INSURANCE INSTITUTE
FOR HIGHWAY SAFETY

NEWS RELEASE

June 16, 1999

UTILITY VEHICLE BUMPERS DON'T RESIST DAMAGE IN IMPACTS AT LITTLE MORE THAN WALKING SPEED

ARLINGTON, VA — Some automakers are improving the bumpers on their cars so consumers are less likely to face expensive repairs from low-speed collisions, but these improvements aren't carrying over to utility vehicles. They still have bumpers that typically allow expensive damage in low-speed crashes.

The Insurance Institute for Highway Safety recently tested six 1999 model midsize utility vehicles, only two of which allowed less than $5,000 damage in four impacts at 5 mph. The worst vehicle tested, Mitsubishi's Montero Sport, sustained more than $6,000 damage. "There was a wide range of damage, with a couple of utility vehicles doing better than the others," Institute senior vice president Adrian Lund points out. "But even the best one we tested, the Mercedes ML 320, sustained about $3,000 damage."

Four other 1999 midsize utility vehicles — Lexus RX 300, Jeep Grand Cherokee, Land Rover Discovery, and Dodge Durango — performed better than the Montero Sport but far from good (see table, p.2). "This is very different from the rugged image utility vehicle manufacturers are selling. Instead of rugged, a more appropriate description for the bumpers on these vehicles is flimsy," Lund says.

➨ **Little improvement from previous tests of same vehicles:** The Institute previously tested 1996 models of the Jeep Grand Cherokee and Land Rover Discovery. In both cases, the bumper performances were poor. This time around, the vehicles have been redesigned, giving the automakers a chance to see what went wrong in the previous tests and equip the new models with bumpers that do a better job of resisting damage in 5 mph impacts. There were improvements, but they weren't impressive (see table). Both vehicles performed somewhat better but still racked up more than $5,000 damage in the four low-speed impacts.

To assess bumper performance, the Institute conducts a series of 4 crash tests at 5 mph — front and rear flat-barrier impacts plus two localized impacts, front-into-angle-barrier and rear-into-pole.

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5 MPH CRASH TEST RESULTS, 1999 MODELS

	Front Into Flat Barrier	Rear Into Flat Barrier	Front Into Angle Barrier	Rear Into Pole	Total Damage 4 Tests	Average Damage Each Test
Mercedes ML 320	$346	$121	$951	$1,500	$2,918	$730
Lexus RX 300	$422	$334	$1,418	$1,119	$3,293	$823
Jeep Grand Cherokee						
1999 model	$641	$871	$1,578	$2,017	$5,107	$1,277
1996 model	$758	$1,677	$2,025	$1,945	$6,405	$1,601
Land Rover Discovery						
1999 model	$914	$1,238	$2,275	$799	$5,226	$1,307
1996 model	$745	$2,298	$2,879	$1,287	$7,209	$1,802
Dodge Durango	$1,494	$702	$1,716	$1,743	$5,655	$1,414
(2nd test after bumper changes)				$1,241	$5,153	$1,288
Mitsubishi Montero Sport	$1,141	$1,239	$2,122	$1,780	$6,282	$1,571

Note: Repair costs reflect January 1999 prices.

➨ **Two pole tests of Dodge Durango:** When the rear of this utility vehicle hit the pole at 5 mph, the minor impact activated the door latch and the tailgate opened. The automaker made changes in the rear bumper system and asked for another pole test. The result was that, the second time, the latch didn't open and the vehicle sustained about $500 less damage in the impact. However, there still was more than $1,000 damage in the pole test alone.

➨ **No damage-resistance requirements:** One reason the utility vehicles performed so poorly is that they aren't subject to any requirements to prevent damage in low-speed impacts. Car bumpers have to meet federal standards in 2.5 mph impacts, and most of the bumpers on cars include a reinforced bumper bar and foam or other material to

absorb crash energy. But the bumpers on many utility vehicles don't. The Montero Sport's bumper system, for example, doesn't include energy-absorbing material, and the bumper bar "isn't much of a bar at all," Lund notes. "It's just a thin steel plate that functions more to support the bumper cover than to resist damage in low-speed impacts."

Another problem is that the bumper parts themselves are very expensive, which drives up the cost of repairs. For example, the front bumper on the Discovery is a one-piece system. Extensive damage to any part of it means the whole thing has to be replaced at a cost of $600 for the part alone. This is one reason repair costs were so high for this vehicle after the two frontal impacts at 5 mph.

"Utility vehicles may be advertised as rugged. Manufacturers tell potential buyers they can drive these vehicles anywhere adventure leads them. But consumers can expect to pay thousands of dollars when they're unlucky enough to bump these so-called rugged vehicles into something at slow speeds," Lund concludes.

End 3-page release on damage repair costs after low-speed tests.

Video news release on Wednesday, June 16, 1:30-2:00 pm EDT
(C) Galaxy 6/Trans. 9; includes crash test footage, related video

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