

J.D. Power – Car Buyers Like Technology

Vehicle owners have a high interest in technology related to fuel economy, device/application linking for smartphones, wireless connectivity, natural language voice activation and a variety of infotainment features for their next vehicle, according to the J.D. Power and Associates 2013 U.S. Automotive Emerging Technologies StudySM released April 25.

The study measures vehicle owner interest and purchase intent for emerging automotive technologies, both before and after the market price is revealed.

Of the 22 technology features included in the 2013 study, fuel economy indicator and active shutter grille vents – both energy-related technologies – capture among the highest interest from vehicle owners. Fuel economy indicator is second highest in pre-price feature interest, followed by active shutter grille vents.

In recent years, automotive brands have rolled out fuel economy assisting technology, which has helped increase familiarity with the technology and its benefits. The active shutter grille vents feature is currently available on select domestic vehicles. Among owners who recently purchased from one of the domestic makes that offers a model with active shutter grille vents, 83 percent indicate pre-price interest in the feature, which is 7 percentage points higher than the study average at 76 percent.

Not unexpectedly, purchase interest declines across all features when a price is introduced. However, fuel economy indicator and active shutter grille vents have among the lowest drops in interest once price is introduced (decreasing 7 percentage points and 16 percentage points, respectively), compared with other technology features examined in the study. In part, fuel economy indicator and active shutter grille vents maintain vehicle owner interest because of their lower relative pricing at \$50 and \$150, respectively.

“Vehicle owners are continually aware of rising fuel costs and the need for better fuel economy. As they have come to understand the benefits of new automotive technology, they are increasingly interested in those that allow them to manage their fuel consumption with greater efficiency and help better manage their cost at the pump,” said Mike VanNieuwkuyk, executive director of global automotive at J.D. Power and Associates.

During the past five years, there has been rapid adoption of smartphones.

More than 67 percent of vehicle owners have a smartphone, while ownership of traditional mobile phones has plummeted to 28 percent in 2013 from 82 percent in 2007, when J.D. Power began measuring ownership of traditional phones.

Smartphone technology has revolutionized the way owners have engaged in countless personal and professional activities from their vehicle.

Vehicle owners have high expectations for their smartphone to easily integrate with the system in their vehicle. They want to use their smartphone in-vehicle with the same ease and functionality they have become accustomed to in their personal or business life.

However, a key challenge is that many owners keep their vehicles for more than five years, and software upgrades for device linking technology lags the introductions of new smartphones.

“Automakers have an important opportunity to gain a competitive advantage by working side by side with smartphone and application developers to provide a seamless smartphone experience for in-vehicle control

of GPS/mapping, music, weather, search tools, travel and more,” said VanNieuwkuyk. “These connections to smartphone applications need to be robust, affordable and simple to access and use in a vehicle environment.”

In the 2013 study, 82 percent of vehicle owners with smartphones cite pre-purchase interest in an in-vehicle device/application link that would connect their smartphone to their vehicle’s infotainment system, compared with 78 percent in 2012.

Owners want their infotainment system powered by their smartphone to keep their vehicle technology up to date. The physical proximity of one’s smartphone continues to be a concern, as vehicle owners struggle with the limitations of hands-free technology, generating interest in natural language voice activation systems.

Vehicle owners in Generation Y (born 1977-1995) are more likely to be interested in device application linking technology at every price level, but the largest interest increases from 2012 are among Early Boomers – those who were born between 1947 and 1953 (increasing 7 percentage points pre-price; 14 percentage points at \$250), which indicates high potential to purchase this technology. Pre-price purchase interest is also higher among men.

Fully autonomous driving is still a relatively new concept, said VanNieuwkuyk. He added that there is greater interest in semi-autonomous modes such as emergency braking and steering (40%) and automatic park assist (32%) than in a fully autonomous mode.

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