

New Impala Tops Sedans In Consumer Reports Tests

Tom Krisher, AP Auto Writer

DETROIT (AP) — The Chevrolet Impala, long the standard-bearer for mediocre cars from Detroit, has made an amazing turnaround.

Consumer Reports magazine has ranked the completely reworked 2014 version of the full-size car as its top U.S. sedan. It's the first time in at least 20 years that a domestic brand has beaten out cars from Germany and Japan.

The new version, which began arriving in showrooms in April, scored 95 out of 100 points in the magazine's testing to get an "Excellent" rating. Only two cars earned higher scores: the electric Tesla Model S, which starts at \$62,400, and the BMW 135i coupe with a base price of \$39,300.

The performance of the 2014 Impala, which starts at just under \$27,000, is another sign of the three Detroit automakers' renaissance, said Jake Fisher, the magazine's chief auto tester. All three companies nearly collapsed into financial ruin four years ago, partly because of their reputation for shoddiness.

"We've seen a number of redesigned American models — including the Chrysler 300, Ford Escape and Fusion, and Jeep Grand Cherokee — deliver world-class performance in our tests," Fisher said.

The Impala, made by General Motors, surprised the magazine's auto testers with its ride, agility, braking, high-quality materials and quiet, roomy cabin, Fisher said. Its score was 32 points higher than the previous model, a noisy sedan with uncertain handling that became a staple in rental car lots.

"It really doesn't fall down in any area, and it does a lot of things really well," Fisher said of the 2014 version. "The car rides better than a Lexus ES. It's quieter than many luxury cars. It accelerates and brakes better than, say a Volkswagen GTI. It's extremely roomy."

In addition, the car's interior controls, including its electronics, are simple and easy to use. Problems with complex electronics have sunk many a luxury car in the magazine's testing, including the Cadillac XTS, which shares the same underpinnings as the Impala, Fisher said.

The Impala, he said, is competitive with cars that cost \$20,000 more such as the Audi A6 and Lexus LS460L. Only high-performance models from Germany and Japan handle better, he said.

Still, the Impala won't get *Consumer Reports'* coveted "Recommended Buy" rating.

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That's because it's too new for the magazine to have reliability data. That data could come from surveys gathered between now and the fall when the magazine unveils its annual automobile issue.

The Impala also is too new to have much of an impact on Chevrolet sales. For the first half of the year, GM sold just over 83,000 Impalas, down 15 percent from the first six months of last year. GM is hoping the redesigned car will revive the full-size segment, where sales have been falling for years due largely to old models that had not been updated.

The Impala and the Toyota Avalon, which has also been reworked this year, should breathe some life into the market.

The old Impala, which will live on as a car sold to fleets, was last redesigned in 2005. Fisher conceded that many won't believe the Impala is so good because they remember the old version.

"We're going to have to have everyone withhold their judgment until they drive one," he said.

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