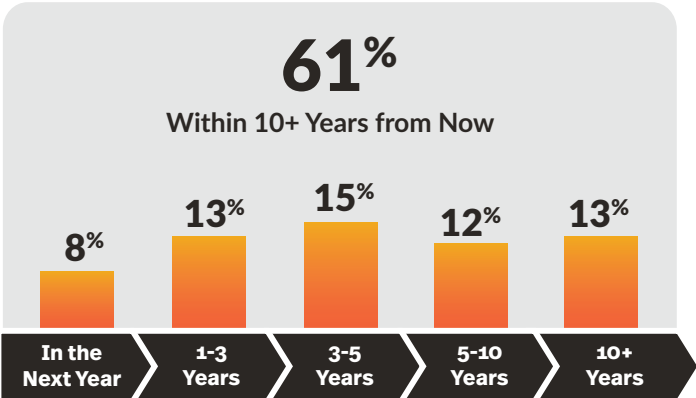
Automakers might want to take heed that consumers are indicating that a vehicle that 'knows you' has tremendous potential to further enhance their third-space experience, making it more immersive, more efficient, more productive and, as such, an extension of their first and second spaces.

Personal Vehicle as Third Space Is the Future

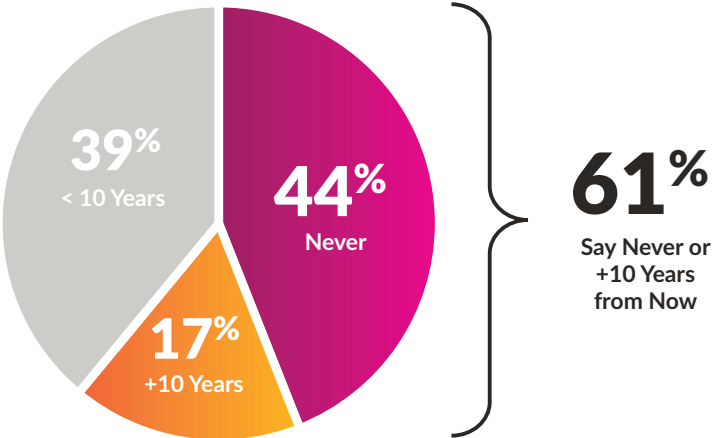
So, will the personal vehicle, and its role as a third space, continue to be important in the years to come? “Yes,” say respondents who predict that personal vehicle ownership is here to stay for quite some time and that it will, in a sense, become an extension of their first and second spaces as well. Sixty-one percent of respondents say that consumers will *never* give up their personal vehicles or, if it happens, it will be over ten years from now.

Sixty-one percent also expect their vehicle to eventually become an extension of their office or living room – a place to work, play and relax, with 36% expecting that to happen in the next five years and 26% saying it will happen more than five years from now. These consumers are prescient as the technology is already in place for just such a scenario – a vehicle dash/cabin that could follow the owner’s current digital ecosystem in home/office and mobile, and seamlessly continue that infotainment experience into a vehicle that is able to anticipate their needs.

Majority of Consumers Say Vehicles Will Eventually Become an Extension of Their Office or Living Room



Majority of Consumers Will Not Give Up Their Vehicles





As consumers **embrace their cars as a 'third space'** for relaxation, entertainment and comfort, the future of automotive design hinges on enhancing these experiences.

Conclusion

Reports of the demise of the personal vehicle have been greatly exaggerated, as this report demonstrates, and its function as something beyond a mode of transportation continues to be important to consumers. Whether consumers choose to quietly relax/destress in their vehicle, listen to music (or watch video when it is parked), they are clearly indicating that its role as a third space is as strong as ever and, to that end, they want improved comfort, automation and entertainment choice. In this context, the fact that luxury/ultra-luxury owners – who already have many of these future-looking features – and automakers' future customers, GenZ, the youngest cohort, index the highest for viewing their vehicles as a third space, offers big hints for automakers, not only for future design, but also in how to ensure personal vehicle ownership endures for the long term.



About DTS, Inc.

Since 1993, DTS has been dedicated to making the world sound better. Through its pioneering audio solutions for mobile devices, home theater systems, cinema and beyond, DTS provides incredibly high-quality, immersive and engaging audio experiences to listeners everywhere.

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