

INSURANCE INSTITUTE FOR HIGHWAY SAFETY

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7 NEW SPORT UTILITY VEHICLES SUSTAIN BIG DAMAGE IN 5 MPH BUMPS; ONLY NEW ACURA MDX IS EQUIPPED WITH BUMPERS THAT RESIST DAMAGE

ARLINGTON, VA — Automakers are marketing new midsize SUV models for 2001 and 2002, but most of these vehicles aren't being equipped with bumpers that resist damage in the kinds of impacts that routinely occur in commuter traffic and parking lots. Based on performance in a recent series of 5 mph crash tests involving seven new midsize SUVs, all but the Acura MDX have marginal or poor bumpers.

The Insurance Institute for Highway Safety recently tested the 2001 Acura MDX, 2001 Toyota Highlander, 2002 Chevrolet TrailBlazer, 2001 Pontiac Aztek, 2002 Isuzu Axiom, 2002 Buick Rendezvous (shares a platform with the Aztek), and 2001 Suzuki Grand Vitara XL-7. The series of four tests conducted at 5 mph are front- and rear-into-flat-barrier plus two localized impacts, front-into-angle-barrier and rear-into-pole.

Total damage in the four tests ranges from about \$1,800 for the MDX to nearly \$6,000 for the XL-7 (see table, p.2).

XL-7 and Rendezvous sustain more than \$5,000 damage: Suzuki's Grand Vitara XL-7 was the worst performer among the seven vehicles tested, sustaining more than \$2,000 damage in the rear-into-pole test alone. There was major damage to the tailgate, and the rear window shattered in both rear impacts at 5 mph. Total damage in all four tests came to \$5,802 — "a terrible showing, the worst of a generally bad lot," says the Institute's chief operating officer, Adrian Lund.

Another new SUV that sustained more than \$5,000 total damage is the Buick Rendezvous. "In the pole test, the large rear liftgate was damaged and had to be replaced because the bumper didn't absorb the force of the 5 mph bump," Lund explains.

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5 MPH CRASH TEST RESULTS, MIDSIZE UTILITY VEHICLES

	Front into flat <u>barrier</u>	Rear into flat <u>barrier</u>	Front into angle <u>barrier</u>	Rear into pole	Total damage <u>4 tests</u>	Average damage per test
2001 Acura MDX	\$124	\$282	\$656	\$730	\$1,792	\$448
2001 Toyota Highlander	\$636	\$407	\$1,413	\$532	\$2,988	\$747
2002 Chevrolet TrailBlazer	\$776	**	\$843	**	\$1,619	\$810 **
2001 Pontiac Aztek	\$348	\$389	\$469	\$2,218	\$3,424	\$856
2002 Isuzu Axiom	\$811	\$827	\$1,474	\$1,393	\$4,505	\$1,126
2002 Buick Rendezvous	\$206	\$767	\$1,029	\$3,597	\$5,599	\$1,400
2001 Suzuki Grand Vitara XL-7	\$656	\$1,602	\$1,505	\$2,039	\$5,802	\$1,451

Note: Repair costs reflect June 2001 prices.

** In the two rear impacts of the Chevrolet TrailBlazer, there wasn't any damage. But this wasn't because of a good bumper design. It was because the very strong trailer hitch absorbed all of the crash energy. It's clear that the TrailBlazer's rear bumper design isn't good — for example, the bumper bar doesn't extend the full width of the vehicle. There's no protection against damage at the rear corners. Therefore, the average repair cost for this vehicle is based on the two frontal tests only.

MDX is the best performer: Among the seven vehicles the Institute tested, “the Acura MDX has the best bumper systems. In fact, it has the best bumpers of any midsize SUV the Institute has ever tested,” Lund points out. After the rear-into-pole and front-into-angle-barrier tests, the MDX’s bumper reinforcement bar and plastic cover had to be replaced and there was some additional cosmetic refinishing.

Two more poor performers are Aztek and Axiom: The Pontiac Aztek is built on the same platform as the Rendezvous, and the bumper systems are of similar composition. However, there are design differences in these vehicles that affect the cost of repairing damage in low-speed impacts. The Aztek’s tailgate, for example, doesn’t incorporate the rear window, as does the liftgate on the Rendezvous. In the Institute’s rear-into-pole test, the Aztek’s tailgate had to be replaced. Total damage in this test came to \$2,218 including the cost of damage to the bumper system and other rear body parts.

The Axiom sustained about \$800 damage in the simplest of the Institute's four bumper tests, front-into-flat-barrier, and about \$1,500 damage in the angle-barrier impact. Total damage in all four tests came to about \$4,500. "This kind of damage shouldn't occur in 5 mph impacts. There's really no excuse for it," Lund says.

Highlander performed well in rear tests but not frontal ones: The Toyota Highlander sustained only about \$500 damage in the rear-into-pole test, compared with more than \$2,000 damage to the Aztek and XL-7 and more than \$3,500 damage to the Rendezvous in the same test. However, the Highlander has poor front bumpers.

Partial test results for the TrailBlazer: This midsize SUV sustained an average of \$810 damage in each of the frontal impacts at 5 mph. But the rear impacts didn't assess bumper performance because of the trailer hitch, which is standard equipment that extends slightly beyond the bumper and is extremely strong. The trailer hitch made direct contact with the pole and the barrier, resulting in no damage in either of the Institute's rear impact tests. "But this result is more an artifact of the Institute's tests than an indication of a good bumper design," Lund says. "It's clear that the TrailBlazer's rear bumper design isn't a good one. For example, the bumper bar doesn't extend the full width of the vehicle. Consequently, there's no protection against damage at the rear corners. This is why we assessed the TrailBlazer from the frontal test results."

End 3-page release on damage in 5 mph tests
Video news release Tues., 7/31, 1-1:30 pm EDT
(C)Telstar 6/Trans. 8; crash test footage & more

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