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CONSUMER REPORTS' 2009 ANNUAL CAR RELIABILITY SURVEY: FORD SECURES PLACE AMONG WORLD'S MOST RELIABLE CARMAKERS

Ford Fusion, Mercury Milan Reliability Tops Honda Accord and Toyota Camry

YONKERS, NY — Ford has secured its position as the only Detroit automaker with world-class reliability. About 90 percent (46 of 51) of Ford, Mercury, and Lincoln products were found to have average or better reliability, according to *Consumer Reports'* 2009 Annual Car Reliability Survey. The results were announced today at an Automotive Press Association luncheon in Detroit.

Ford's sustained production of vehicles that are as dependable—or better than—some of the industry's best dispels the notion that only Japanese manufacturers make reliable cars. Other than the Toyota Prius, the reliability of the 4-cylinder Fusion and Milan ranks higher than that of any other family sedan. Both of those Ford Motor Company products continue to beat the Honda Accord and Toyota Camry, while the upscale Lincoln MKZ tops its rivals, the Acura TL and Lexus ES.

"It's rare for *Consumer Reports* to see family sedans from domestic carmakers continue to beat the reliability scores of such highly regarded Japanese models as the Camry and Accord," said David Champion, senior director of *Consumer Reports'* Automotive Test Center. The last domestic sedan that had better reliability than the Camry and Accord was the Buick Regal in 2004, he noted.

Ford's position as the most reliable domestic carmaker includes good scores for its new Ford Flex SUV. But the Lincoln division has had mixed results; some models score below their Ford equivalents. All-wheel-drive versions of the Lincoln MKS, MKX, and MKZ, essentially high-end versions of the Ford Taurus, Edge, and Fusion, respectively, are all below average.

More details, and a list of models with the best and worst predicted-reliability Ratings, will appear first on www.ConsumerReports.org. The reliability report will also appear in the December issue of *Consumer Reports*, on sale November 3, and in the latest *Consumer Reports Cars* publication, *Best & Worst New Cars for 2010*, which also includes predicted-reliability ratings for more than 300 models.

A large margin separates the best from the worst. The least reliable vehicle, the Volkswagen Touareg, is 27 times more likely to have a problem than the most reliable car, the Honda Insight.



In addition to the Insight, small car reliability scores stood out. Twenty of 37 small cars have above-average predicted-reliability including the Honda Fit, Scion xD and Volkswagen Golf. Family cars fared nearly as well, with 21 out of 42 scoring above average. Five of the eight most reliable family cars are hybrids, including the Toyota Prius, Ford Fusion Hybrid, Mercury Milan Hybrid, Nissan Altima Hybrid and Toyota Camry Hybrid.

Even good brands falter. Among the least reliable vehicles in their respective classes are the all-wheel-drive Lexus GS, the Nissan Versa sedan, and the Subaru Impreza WRX.

General Motors shows some bright spots, Chrysler still struggles

Some newer GM products are bright spots. Overall 20 of the 48 GM models *Consumer Reports* surveyed have average reliability scores, while the Chevrolet Malibu V6 has shown better-than-average scores and is on par with the most reliable family sedans. The Buick Lucerne did well in *Consumer Reports* road tests, and it scores average in reliability.

The Chevrolet Traverse SUV also makes the cut, as does its cousin, the Buick Enclave, but only in the all-wheel-drive version. The reliability scores of the Chevrolet Silverado and GMC Sierra 1500 pickups has improved enough to earn *Consumer Reports*' Recommendation. *CR* only Recommends vehicles that have performed well in its tests, have at least average predicted reliability based on the Annual Auto Survey, and performed at least adequately if crash-tested or included in a government rollover test.

GM has a number of strong contenders either just released or in the pipeline, but they are too new for *CR* to have reliability data on them.

Chrysler continues to struggle. More than one-third of Chrysler products are much worse than average, including its new car-based SUV, the Dodge Journey. Last year, *Consumers Reports* couldn't Recommend any of its products either because of mediocre performance, poor reliability scores, or both. However, this year *CR* can recommend one important vehicle in Chrysler's lineup: the four-wheel-drive version of the redesigned Dodge Ram 1500 pickup. It did well in *CR* road tests and rates average in reliability.

Asian brands still in command

Of the 48 models with top reliability scores, 36 are Asian—Toyota accounts for 18; Honda, eight; Nissan, four; and Hyundai/Kia and Subaru, three each. With only a few exceptions, Japanese vehicles are consistently good. All Honda and Acura products have average or above average reliability. Although, Toyota, with its Lexus and Scion brands, provides a broader product range, the Lexus GS AWD is the only Toyota model with below average reliability.

Models from Nissan and its Infiniti luxury division have mostly been very reliable. The once-troublesome Infiniti QX56 and Nissan Armada are now average, as is the four-wheel-drive Nissan Titan, although its rear-wheel-drive version is still troublesome. The Nissan Versa has produced uneven results. Over the last two surveys, the hatchback has been average while the sedan has been far below average. The Nissan Quest minivan also remains troublesome.

Hyundai and Kia continue to make reliable cars. The Hyundai Elantra and Tucson, and the Kia Sportage get top marks. The new Hyundai Genesis V6 is better than average; the V8 version is average. Only Kia's Sedona minivan and Sorento SUV score below average.

European models continue to rally

European brands continue to improve. Mercedes-Benz has significantly rebounded, with most models average or better, and the GLK did exceptionally well in its first year in *CR*'s survey. Scores from rival BMW are more mixed. The 535i sedan and X3 SUV declined in reliability, and the 135i, debuting in this survey, scores below average. Some BMW models have average or better reliability, but the 328i versions are the only ones that we have tested and can Recommend.

Volkswagen and Audi are also staging a nice reliability recovery. The Volkswagen Rabbit (Golf) and the new CC earn top scores. The VW Jetta's Recommendation now extends to the diesel version, making it the only diesel *Consumer Reports* currently recommends.

Both the VW Passat and Audi A3 have improved so that they now have average reliability scores. The new VW Tiguan SUV is average. The Audi Q7 SUV continues to be much worse than average, but not as bad as its platform mate, the VW Touareg, which not only scores poorly but has the worst new-car predicted reliability score in the survey.

All of Volvo's sedans are average or better, but Volvo's XC90 SUV is below average. Porsche, which has been doing quite well in our survey of late, has one serious hiccup this year: The Boxster drops to below average, which strikes it from *Consumer Reports* Recommended list. But the Cayenne SUV improved to average.

Findings are based on responses on more than 1.4 million vehicles owned or leased by subscribers to *Consumer Reports* or its Web site, www.ConsumerReports.org, the biggest response in the Annual Auto Survey's history. The survey was conducted in the spring of 2009 by *Consumer Reports*' National Survey Research Center and covered model years 2000 to 2009.

Consumer Reports' expert team of statisticians and automotive engineers used the survey data to predict reliability of new 2010 models. Predicted reliability is *CR*'s forecast of how well models currently on sale are likely to hold up. To calculate predicted-reliability ratings, *CR* averages the overall reliability scores (used car verdicts) for the most recent three model years, provided that the model remained unchanged in that period and also didn't substantially change for 2010. If a model was new or redesigned in the past couple of years, one or two years' data may be used, or if that's all that's available.

Consumer Reports Annual Auto Survey is used in determining which makes and models are recommended to consumers by *CR*. *Consumer Reports* recommends only models that have performed well in tests conducted at its 327-acre Auto Test Center in Connecticut, and that have average or better predicted reliability based on its annual survey. In addition, vehicles must perform well in government or insurance-industry crash and rollover tests, if tested, in order to be Recommended. Occasionally, *Consumer Reports* may recommend a redesigned model too new to have compiled a reliability record if the previous generation, and the manufacturer's reliability track record has been consistently outstanding, and if the model meets the other criteria.

Full reliability history charts and predicted-reliability ratings on hundreds of 2010 models, plus a list of what's up and what's down, best and worst models, and a comparison chart of brands can be found online at www.ConsumerReports.org, in the December issue and in the latest *Consumer Reports Cars* publication, *Best & Worst New Car for 2010* (\$5.99 U.S./\$6.99 Canada), on sale November 17, 2009 everywhere magazines are sold.

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