

Only 2 Of 13 Small SUVs Do Well In Crash Tests

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DETROIT (AP) — Only two of 13 small SUVs performed well in front-end crash tests done by an insurance industry group, with several popular models faring poorly in the evaluations.

Subaru's 2014 Forester was the only vehicle to get the top "good" rating in the results released Thursday. The 2013 Mitsubishi Outlander Sport was rated as "acceptable." But fast-selling models such as the Ford Escape, Honda CR-V and Jeep Wrangler received only "marginal" or "poor" ratings from the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety.

Small and midsize SUVs, which get decent gas mileage and have the cargo and passenger space of larger SUVs, are among the fastest-growing segments of the U.S. auto market. Sales grew 50 percent from 2005 to last year, when U.S. consumers bought more than 2.5 million of them, according to Ward's AutoInfoBank.

The IIHS ratings are influential because many auto shoppers find them while researching vehicles on the Internet. The group says its crash tests and ratings are designed to get automakers to improve crashworthiness of their vehicles.

The ratings are for the institute's "small overlap" crash test that covers only 25 percent of a vehicle's front end. The test was added to the IIHS evaluations last year, with the institute aiming to push automakers into bolstering the crash resistance of their vehicles.

The group's tests are more stringent than the U.S. government's full-width front crash test. The institute says that in many vehicles, a crash affecting one-quarter of the front end misses the main structures designed to absorb the impact of a crash. Yet such crashes account for nearly a quarter of the collisions that cause serious or fatal injuries to people in the front seats, IIHS said.

The new Ford Escape, the top-selling small SUV so far this year, got a "poor" overall rating, while Honda's CR-V, the No. 2 seller, got a "marginal" rating. Toyota's RAV-4, another big seller, hasn't done the testing yet because Toyota asked for a delay to improve the vehicle's structure, the IIHS said.

Other SUVs getting "poor" ratings were the Jeep Patriot, Buick Encore, Kia Sportage and Hyundai Tucson, the institute said. The BMW X1, Nissan Rogue, Mazda CX-5, Volkswagen Tiguan and Jeep Wrangler two-door all got "marginal" ratings.

Ford said in a statement that the Escape is safe because it is equipped with advanced safety features and a structure designed to manage the impact of a crash. But the company said it takes new developments in crash performance

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seriously.

The Forester and Outlander Sport each received the IIHS' coveted "Top Safety Pick Plus" award because they performed well in multiple tests including the small offset crash. Many of the other SUVs, including the Escape and CR-V, won "Top Safety Pick" designations, but didn't get the "plus" due to their performance in the small offset tests. Only 20 vehicles across all car segments have received the IIHS "Top Safety Pick Plus" award.

"With the redesigned Forester, Subaru's engineers set out to do well in our new test, and they succeeded," Joe Nolan, the institute's vice president of vehicle research, said in a statement. "This is exactly how we hoped manufacturers would respond to improve protection."

All SUVs tested, except the Forester, were 2012 or 2013 models. The institute said tests of 2012 models were valid because no significant design changes were made between model years.

Honda said in a statement that the CR-V earned a Top Safety Pick award, which was the best when it was introduced in 2011. The company would not comment when asked if it's reworking the CR-V so it does better in the small offset test.

Chrysler said the Wrangler and Patriot both meet or exceed all government safety requirements and perform well in real-world driving. Like most of the vehicles tested, both were designed before the IIHS added the small offset test.

IIHS conducts its small offset test by crashing vehicles into a fixed 5-foot-tall barrier at 40 mph to simulate collisions with a utility pole or tree. The institute gives vehicles demerits when the structure intrudes into the passenger compartment, or if a crash dummy suffers head, neck, chest, thigh, hip, leg or foot injuries. Head, neck and chest injuries get more weight. The group also measures how well seat belts and air bags protect people. "Good" is the top rating, followed by "acceptable," then "marginal" and "poor."

IIHS is a nonprofit research group funded by auto insurance companies.

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