

INSURANCE INSTITUTE FOR HIGHWAY SAFETY

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BUMPERS ON ONE NEW SUV AND ONE LARGE PICKUP IMPROVE DRAMATICALLY; TWO OTHER NEW SUVs ARE EQUIPPED WITH BUMPERS THAT STILL DON'T BUMP

ARLINGTON, VA — In low-speed crash tests, the bumpers on the new Chevrolet TrailBlazer sport utility vehicle and redesigned Dodge Ram 1500 pickup improved compared with predecessor models of the same vehicles. The Ford Explorer SUV didn't improve. Its bumpers performed only a little better than those on the old Explorer, and the Jeep Liberty sustained more damage than three other vehicles in a recent series of crash tests at 5 mph conducted by the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety (see table, p.2).

The Liberty's bumpers "simply don't work," says the Institute's chief operating officer, Adrian Lund. "More encouraging are the bumpers on the new TrailBlazer SUV, which improved dramatically, and the bumpers on the Ram 1500 pickup, which improved the most among the vehicles we tested this time around. Now the Ram is the only large pickup with bumpers that aren't rated poor."

The Institute's 5 mph crash tests assess bumper performance in the kinds of minor impacts that frequently occur in commuter traffic and parking lots. The four tests include front- and rear-into-flat-barrier plus two localized impacts, front-into-angle-barrier and rear-into-pole. Highlights of the latest test results include the following:

The 2002 Chevrolet TrailBlazer (midsize SUV) sustained \$2,445 total damage in the Institute's four crash tests, including \$0 damage in the rear-into-flat-barrier impact. Because a trailer hitch is mounted in the middle of the back of the TrailBlazer, right where the bumper contacts the pole in the rear-into-pole impact, this test was conducted slightly off center, resulting in \$755 damage. "It isn't a bad showing, given that the pole impact is the most demanding bumper test we conduct. All of the damage to

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5 MPH CRASH TEST RESULTS							
	Front into flat barrier	Rear into flat barrier	Front into angle barrier	Rear into pole	Total damage 4 tests	Average damage per test	Bumper rating
<u>Midsize SUVs</u>							
2002 Chevrolet TrailBlazer	\$811	\$0	\$879	\$755	\$2,445	\$611	ACCEPTABLE
1996 Chevrolet Blazer	\$650	\$1,069	\$1,808	\$1,346	\$4,873	\$1,218	POOR
2002 Ford Explorer	\$1,127	\$272	\$2,334	\$1,699	\$5,432	\$1,358	POOR
1996 Ford Explorer	\$946	\$1,505	\$2,388	\$1,162	\$6,001	\$1,500	POOR
2002 Jeep Liberty	\$809	\$1,719	\$1,649	\$1,490	\$5,667	\$1,417	POOR
<u>Large pickup truck</u>							
2002 Dodge Ram 1500	\$721	\$989	\$1,010	\$1,123	\$3,843	\$961	MARGINAL
2001 Dodge Ram 1500	\$2,181	\$1,557	\$2,510	\$2,190	\$8,438	\$2,110	POOR
Note: Repair costs reflect October 2001 prices.							

the TrailBlazer was confined to the bumper, without any damage to the vehicle body. It's a lot less damage than the predecessor Blazer model sustained in the same impact," Lund points out. Damage also was reduced in the front-into-angle-barrier test, compared with the Blazer.

The **2002 Ford Explorer** (midsize SUV) sustained a total of \$5,432 damage, or somewhat less than the 1996 Explorer sustained in the same tests. The worst result was in the front-into-angle-barrier impact in which the Explorer sustained extensive bumper system damage, a right front fender that was bent in three places and couldn't be repaired, hood damage, a broken headlight, and underlying frame rail deformation. The cost of repairs from this test alone totaled \$2,334. "It's disappointing," Lund says, "because the 2002 Explorer is a whole new design. Ford had every opportunity to design the bumpers to do a better job of reducing damage."

The 2002 Jeep Liberty (midsize SUV) sustained a total of \$5,667 damage. The worst result was in the simple rear-into-flat-barrier impact, during which the rear window shattered (a \$500 repair cost alone) and the rear windshield wiper motor was damaged. There also was extensive damage to the Liberty's tailgate. "These bumpers simply don't work. A major problem is the spare wheel and tire mounted on the back," Lund explains. "The spare extends out from the vehicle beyond the bumper. This means the rear bumper didn't hit the barrier at all. The spare became the bumper, and the result is a total of about \$1,700 damage in the rear flat-barrier impact alone."

The 2002 Dodge Ram 1500 (large pickup truck) sustained a total of \$3,843 damage, or less than half as much as the predecessor 2001 Ram 1500 in the same tests. Damage to the older model in the least demanding of the four impacts, front-into-flat-barrier, involved not only the bumper system but also the grille, hood, air conditioner condenser, and radiator support. When the 2002 Ram 1500 was tested, damage in the same impact was confined to the bumper system.

"The Ram used to have the worst bumpers among the large pickup trucks the Institute tested, but now it has the best bumpers. This is encouraging, but a total of almost \$4,000 damage in our tests is still too much," Lund says. Repair costs resulting from the angle-barrier and pole tests exceeded \$1,000 each.

**End 3-page release on damage in 5 mph tests
Video news release Thurs., 11/29, 1-1:30 p.m. EST
(C)Telstar 6/Trans. 8; crash test footage & more**

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