Survey: New U.S. Cars Struggle With Quality

Dee-Ann Durbin, AP Auto Writer

DETROIT (AP) — Owners of cars that were new or redesigned for the 2011 model year are reporting more quality problems, partly because of glitches with the navigation screens, voice-activated systems and other technology packed into their dashboards.

J.D. Power and Associates released its annual survey of new vehicle quality Thursday. Lexus, Honda and Acura were the top performers. Dodge was the worst-performing brand.

The survey questioned 78,000 people about the problems they had with 2011 model-year vehicles in the first 90 days of ownership. Owners reported an average of 107 problems per 100 vehicles. That jumped to 122 problems for cars that were new or redesigned in 2011, up 10 percent from 2010 model-year cars and trucks.

J.D. Power said new technology was partly to blame.

"Clearly, consumers are interested in having new technology in their vehicles, but automakers must ensure that the technology is ready for prime time," David Sargent, J.D. Power's vice president of global research said in a statement. "There is an understandable desire to bring these technologies to market quickly, but automakers must be careful to walk before they run."

New technology was likely responsible for Ford's declining quality. The brand dropped from fifth place in 2010 to 23rd this year.

Ford launched its My Ford Touch voice-activated dashboard system on the Ford Edge and the Ford Explorer in the 2011 model year. The system allows drivers to control climate, navigation, entertainment and other features by voice. Ford said earlier this week that 73 percent of owners with My Ford Touch say they're satisfied with it, but the company has acknowledged it's been difficult for some buyers to use. Ford says it has made some software updates to make the system easier to use and is now offering workshops at dealerships to help owners.

Toyota saw a big leap in quality, jumping 14 spots to seventh place. Toyota's 2010 rankings were hurt by a series of safety recalls that year. Also, Toyota introduced few new products for 2011, so it didn't experience the glitches other manufacturers did.

Cadillac and GMC, both General Motors Co. brands, and Mazda rose into the top ten performers this year, while Hyundai and Ford Motor Co.'s Lincoln luxury brand dropped out of the top tier.

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