

INSURANCE INSTITUTE FOR HIGHWAY SAFETY

NEWS RELEASE

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FIRST SELECTION OF TOP SAFETY PICKS: INSTITUTE ANNOUNCES 10 CAR DESIGNS THAT WIN

ARLINGTON, VA — The Insurance Institute for Highway Safety today announces 10 cars (2006 models) that win its first ever Top Safety Pick award. The awards recognize car designs that afford the best protection for people in front, side, and rear crashes, based on performance in Institute tests. The winning vehicles were

chosen from among current models of small, midsize, and large cars plus minivans. There's a winner in three of these four groups. The winners include 2 large car designs, 7 midsize cars, and 1 small car. No minivans meet the Institute's criteria to earn a Top Safety Pick. Pickups and SUVs weren't included in this round of awards because side impact tests of most of these vehicles haven't been conducted yet.

"Now that we're rating vehicles' front, side, and rear crashworthiness, based on test performance, we decided to give consumers an overall assessment based on all three tests. These Top Safety Picks are replacing our previous 'best pick' designations

THE WINNERS TOP SAFETY PICKS 2006 CARS & MINIVANS

Large cars

GOLD award Ford Five Hundred
and twin Mercury Montego
with optional side airbags

SILVER award Audi A6

Midsize cars

GOLD award Saab 9-3
GOLD award Subaru Legacy
SILVER award Audi A3
SILVER award Audi A4
SILVER award Chevrolet Malibu
with optional side airbags

SILVER award Volkswagen Jetta
SILVER award Volkswagen Passat

Small car

GOLD award Honda Civic 4dr

Minivans

no winners

— MORE —

that were awarded separately for front and side crash test performance," Institute president Brian O'Neill explains. "The new awards mean consumers can compare cars' ratings more quickly and easily. They won't have to review multiple sets of test results separately. And when we test new car designs as they are introduced next year, it's possible that some additional models will be added to the 2006 Top Safety Picks."

Criteria to win gold and silver awards: Top Safety Pick winners reflect an elite fraction of the car market. Winners of the gold award have earned good ratings in the Institute's frontal offset and side impact crash tests, and their seat/head restraints are



rated good for protection against neck injuries in rear impacts. Silver awards go to vehicles with good performance in the front and side crash tests plus acceptable seat/head restraint ratings. Awards are by car size class because vehicle size and weight influence occupant protection in serious crashes. Larger, heavier cars generally afford more protection than smaller, lighter ones. Top Safety Picks indicate the best choices for safety within each size class, but they don't mean a small car that's an award winner affords better protection than a larger car that didn't win a Top Safety Pick.

Almost all of the 10 winners are relatively new designs, and they all have side airbags designed to protect people's heads. This reflects the improvements manufacturers have been making in the side and rear crash protection afforded by their newer cars (most vehicles have afforded good occupant protection in frontal crashes for several years).

"This is one reason Volkswagen and Audi cars are 5 of the 10 award winners. This company has introduced 5 new designs since the 2005 model year and made the commitment to ensure that these designs perform well in Institute tests," O'Neill points out.

Winners by vehicle size class: Among large family cars, the Ford Five Hundred and its twin Mercury Montego were new designs for the 2005 model year. However, only the models with optional side airbags are Top Safety Pick winners. Another winner is the Audi A6, a large luxury model that was redesigned for the 2005 model year.

"The midsize group is the heart of the car market," O'Neill says. "About 40 percent of new cars sold every year are midsize, so it's good news that consumers have a number of Top Safety Pick choices in this size group from moderately priced to near luxury models." Seven of the 10 Top Safety Picks are midsize. The Saab 9-3 and Subaru Legacy are gold award winners. The Audi A3, A4, Chevrolet Malibu with optional side airbags, and Volkswagen Passat and Jetta are silver award winners.

The Honda Civic is the only small car among the 13 the Institute has evaluated that meets the criteria for a Top Safety Pick. It's the only car in this size group that has earned a good overall rating in the Institute's side impact test.

No minivans are among the award winners. This doesn't mean minivans are unsafe. It means none of the current designs the Institute has tested meets the award criteria. The Honda Odyssey, Toyota Sienna, and Nissan Quest are rated good for front and side crashworthiness, but their seat/head restraints are marginal or poor.

Automakers had opportunity to strive for awards: Earlier this year the Institute alerted automakers about the upcoming Top Safety Pick award and the criteria that would have to be met to earn one. The Institute offered to conduct early tests of any vehicles the manufacturers thought would be candidates for the award. Thus, all current car and minivan models were eligible for consideration.

"A number of automakers requested early tests, and based on our discussions with the automakers we believe no other 2006 models would meet our Top Safety Pick criteria," O'Neill says. A number of major automakers including BMW, Mercedes, Nissan, Toyota, and Volvo aren't represented in the first set of winners.

How vehicles are evaluated: The Institute's frontal crashworthiness evaluations are based on results of frontal offset crash tests at 40 mph. Each vehicle's overall evaluation is based on measurements of intrusion into the occupant compartment, injury measures from a Hybrid III dummy in the driver seat, and analysis of slow-motion film to assess how well the restraint system controlled dummy movement during the test.

Each vehicle's overall side evaluation is based on performance in a crash test in which the side of the vehicle is struck by a moving barrier representing the front end of a pickup or SUV. Ratings reflect injury measures recorded on two instrumented SID-IIIs dummies, assessment of head protection countermeasures, and the vehicle's structural performance during the impact. Injury measures obtained from the two dummies, one in the driver seat and the other in the rear seat behind the driver, are used to determine the likelihood that a driver and/or passenger in a real-world crash would have sustained serious injury to various body regions. The movements and contacts of the dummies' heads during the crash also are evaluated. Structural performance is based on measurements indicating the amount of B-pillar intrusion into the occupant compartment.

Rear crash protection is rated according to a two-step procedure. Starting points for the ratings are measurements of head restraint geometry — the height of a restraint and its horizontal distance behind the back of the head of an average-size man. Seats with good or acceptable restraint geometry are tested dynamically using a dummy that measures forces on the neck. This test simulates a collision in which a stationary vehicle is struck in the rear at 20 mph. Seats without good or acceptable geometry are rated poor overall because they cannot be positioned to protect many people.

For more information go to www.iihs.org

ATTACHMENT: TOP SAFETY PICKS 2006, BY CAR SIZE GROUP

		FRONT EVALUATION	SIDE EVALUATION	REAR CRASH PROTECTION
<u>LARGE CARS</u>				
GOLD	FORD FIVE HUNDRED MERCURY MONTEGO 2006 MODELS WITH OPTIONAL SIDE AIRBAGS	G	G	G
SILVER	AUDI A6 2006 MODELS	G	G	A
<u>MIDSIZE CARS</u>				
GOLD	SAAB 9-3 2006 MODELS	G	G	G
GOLD	SUBARU LEGACY 2006 MODELS	G	G	G
SILVER	AUDI A3 2006 MODELS	G	G	A
SILVER	AUDI A4 2006 MODELS	G	G	A
SILVER	CHEVROLET MALIBU 2006 MODELS WITH OPTIONAL SIDE AIRBAGS	G	G	A
SILVER	VOLKSWAGEN JETTA 2006 MODELS	G	G	A
SILVER	VOLKSWAGEN PASSAT 2006 MODELS	G	G	A
<u>SMALL CAR</u>				
GOLD	HONDA CIVIC 4DR 2006 MODELS	G	G	G
<u>MINIVANS</u>				
NO WINNERS				

G GOOD
A ACCEPTABLE
M MARGINAL
P POOR

GO TO WWW.IIHS.ORG FOR MORE DETAILED CRASHWORTHINESS EVALUATIONS
OR TO COMPARE A TOP SAFETY PICK WITH OTHER CARS IN THE THE SAME SIZE CLASS

TOP SAFETY PICK GOLD: good ratings in front and side crash tests plus seat/head restraints rated good for neck protection in rear impacts
TOP SAFETY PICK SILVER: good ratings in front and side crash tests plus seat/head restraints rated acceptable for neck protection in rear impacts

FRONTAL RATINGS are based on performance in a 40 mph frontal offset crash test into a deformable barrier. **CAUTION:** Frontal ratings cannot be compared across vehicle type and weight categories because the kinetic energy involved in the frontal test depends on the speed and weight of the test vehicle, and the crash is more severe for heavier vehicles. Given equivalent frontal ratings for heavier and lighter vehicles, the heavier vehicle typically will offer better protection in real-world crashes. **SIDE RATINGS** are based on performance in a crash test in which the side of the vehicle is struck by a moving deformable barrier with a front end that represents the front of a typical SUV or pickup. The moving barrier strikes the vehicle at 31 mph in a perpendicular impact. **NOTE:** Side ratings can be compared across vehicle type and weight categories (frontal ratings cannot). **REAR CRASH PROTECTION RATINGS** are based on a two-step evaluation. In the first step restraint geometry is rated. Seats with good or acceptable geometric ratings then are subjected to a dynamic test. Seats with head restraints rated marginal or poor, based on geometry, aren't tested because they cannot protect taller occupants.