

EMBARGOED UNTIL 12:01 A.M. EDT, TUESDAY, JULY 12, 2016

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VNR: TUES. 7/12/2016, 10:30-11 a.m. EDT; repeat 1:30-2 p.m. EDT (KU) GALAXY 17
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Most small SUV headlights rate poor in IIHS evaluations

ARLINGTON, Va. — Not a single small SUV out of 21 tested earns a good rating in the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety's headlight evaluations, and only four are available with acceptable-rated headlights.

Among the 21 vehicles, there are 47 different headlight combinations available. More than two-thirds of them are rated poor, making this group of vehicles even more deficient when it comes to lighting than the midsize cars that were the first to be rated earlier this year.

Headlight performance in today's vehicles varies widely. Government standards are based on laboratory tests, which don't accurately gauge performance in real-world driving. The issue merits attention because about half of traffic deaths occur either in the dark or around dawn or dusk.

As with midsize cars, the IIHS evaluations of small SUVs showed that a vehicle's price tag doesn't correspond to the quality of headlights. More modern lighting types, including high-intensity discharge (HID) and LED lamps, and curve-adaptive systems, which swivel in the direction of steering, also are no guarantee of good performance.

"Manufacturers aren't paying enough attention to the actual on-road performance of this basic equipment," says IIHS Senior Research Engineer Matthew Brumbelow. "We're optimistic that improvements will come quickly now that we've given automakers something to strive for."

For 2017, vehicles will need good or acceptable headlights in order to qualify for the Institute's highest award, *TOP SAFETY PICK+*.

While studies have pointed to advantages for advanced lighting systems, the IIHS rating system doesn't favor one type of technology over the other. Instead, it simply measures the amount of usable light provided by low beams and high beams as vehicles travel on straightaways and curves.

IIHS engineers evaluate headlights on the Vehicle Research Center's track after dark. A special device is used to measure how far the light is projected as the vehicle is driven on five approaches: traveling straight, a sharp left curve, a sharp right curve, a gradual left curve and a gradual right curve.

Glare from low beams for oncoming drivers is also measured in each scenario. A vehicle with excessive glare on any of the approaches can't earn a rating higher than marginal.

The only type of technology given an explicit nod in the ratings is high-beam assist, which automatically switches between high and low beams based on the presence of other vehicles. Vehicles can earn extra credit for this feature because of its potential to increase low rates of high-beam use.

The best-performing headlights in the small SUV group belong to a new model, the Mazda CX-3, and are available on its Grand Touring trim. They are curve-adaptive LED lights with optional high beam assist. The low beams perform well on both right curves and fairly well on the straightaway and sharp left curve; however, they provide inadequate light on the gradual left curve. The high beams perform well on most approaches.

Headlight ratings for small SUVs <i>Best available headlight system for each model</i> 2016 models unless specified	
For trim and package specifications for the listed ratings and for ratings of other systems available on these models, visit iihs.org/ratings .	
Acceptable	
Ford Escape (2017)	Hyundai Tucson
Honda CR-V	Mazda CX-3
Marginal	
BMW X1	Toyota RAV4
Mazda CX-5	Volkswagen Tiguan
Mitsubishi Outlander	
Poor	
Audi Q3	Jeep Renegade
Buick Encore	Jeep Wrangler
Chevrolet Trax	Kia Sportage (2017)
Fiat 500X	Mitsubishi Outlander Sport
Honda HR-V	Nissan Rogue
Jeep Patriot	Subaru Forester

The other vehicles available with acceptable headlights are the Ford Escape, the Honda CR-V and the Hyundai Tucson. None of the three are curve-adaptive, and only the Escape has high-beam assist. Still, all of them provide fair or good illumination in most scenarios.

The worst headlights among the small SUVs belong to a different Honda — the new-for-2016 HR-V.

The illumination provided by the HR-V’s halogen low beams and high beams is inadequate on all four curves and on the straightaway.

The HR-V is one of 12 small SUVs that can’t be purchased with anything other than poor-rated headlights.

For those vehicles available with higher-rated headlights, consumers need to make sure they’re getting the right ones. For example, the

Tucson’s acceptable headlight combination is available on the SUV’s Limited version, but the headlights on other trim levels of the Tucson earn a poor rating. Even the Limited, when equipped with curve-adaptive headlights, earns a poor rating because of excessive glare.

Seventeen of the rated SUV headlight combinations have unacceptable glare. They include all types of lights — halogen, HID and LED — and none of the headlight types is more likely than the others to have excessive glare. Three of the 17 fell short of an acceptable rating on the basis of glare alone.

“Glare issues are usually a result of poorly aimed headlights,” Brumbelow says. “SUV headlights are mounted higher than car headlights, so they generally should be aimed lower. Instead, many of them are aimed higher than the car headlights we’ve tested so far.”

IIHS plans to conduct headlight tests on pickups next.

For more information, go to iihs.org

The Insurance Institute for Highway Safety is an independent, nonprofit scientific and educational organization dedicated to reducing the losses — deaths, injuries and property damage — from crashes on the nation’s roads. The Institute is wholly supported by auto insurers.