

INSURANCE INSTITUTE FOR HIGHWAY SAFETY

NEWS RELEASE

Thursday, January 22, 1998

CONSUMERS WILL SAVE AS VW, NISSAN, & LEXUS IMPROVE BUMPERS; EXPENSIVE DAMAGE REPAIRS CUT TO FRACTION OF PREVIOUS COSTS

ARLINGTON, VA – Responding to poor performance in 5 mph crash tests by the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety, three automakers have improved car bumpers. Nissan and Volkswagen upgraded both front and rear bumpers on their Maxima and Passat models, and Toyota improved the rear bumpers on its Lexus LS 400. These are important design improvements because the minor bumps that frequently occur in commuter traffic can cost thousands of dollars to repair.

The redesigned bumpers increase damage resistance in low-speed impacts, as shown in follow-up tests by the Institute. These tests include 5 mph front and rear flat-barrier impacts plus two localized impacts, front-into-angle-barrier and rear-into-pole.

Maxima bumpers were improved for 1997 and later model years. Passat and Lexus bumpers were upgraded for 1998. The Institute had tested previous models of the same three cars (see table, attached page), finding “bumpers on the Lexus and Maxima some of the worst we ever tested,” Institute President Brian O’Neill explains. “All three manufacturers have substantially improved their bumper designs, as our tests demonstrate. The Maxima bumpers used to be the worst among midsize four-door cars [1994-98 models], and now this is the car with the second best bumpers in its group.”

The new Passat is the best in the group. “This is the only late-model midsize four-door car the Institute has tested with total repair costs less than \$1,000 after our crash tests at 5 mph. Four other cars in this group – Hyundai Sonata, Toyota Avalon, Mitsubishi Galant, and Ford Contour – had repairs costing about \$3,500,” O’Neill notes.

Damage repair costs for the 1998 Passat, Maxima, and Lexus after the 5 mph rear-into-pole test were fractions of what they were for previous models of the same cars after the same test. Damage to the Lexus in the pole test was cut from \$3,259 to \$445, and damage to the Maxima from \$2,418 to \$299. Passat damage was cut from \$1,110 to \$251.

— MORE —

5 MPH CRASH TEST RESULTS					
	Front Into Flat Barrier	Rear Into Flat Barrier	Front Into Angle Barrier	Rear Into Pole	Total
Volkswagen Passat					
1998 model	\$138	\$ 0	\$ 544	\$ 251	\$ 933
1995 model	\$547	\$798	\$ 810	\$1,110	\$3,265
Nissan Maxima					
1998 model	\$217	\$155	\$ 549	\$ 299	\$1,220
1995 model	\$530	\$220	\$ 676	\$2,418	\$3,844
Lexus LS 400					
1998 model	\$699*	\$345	\$2,128*	\$ 445	\$3,617
1997 model	\$699	\$ 0	\$2,128	\$3,259	\$6,086

*Front bumpers weren't retested because no design changes were introduced since previous model year.
 Note: All repair costs reflect November 1997 prices.

"These improvements show what can be done when manufacturers put their minds to designing better bumpers. Improvements to the Lexus rear bumper were accomplished in only a few months," O'Neill points out. "Once Toyota saw the very high damage repair costs when we tested last year's model, it went to work and made the improvements before the 1998s were introduced. This leaves the Mercedes E class as noteworthy for its lousy bumpers among the luxury cars we've tested. Its repair costs total \$5,990."

Paying attention to bumpers "is important because low-speed crashes are consumer pocket-book issues," O'Neill continues. "So-called fender-bender crashes are prevalent in urban areas, and they cost consumers in several ways – increased insurance costs, the deductibles consumers pay, and the aggravation of getting a damaged car fixed. But these largely unnecessary costs can be eliminated with good bumper designs."

**Video news release on Thurs., January 22, 1998:
 1:00 to 1:30 p.m. EST; Galaxy 9/Transponder 1;
 Footage of 5 mph crash tests and related video**

Internet: www.highwaysafety.org