

Survey: Lexus Most Dependable

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DETROIT (AP) — Lexus is the top performer in a survey of vehicle dependability released Wednesday, but most other brands also showed improvement in an industry that has reached historically high dependability levels.

Consulting firm J.D. Power and Associates polled 31,000 owners of 2009 model-year vehicles and rated brands by the number of problems owners have experienced in the last 12 months. Problems can range from stalling engines and transmission issues to peeling paint and electronics glitches.

The top complaint in this year's survey was excessive wind noise, followed by noisy brakes.

Lexus owners reported 86 problems per 100 vehicles. Porsche, Cadillac, Toyota and Scion rounded out the top five. The worst performers were Chrysler, Dodge, Jeep, Ram and Jaguar. Chrysler owners reported 192 problems per 100 vehicles.

The industry average was 132 problems per 100 vehicles, a 13 percent improvement from last year and the highest rate since the survey began in 1990. The results are particularly surprising since the industry was in turmoil in 2009. Both General Motors Co. and Chrysler Group LLC went through bankruptcy that year, and U.S. auto sales fell to a 30-year low because of the recession.

"Despite facing immense challenges in 2009, automakers placed a keen focus on delivering outstanding levels of quality, which they understood would be essential to their long-term success," J.D. Power automotive vice president David Sargent said in a statement.

J.D. Power said 25 of 32 brands improved their scores, with Scion and Mini making the biggest leaps. Lincoln, Acura, Kia, Infiniti, Ram and Jaguar all saw their scores fall from a year ago. Buick's score stayed the same.

Toyota Motor Corp. had eight winners at the segment level, the most of any automaker. The Toyota Yaris was the most dependable subcompact, the Toyota Prius was the best compact and the Toyota Tundra was the best pickup truck. Toyota began a series of safety recalls in late 2009, and some 2009 model-year vehicles were included in those recalls, but that wasn't reflected in the company's results.

Ford Motor Co. had three segment winners, including the Ford Fusion midsize car and Ford Explorer SUV, while General Motors Co. and Nissan Motor Co. had two winners each.

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