

ENGLISH LEARNING FOR CURIOUS MINDS



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Episode #299
The Rise of the SUV
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[00:00:00] Hello, hello hello, and welcome to English Learning for Curious Minds, by Leonardo English.

[00:00:11] The show where you can listen to fascinating stories, and learn weird and wonderful things about the world at the same time as improving your English.

[00:00:20] I'm Alastair Budge, and today we are going to be talking about the rise of the SUV, the "Sports Utility Vehicle".

[00:00:30] SUVs have overtaken the car market.

The Rise of the SUV

[00:00:33] With their [off-road¹](#) [heritage²](#) they have become the [heavyweight³](#) of roads across the globe, [towering over⁴](#) traditional [hatchbacks⁵](#), and taking 4-wheel-drive from the American highway to the [winding⁶](#) streets of Europe to the ring roads of Beijing.

[00:00:48] So, in this episode we are going to look at the story of how the SUV took over the world.

[00:00:57] OK then, the rise of the SUV.

[00:01:02] First off, what actually is a SUV, a Sports Utility Vehicle?

[00:01:08] The term SUV was first used in the U.S in the 1980s but it is not a [strict⁷](#) category and includes various cars that have either four or two-wheel drive.

¹ for use over ground which is not smooth or even

² features that have lasted and proved important

³ objects that are heavier than others

⁴ being much taller than

⁵ cars with an extra door at the back which opens upward

⁶ involving a lot of turning

⁷ limiting, specific

The Rise of the SUV

[00:01:21] They are larger than [saloon](#)⁸ or [sedan](#)⁹ models with wider and taller bodies and their raised [suspension](#)¹⁰ leaves them higher off the ground, they are able to [conquer](#)¹¹ all types of [terrain](#)¹² if necessary.

[00:01:34] And their ability to drive [off-road](#) is where it all began, for the [origin](#)¹³ of the SUV is in U.S military vehicles.

[00:01:44] Before the Second World War, the American army called for a [sturdy](#)¹⁴ four-wheel drive vehicle that could transport soldiers over [rough](#)¹⁵ [terrain](#).

[00:01:53] The company 'Willys Overland' responded to the army's request and supplied it with a [prototype](#)¹⁶, the 'Jeep', which became the standard military vehicle that we likely all recognise today.

⁸ a car having a closed body and a closed separated space intended for luggage

⁹ a car having a closed body and a closed separated space intended for luggage

¹⁰ the system of devices by which a vehicle is supported on its wheels

¹¹ overcome, control

¹² ground, area of land

¹³ beginning

¹⁴ strong, resilient

¹⁵ not even or smooth

¹⁶ first version of the vehicle

The Rise of the SUV

[00:02:07] 700,000 Jeeps were produced for World War II with the help of the Ford Motor company; and the vehicles played a vital role carrying soldiers, weapons and medical equipment over the battlefields.

[00:02:22] Clearly, in times of war, when you really do need to drive over difficult [territory](#)¹⁷ and you need to have a [durable](#)¹⁸ and [reliable](#)¹⁹ vehicle, this is exactly the sort of vehicle you want.

[00:02:36] After the war, the Jeep 'CJ', short for civilian Jeep, went on sale to the American public. The vehicle was still very [influenced](#)²⁰ by its [initial](#)²¹ open-body military design, though, with no roof or no doors they would have looked more appropriate [trudging](#)²² through the battlefields than [cruising](#)²³ along the American highway.

¹⁷ area of land

¹⁸ able to last

¹⁹ able to be trusted

²⁰ affected

²¹ of the beginning

²² moving slowly and with difficulty

²³ travelling with ease

The Rise of the SUV

[00:02:58] Inspired by the [innovations](#)²⁴ they saw across the Atlantic, British brothers Maurice and Spencer Wilks also decided to put their engineering skills to the test and produce their own four-by-four vehicle.

[00:03:12] Using a similar design to the Jeep, they produced the ‘Land Rover’, which [debuted](#)²⁵ in 1948 and quickly became a popular vehicle for farmers.

[00:03:24] Clearly, for a farmer who needs to drive through fields and [ditches](#)²⁶, such a car simply made sense, if you’re a farmer you do literally need to [rove](#)²⁷ across the land.

[00:03:36] Not long after, in 1950, the Korean war [broke out](#)²⁸ and the U.S military based in Japan called for the manufacturer Toyota to develop a [suitable](#)²⁹ vehicle for the battlefield.

[00:03:49] However, the military were [unimpressed](#)³⁰ by the [prototype](#) offered and stuck with their [trusty](#)³¹ American Jeep.

²⁴ new ideas

²⁵ was presented for the first time

²⁶ long, narrow holes in the ground

²⁷ move around

²⁸ began suddenly

²⁹ appropriate, acceptable

³⁰ not impressed or interested in it

³¹ able to be trusted

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[00:03:57] Nonetheless, in 1953, Toyota produced the ‘Land Cruiser’ model, which quickly became the vehicle of choice for the Japanese police force. In the same year, Mitsubishi were given permission to reproduce the Jeep for themselves and bring it to the Japanese market.

[00:04:14] Back in America, the popularity of the Jeep CJ, the “civilian jeep”, had led to a newer, more comfortable, [civilian³²](#) model in 1955.

[00:04:25] By this time, the manufacturer, now named Willys Motors, had become known as ‘the world’s largest maker of four-wheel drive vehicles’.

[00:04:36] It was not until 1963 though, that a more ‘car-like’ Jeep was produced with the release of the Wagoneer model.

[00:04:44] This offered the luxury of doors and a roof, as well as more comfortable interior and less [rigid³³ suspension](#) which gave it a smoother ride.

[00:04:55] Similarly, in 1967 Toyota [adapted³⁴](#) their Land Cruiser, transforming it from a police vehicle to a [rival³⁵](#) of the Jeep or Land Rover. It too was more [luxurious³⁶](#) than its

³² made for citizens and not for members of the police or the army

³³ fixed, stiff or not flexible

³⁴ changed to fit the new conditions

³⁵ competitor, challenger

³⁶ very comfortable

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[predecessor](#)³⁷, and brought the utility of a four-by-four [in line with](#)³⁸ the more [civilian](#) friendly models taking over the market in the U.S.

[00:05:19] The popularity of the Jeep in the United States saw many other manufacturers such as Dodge, Chevrolet and Land Rover continue to develop and expand their own models.

[00:05:31] Car production, however, was still somewhat of a wild west, it was still quite [unregulated](#)³⁹.

[00:05:38] This all changed in the 1960s, when there were massive improvements in safety regulations.

[00:05:44] In the 1960s it became [mandatory](#)⁴⁰ for cars to be produced with seatbelts; and in the 1970s and 80s, the U.S government issued [mandates](#)⁴¹ to reduce pollution from vehicles, increase fuel efficiency and improve car safety overall.

[00:06:02] While this was clearly good news for drivers, and—in the short term at least—for the environment, it wasn't good news for car manufacturers.

³⁷ the model it replaced

³⁸ in agreement or accordance with

³⁹ not controlled by laws

⁴⁰ demanded by law

⁴¹ official orders

The Rise of the SUV

[00:06:11] This period in American car history has become known as the ‘[malaise](#)⁴² era’, with the strict new list of regulations massively impacting car design as manufacturers were not prepared. There was no technology to continue producing these big muscle car engines that would [abide by](#)⁴³ the new limits on [emissions](#)⁴⁴.

[00:06:32] But importantly, SUVs were, until 2004, not [classified](#)⁴⁵ in the same way as normal cars, they were [classified](#) as a truck, not a car, which allowed them to be less fuel-efficient.

[00:06:48] And while the [archetypal](#)⁴⁶ American muscle cars such as the Ford Mustang and Dodge Charger weren’t able to [abide by](#) these stricter [emissions](#) requirements, SUVs, because they weren’t [classified](#) as cars, they were [classified](#) as trucks, they needed to make some [adjustments](#)⁴⁷ but they could [comply with](#)⁴⁸ the new regulations.

[00:07:11] By the 1980s, American car manufacturers were used to the regulations and they could produce a wider variety of models.

⁴² trouble, anxiety

⁴³ follow, obey

⁴⁴ production or release of gas

⁴⁵ arranged in categories

⁴⁶ most typical or characteristic

⁴⁷ small changes

⁴⁸ follow, obey

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[00:07:20] One of those models was the original SUV, the Jeep Cherokee XJ, which came out in 1984.

[00:07:30] This model was more compact and lighter in comparison to the previous Jeep models which made it more fuel-efficient and consumer friendly. It was also far more comfortable and good for families.

[00:07:43] This Cherokee [bridged the gap](#)⁴⁹ between a four-by-four and a passenger car and it was a huge success. It was in the media celebration of this car that the term SUV, Sports Utility Vehicle, was originally used.

[00:08:01] When other car manufacturers realised that Jeep was taking away sales from classic [sedan](#) and [hatchback](#)⁵⁰ models, they wanted their share of the success and throughout the 1990s more and more SUV models were released.

[00:08:16] By the mid-90s the SUV [craze](#)⁵¹ was well [underway](#)⁵² and by 1999 sales of SUV and pick-up trucks in the U.S [exceeded](#)⁵³ regular passenger cars.

⁴⁹ reduced the differences that separated them

⁵⁰ a car with an extra door at the back which opens upward

⁵¹ extreme popularity

⁵² having started and being in progress

⁵³ were greater than

The Rise of the SUV

[00:08:30] Eventually, the [trend](#)⁵⁴ would spread worldwide and between 2010 and 2021, SUV sales increased by 178% globally.

[00:08:41] This [trend](#) shows no signs of slowing down and in 2021 the number of SUVs on the road increased globally by over 35 million, with SUVs making up 49.7% of all car sales in Europe.

[00:08:59] And if you add “trucks and [pickups](#)⁵⁵” together with SUVs, this category makes up 72.9% of all new cars sold in the United States.

[00:09:11] And this [phenomenon](#)⁵⁶ is, as you will well know, taking over the world.

[00:09:16] Almost. Some SUVs are just simply too big for some urban environments.

[00:09:22] [Boxy](#)⁵⁷ American SUVs like the popular Ford Expedition, for example, didn't quite make it to Europe.

[00:09:29] At over 5 metres long and over 2 metres wide, the model is just not a good fit for the [narrower](#)⁵⁸ and urban roads of Europe.

⁵⁴ the general direction in which people behaved

⁵⁵ small trucks

⁵⁶ situation that exists

⁵⁷ looking like a box, having the shape of a square

⁵⁸ having less distance from one side to the other

The Rise of the SUV

[00:09:39] Instead, slightly more compact models such as the Peugeot 3008 have proved popular.

[00:09:46] Asia, too, has [championed⁵⁹](#) slightly more compact models.

[00:09:50] So how and why did SUVs get so popular?

[00:09:55] Well, perhaps you drive an SUV yourself, so you have your own reasons for choosing one over a smaller car.

[00:10:03] People, especially families, are attracted to the vehicle's [versatility⁶⁰](#), with its ability to go [off-road](#), its larger [cargo⁶¹](#) space, potential for more seats, and [towing⁶²](#) abilities, it seems like you get more for your money.

[00:10:18] But one of the key things that people value, of course, is safety and these cars are often [marketed⁶³](#) on their ability to protect your family.

[00:10:30] Many people believe an SUV is a safer choice, being bigger, [bulkier⁶⁴](#) and taller.

⁵⁹ supported, promoted

⁶⁰ able to be used for different purposes

⁶¹ the goods carried by a vehicle

⁶² pulling something behind a vehicle

⁶³ advertised, promoted

⁶⁴ larger

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[00:10:37] They have a better view over the road, their four-wheel drive gives a certain sense of security no matter the weather, and if you do hit something then it's better to be hitting it in a massive truck than a small [hatchback](#), a small car.

[00:10:53] And of course, if, statistically, over half of the cars on the road are SUVs, from a safety point of view you'll be safer in a crash if you too are in an SUV.

[00:11:05] Or at least that is the popular belief.

[00:11:08] There are, in fact, [critics](#)⁶⁵ of SUVs who say that they may not actually be much safer than other cars.

[00:11:15] And by "safer", I don't just mean safer for the people in the car.

[00:11:20] A study from the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration suggests that their design makes them twice as likely to [roll over](#)⁶⁶ in a crash; while their large size is more likely to kill [pedestrians](#)⁶⁷ in comparison with [sedan](#) vehicles that typically impact the lower body.

[00:11:38] An article in Economics of Transportation reported that in the United States, [pedestrian](#)⁶⁸ deaths increased by 30% between 2000 and 2019, a period when the

⁶⁵ people who express their disapproval

⁶⁶ turn upside down

⁶⁷ people who are walking

⁶⁸ of people who were walking

The Rise of the SUV

number of SUVs tripled. These figures are alarming when we consider that these popular cars have begun to [flood](#)⁶⁹ our cities, only increasing chances of [collisions](#)⁷⁰.

[00:12:03] In the UK, in fact, three quarters of SUVs are registered to urban areas, to towns and cities.

[00:12:11] This explains why they have become known as ‘Chelsea Tractors’, the term capturing how they [plough](#)⁷¹ through the middle-class streets, somewhat out of place.

[00:12:22] They are so popular in British urban areas that in 2016, the UK’s largest car park operator had to [widen](#)⁷², it had to [enlarge](#)⁷³ its parking bays in the cities of London, Manchester and Bournemouth to make space for these cars.

[00:12:39] In America, the [influx](#)⁷⁴ of SUVs in urban centres has been described as ‘truck [bloat](#)⁷⁵’, this reflects how uncomfortably these cars fit in the streets.

[00:12:52] Not all cities are [accepting this sitting down](#)⁷⁶.

⁶⁹ appear in large amounts

⁷⁰ accidents that happen when two vehicles hit each other

⁷¹ move with force

⁷² make them more wide

⁷³ make them larger

⁷⁴ arrival in large numbers

⁷⁵ extreme amount of them

⁷⁶ accepting this without reaction

The Rise of the SUV

[00:12:56] In a first for the United States, Washington D.C. has proposed requiring owners of vehicles weighing over 2.7 metric tonnes to pay an annual fee of \$500.

[00:13:08] It might not sound like a huge amount, especially to car owners in Europe, but this is nearly seven times the amount the city charges for a [sedan](#) model.

[00:13:18] In Berlin, the issue of SUVs in the city became painfully obvious when in 2019, a driver lost control of their SUV and [mounted](#)⁷⁷ the [pavement](#)⁷⁸ killing four people.

[00:13:33] And clearly, it isn't just a case of SUVs [clogging up](#)⁷⁹ the road or being a danger to [pedestrians](#).

[00:13:39] They are terrible for the environment, producing 25% more CO2 than medium sized cars.

[00:13:47] And because there are now so many SUVs on the road, if SUV drivers were a country, it would rank 7th in the world for its carbon [emissions](#), worse than the U.K and the Netherlands combined.

[00:14:02] In the UK in fact, SUVs have [cancelled out](#)⁸⁰ the impact electric vehicles have had on [emissions](#).

⁷⁷ climbed or moved onto

⁷⁸ the raised path on the side of the road that people walk on

⁷⁹ blocking

⁸⁰ removed

The Rise of the SUV

[00:14:09] And perhaps even more [stunningly](#)⁸¹, the International Energy Agency found that the rise of the SUV is the second largest cause of the increase in global [emissions](#) across the last decade.

[00:14:22] As a result, there is an increasing [backlash](#)⁸² against SUV manufacturers.

[00:14:29] Some critics have [called for](#)⁸³ a ban on adverts for SUVs, comparing the vehicles to tobacco for the threat they [pose](#)⁸⁴ to public health, and claiming that SUV adverts have similarly [misled](#)⁸⁵ the public with their safety claims.

[00:14:46] The idea is, of course, that if SUV manufacturers can't [market](#)⁸⁶ their products to consumers, demand will [fall off a cliff](#)⁸⁷, it will drop dramatically, and so will SUV [emissions](#).

⁸¹ in an impressive or very surprising way

⁸² strong negative reaction

⁸³ publicly asked or demanded

⁸⁴ cause

⁸⁵ caused them to have a wrong idea or impression

⁸⁶ advertise, promote

⁸⁷ drop dramatically

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[00:14:59] And all this is against a [backdrop](#)⁸⁸ of global increasing [hostility](#)⁸⁹ to all urban driving, not just SUVs.

[00:15:08] Paris, in France, plans to ban all private vehicles from the historical city centre by 2024.

[00:15:16] By the same year, Rome will ban diesel cars in an attempt to [preserve](#)⁹⁰ the historic sites from pollution damage.

[00:15:24] And [countless](#)⁹¹ other cities across Europe plan on removing fossil-fuel cars from their centres over the next five years.

[00:15:32] Many more cities have similar [bold](#)⁹² plans, and countries across the globe are, at least [nominally](#)⁹³, in the process of [phasing-out](#)⁹⁴ fossil fuel vehicles entirely.

[00:15:44] The EU has the target of a 100% CO2 [emissions](#) reduction for new vehicles by 2035, while the U.S is aiming for 50% of new vehicles to be electric by 2030.

⁸⁸ background

⁸⁹ negative reaction, opposition

⁹⁰ keep them as they are, stop further damage

⁹¹ too many to be counted

⁹² brave, showing no fear of taking risks

⁹³ in thought, not in fact

⁹⁴ removing in stages or gradually

The Rise of the SUV

[00:15:58] Given their big, polluting engines, the [fate⁹⁵](#) of the SUV certainly sounds [precarious⁹⁶](#), it looks dangerous.

[00:16:07] That is until you discover that over 55% of electric car models on the market in 2021 were, in fact, SUVs and pickup trucks.

[00:16:18] [In anticipation of⁹⁷](#) where public opinion and public policy is heading, car companies like Volkswagen, Ford, Mercedes and Volvo have all declared they will be stopping their production of gas and diesel powered engines.

[00:16:34] Instead, these companies will be producing only electric vehicles, with many of those electric vehicles SUVs.

[00:16:42] The futuristic Tesla 'Cyber Truck' is also [on the horizon⁹⁸](#), with production due to start after 2022.

[00:16:50] This model claims it will have 'better utility than a truck with more performance than a sports car'.

⁹⁵ what will happen to them at the end

⁹⁶ dangerous

⁹⁷ expecting and being prepared for

⁹⁸ coming soon, approaching

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[00:16:57] It's certainly a **bold claim**⁹⁹, and the announcement of Tesla's new truck has been so popular that it has had to **suspend**¹⁰⁰ pre-orders.

[00:17:06] However, being electric does not completely **eradicate**¹⁰¹ concerns over SUVs.

[00:17:12] Their large size still leads to problems as they require larger batteries and consume more energy in comparison to other electric vehicles. The batteries for electric vehicles themselves are not particularly eco-friendly, as the **mining**¹⁰² of the raw materials required has major environmental and human rights impacts.

[00:17:34] Despite all this, it's clear that SUVs, both electric and fossil-fuel powered, are the **choice**¹⁰³ model for many drivers all over the world.

[00:17:44] It's quite the journey from a car produced for the army that, just to remind you, when it was first released, didn't even have any doors.

[00:17:55] Ok then, that is it for today's episode on the rise of the SUV.

[00:18:00] I hope it was an interesting one and you learned something new.

⁹⁹ statement or saying showing that it is true

¹⁰⁰ stop for the time being

¹⁰¹ remove completely

¹⁰² removal of materials from the ground by digging

¹⁰³ best, prime

The Rise of the SUV

[00:18:04] As always I would love to know what you thought about this episode.

[00:18:07] What are your thoughts on SUVs, do you love them or do you [loathe¹⁰⁴](#) them?

[00:18:12] If you drive an SUV, what was it for you that made you [make the switch¹⁰⁵](#) from a smaller car?

[00:18:18] Do you think that SUVs are overcrowding our cities or do you think they're just the same as a traditional car?

[00:18:24] I would love to know, so let's get this discussion started.

[00:18:28] You can head right into our community forum, which is at community.leonardoenglish.com and get chatting away to other curious minds.

[00:18:37] You've been listening to English Learning for Curious Minds, by Leonardo English.

[00:18:42] I'm Alastair Budge, you stay safe, and I'll catch you in the next episode.

[END OF EPISODE]

¹⁰⁴ hate

¹⁰⁵ make the change

Key vocabulary

Word	Definition
Off-road	for use over ground which is not smooth or even
Heritage	features that have lasted and proved important
Heavyweight	objects that are heavier than others
Towering over	being much taller than
Hatchbacks	cars with an extra door at the back which opens upward
Winding	involving a lot of turning
Strict	limiting, specific
Saloon	a car having a closed body and a closed separated space intended for luggage
Sedan	a car having a closed body and a closed separated space intended for luggage
Suspension	the system of devices by which a vehicle is supported on its wheels
Conquer	overcome, control

The Rise of the SUV

Terrain	ground, area of land
Origin	beginning
Sturdy	strong, resilient
Rough	not even or smooth
Prototype	first version of the vehicle
Territory	area of land
Durable	able to last
Reliable	able to be trusted
Influenced	affected
Initial	of the beginning
Trudging	moving slowly and with difficulty
Cruising	travelling with ease
Innovations	new ideas
Debuted	was presented for the first time
Ditches	long, narrow holes in the ground

The Rise of the SUV

Rove	move around
Broke out	began suddenly
Suitable	appropriate, acceptable
Unimpressed	not impressed or interested in it
Trusty	able to be trusted
Civilian	made for citizens and not for members of the police or the army
Rigid	fixed, stiff or not flexible
Adapted	changed to fit the new conditions
Rival	competitor, challenger
Luxurious	very comfortable
Predecessor	the model it replaced
In line with	in agreement or accordance with
Unregulated	not controlled by laws
Mandatory	demanding by law
Mandates	official orders

The Rise of the SUV

Malaise	trouble, anxiety
Abide by	follow, obey
Emissions	production or release of gas
Classified	arranged in categories
Archetypal	most typical or characteristic
Adjustments	small changes
Comply with	follow, obey
Bridged the gap	reduced the differences that separated them
Hatchback	a car with an extra door at the back which opens upward
Craze	extreme popularity
Underway	having started and being in progress
Exceeded	were greater than
Trend	the general direction in which people behaved
Pickups	small trucks
Phenomenon	situation that exists

The Rise of the SUV

Boxy	looking like a box, having the shape of a square
Narrower	having less distance from one side to the other
Championed	supported, promoted
Versatility	able to be used for different purposes
Cargo	the goods carried by a vehicle
Towing	pulling something behind a vehicle
Marketed	advertised, promoted
Bulkier	larger
Critics	people who express their disapproval
Roll over	turn upside down
Pedestrians	people who are walking
Pedestrian	of people who were walking
Flood	appear in large amounts
Collisions	accidents that happen when two vehicles hit each other
Plough	move with force

The Rise of the SUV

Widen	make them more wide
Enlarge	make them larger
Influx	arrival in large numbers
Bloat	extreme amount of them
Accepting this sitting down	accepting this without reaction
Mounted	climbed or moved onto
Pavement	the raised path on the side of the road that people walk on
Clogging up	blocking
Cancelled out	removed
Stunningly	in an impressive or very surprising way
Backlash	strong negative reaction
Called for	publicly asked or demanded
Pose	cause
Misled	caused them to have a wrong idea or impression
Market	advertise, promote

The Rise of the SUV

Fall off a cliff	drop dramatically
Backdrop	background
Hostility	negative reaction, opposition
Preserve	keep them as they are, stop further damage
Countless	too many to be counted
Bold	brave, showing no fear of taking risks
Nominally	in thought, not in fact
Phasing-out	removing in stages or gradually
Fate	what will happen to them at the end
Precarious	dangerous
In anticipation of	expecting and being prepared for
On the horizon	coming soon, approaching
Claim	statement or saying showing that it is true
Suspend	stop for the time being
Eradicate	remove completely

The Rise of the SUV

Mining removal of materials from the ground by digging

Choice best, prime

Loathe hate

Make the switch make the change

We'd love to get your feedback on this episode.

What did you like? What could we do better?

What did you struggle to understand?

Let us know in the forum community.leonardoenglish.com