CONSUMER REPORTS NAMES THE MOST RELIABLE USED CARS

Used-car lists help guide buying decisions;
2009 Annual Auto Issue reports on how used cars are holding up

YONKERS, NY — Value-minded consumers know that buying a reliable used car is often the best choice, but that finding one takes research. To help simplify the process, Consumer Reports has identified the most and least reliable used cars for 10 years – from model years 1999 to 2008 – in the magazine’s 2009 Annual Auto Issue. Reliability data was compiled from the magazine’s Annual Auto Survey, which generated responses about more than 1.4 million new and used vehicles.

Consumer Reports identifies the most reliable used vehicles in its “Best of the Best” list, which highlights the most well-rounded vehicles and lists other contenders in order of the overall reliability scores for model years 1999 to 2008. The list features nine categories – small cars, family cars, upscale cars, luxury cars, sports and sporty cars, minivans, small SUVs, midsized and large SUVs, and pickup trucks. Toyota and Honda dominated the majority of the categories, demonstrating consistent reliability and performance, but some recent domestic models are also worthy choices. Below are Consumer Reports’ picks in five categories:

**Small Cars:** Honda Civic, Toyota Echo, Scion xB, Toyota Corolla, Toyota Matrix, Pontiac Vibe, Mazda 3, Mazda Protegé, Subaru Impreza

**Family Cars:** Honda Accord, Toyota Prius, Ford Fusion, Mercury Milan, Toyota Camry (except ‘08 V6), Subaru Outback (6-cyl.), Nissan Altima

**Minivans:** Toyota Sienna, Honda Odyssey

**Small SUVs:** Toyota RAV4, Honda CR-V, Subaru Forester, Mitsubishi Outlander

**Midsized and large SUVs:** Honda Pilot, Toyota Highlander, Lexus RX, Toyota Land Cruiser, Toyota 4Runner, Infiniti FX35, Acura MDX, Infiniti QX4, Lexus GX, Hyundai Santa Fe, Subaru Tribeca, Nissan Xterra (‘05–’08), Toyota Sequoia

To help consumers identify cars within their budget, Consumer Reports’ Annual Auto Issue also contains a “Models to Look For” list, which is categorized by price. It features a variety of used vehicles which all have above-average reliability and are priced from less than $4,000 to $30,000 and up. CR found 19 cars that can be purchased for $6,000 or less including the 1999 Acura CL and the 2003 Buick Century.

The report also features a list of “Used Cars to Avoid” and the “Worst of the Worst,” which names vehicles with multiple years of much-worse-than average reliability, including models from the following manufacturers: Audi, BMW, Buick, Cadillac, Chevrolet, Chrysler, Dodge, GMC, Jeep, Kia, Land Rover, Mazda, Oldsmobile, Pontiac, Porsche, Saturn, Volkswagen, and Volvo.

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How Used Cars Are Holding Up

According to Consumer Reports’ reliability data based on information from the Annual Auto Survey, the most reliable three-year-old vehicles have fewer problems than many newer vehicles – and many of them tend to be Hondas and Toyotas. These vehicles tend to be a good value because the steepest part of the depreciation curve is past and many newer safety features can often be found on these vehicles.

Used-car quality often depends on how a vehicle has been treated by its previous owner. Vehicles that are well-maintained tend to have a long useful life ahead of them. Still, Consumer Reports found that some models will stand up better over time than others. Overall, the most reliable vehicles come from Asian nameplates. Though domestic cars are getting better, they still trail the Japanese models. European models are also improving, but the older ones tend to be among the most problematic.

Here are more trends that stood out in Consumer Reports’ Annual Auto Survey:

- Problem rates for cars have decreased across the board, so newer used cars should hold up better than their predecessors as they age.
- Among five-year-old and newer cars, Ford, Hyundai, and Nissan are about tied in reliability.
- European cars, long the least reliable overall, are pulling even with the domestics on newer models.
- Additionally, cars with high problem rates are not always the oldest.

How Vehicles Age

Across all 10 years in Consumer Reports’ survey, problems with the check-engine light, windows, and squeaks and rattles are reported most often. Common troubles among almost-new to three-year-old models include body integrity (squeaks and rattles), body hardware, and power equipment. On average, three-year-old (2006) models had about 43 problems per 100 vehicles.

Brake problems became evident at five years. The average five-year-old (2004) model had about 62 problems per 100 vehicles. Ten-year-old (1999) models averaged 124 problems per 100 vehicles.

For a full list of the most and least reliable used vehicles and more information on how used cars are holding up, check out the full report in Consumer Reports’ Annual Auto Issue on sale March 3 to May 4 and is available wherever magazines are sold. Free highlights from the April Auto issue will be available at www.ConsumerReports.org.

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