

# Lexus, Porsche Top Dependability Rankings

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DETROIT (AP) — If there's one thing you can count on, it's your car.

Vehicles are more dependable than ever, says J.D. Power and Associates. The consulting company's latest study, which measures problems experienced in the last year by owners of 3-year-old vehicles, found that reported problems fell 5 percent to the lowest level since J.D. Power began collecting this data in 1989.

Lexus, Porsche, Lincoln and Toyota owners reported the fewest problems, while Jeep, Mitsubishi, Dodge and Land Rover owners had the most. Owners reported an average of 126 problems per 100 vehicles from the 2010 model year, down from 132 in last year's survey. Problems can be anything from engine failure to dashboard electronic glitches to excessive wind noise.

For the first time, cars and trucks that were new or redesigned for 2010 performed better than those that were unchanged from the 2009 model year. Owners of new models experienced 116 problems per 100 vehicles compared with 133 for models that weren't new in 2010. That result challenges the conventional wisdom that it takes carmakers one or two model years to work out all the glitches in new cars.

"The rapid improvement in fundamental vehicle dependability each year is more than offsetting any initial glitches that all-new or redesigned models may have," said David Sargent, who leads J.D. Power's global automotive operations.

Among the models that were new or redesigned in 2010 were the Ford Mustang, Buick LaCrosse, Lexus ES350 and Toyota Camry.

Chrysler's Ram brand — which introduced a new heavy-duty pickup in 2010 — saw one of the biggest leaps in the rankings. It rose to the 9th spot in 2013 from the 29th spot last year. Suzuki and Mazda also jumped in the rankings. Toyota's youth-oriented Scion brand dropped 13 spots, and Cadillac, Audi, Volvo and Mitsubishi all dropped 11 spots.

For the third straight year, excessive wind noise was the top problem, said Raffi Festekjian, director of global automotive research operations.

Noisy brakes came in second, and problems with chipping or fading paint were No. 3, also for the third consecutive year, Festekjian said in an e-mail.

But trouble with dashboard electronics is on the rise, especially in the premium segment. People reported wrong or missing directions in navigation systems, and voice recognition software that doesn't recognize commands. The voice problem made the top 10 for the first time in the history of the survey, Festekjian said.

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Those problems are likely to grow as newer cars make their way into the three-year reliability study. In J.D. Power's study of quality after three months of ownership last year, owners reported more problems with audio, entertainment and navigation systems than with any other vehicle feature, Festekjian said.

This year's study found that the Toyota Prius was the most reliable small car and the Hyundai Sonata was the most reliable midsize car. The Toyota RAV4 was the highest-ranked small SUV and the Chevrolet Tahoe was the most reliable big SUV. The Lexus RX midsize SUV had the fewest problems of any vehicle, at 57 per 100.

Dependability rankings are important to car companies, since buyers who are happy with a purchase are more likely to stick with that brand in the future. J.D. Power said 54 percent of owners who do not experience any problems with their vehicle stay with the same brand for their next new vehicle. That slips to 41 percent when owners experience three or more problems.

Sargent said the results should give buyers more confidence in older vehicles, whether they're keeping their current model or shopping for a used car. But he says dependability keeps improving, so people who buy new cars this year can have even more confidence in their cars' performance three years from now.

The 2013 study, which was released Wednesday, was based on responses from more than 37,000 original owners of 2010 model-year vehicles after three years of ownership.

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