

Fusion, Spark, Dart Among Top Safety Cars

Twenty-two vehicles have earned the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety's highest safety award for 2014, Top Safety Pick+, thanks to a high level of protection in crashes and the availability of front crash prevention technology to avoid many collisions in the first place, said Russ Rader, senior vice president, Communications, for IIHS.

Among the vehicles honored in the Top Safety Pick+ were the Ford Fusion, in the midsize moderately priced category; and the Lincoln MKZ, in the midsize luxury/near-luxury category.

Other winners were the Chevy Spark, in the minicar category; the Dodge Dart and the Ford Focus, in the small car category; and the Chrysler 200 four-door and the Dodge Avenger, in the midsize moderately priced car category.

An additional 17 vehicles earn Top Safety Pick by meeting the crashworthiness criteria alone. IIHS is using new criteria for the awards this year, Rader said.

Top Safety Pick requires good performance in the Institute's moderate overlap front, side, roof strength and head restraint tests and, for the first time, good or acceptable performance in the small overlap front test introduced in 2012.

The same level of performance in those tests, along with at least a basic rating for front crash prevention, is required for the higher accolade, Top Safety Pick+.

"We've made it more difficult for manufacturers this year," said IIHS President Adrian Lund.

"Following a gradual phase-in, the small overlap crash is now part of our basic battery of tests, and good or acceptable performance should be part of every vehicle's safety credentials.

"We also felt it was time to offer extra recognition to manufacturers that are offering a proven crash avoidance technology."

IIHS has been awarding Top Safety Pick since the 2006 model year. Top Safety Pick+ was introduced last year to reward automakers that achieved good or acceptable performance in the small overlap test, in which 25 percent of a vehicle's front end on the driver's side strikes a rigid barrier at 40 mph.

IIHS began rating front crash prevention systems earlier this year after research by its affiliate, the Highway Loss Data Institute, showed that forward collision warning and automatic braking systems are reducing crashes, Rader said.

Vehicles can earn basic, advanced or superior ratings for systems offered as standard or optional equipment.

A vehicle with a forward collision warning system that meets performance criteria set by the National Highway Traffic Safety

Administration automatically qualifies for a basic rating. Additional points are awarded for autobrake, based on performance in IIHS track tests at 12 mph and 25 mph.

"Consumers who want both crash prevention technology and the latest in occupant protection have a fair number of vehicles to choose from," Lund said. "We hope manufacturers will continue to incorporate front crash prevention, developing more robust systems and adding them to more trim levels or, better yet, making them standard equipment."

The front crash prevention features of the Top Safety Pick+ winners run the gamut from basic warning systems, such as those offered on the Ford Fusion, Lincoln MKZ and Honda's four winners, to Subaru's EyeSight warn-

ing and autobrake system.

EyeSight avoids a collision in tests at both 12 mph and 25 mph and is available on the Forester, Legacy and Outback.

Among Top Safety Pick winners, the Chevrolet Spark minicar is a new model.

With the changes to the criteria, the number of Top Safety Pick+ and Top Safety Pick winners falls from a combined 130 at the time of the initial announcement of 2013 winners to 39 for 2014.

Vehicles that have fallen off the list have less than acceptable ratings for small overlap protection or they haven't been tested yet. All models that made it to the 2013 winners' circle continue to offer a high level of protection in four main crash types - moderate overlap front, side, rollover and rear.

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Looking forward to 2014, sales will continue to improve and Kelley Blue Book anticipates the industry to surpass 16 million SAAR for the first year since 2007, said KBB senior analyst Alec Gutierrez. Growth will slow from recent years; however, the initial estimate from Kelley Blue Book for 2014 is 16.3 million units, up 4.3 percent from 2013.

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