

INSURANCE INSTITUTE FOR HIGHWAY SAFETY

NEWS RELEASE

July 2, 2002

VNR: Tues., 7/2, 1-1:30 p.m. EDT, (C) Telstar 6/Trans. 8

5 MPH CRASH TESTS OF 4 SMALL SUVs: 1 IS GOOD, BUT PERFORMANCES OF 3 OTHERS ARE RATED POOR

ARLINGTON, VA — In low-speed crash tests, the bumpers on the redesigned 2003 Subaru Forester performed well, preventing extensive damage in 5 mph impacts. However, the bumpers on three other new or redesigned small sport utility vehicles — the 2002 model Saturn VUE, 2002 Land Rover Freelander, and 2002 Honda CR-V — allowed excessive damage (see table, p.2). The performances of the CR-V and Freelander were especially poor.

Average damage per test ranged from about \$350 for the Forester to more than \$1,600 for the worst performers, the CR-V and Freelander. The four impacts conducted by the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety to assess how well bumpers prevent damage in low-speed collisions are front- and rear-into-flat-barrier plus front-into-angle-barrier and rear-into-pole. These tests reflect a range of low-speed impacts that are common in commuter traffic and parking lots.

Best performer is Forester: The Forester's front and rear bumper systems include energy-absorbing foam, and the front bumper has two aluminum bars to absorb energy (most passenger vehicles have one bar). Steel extensions at the ends of the top bumper bar spread protection to the corners of the Forester. The result was a lot less damage to the Forester than to the other small SUVs in the Institute's four bumper tests.

"Subaru is working to improve the bumpers on its vehicles to reduce damage in minor impacts. This, in turn, should reduce the cost and inconvenience for consumers involved in low-speed collisions. The new Forester's bumpers are a big improvement over those on the predecessor design, which we rated marginal with an average of \$584 damage per 5 mph crash test. In contrast, the redesigned Forester sustained \$355 damage per test," says Institute chief operating officer Adrian Lund.

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5 MPH CRASH TEST RESULTS, SMALL SPORT UTILITY VEHICLES

	Front into flat <u>barrier</u>	Rear into flat <u>barrier</u>	Front into angle <u>barrier</u>	Rear into <u>pole</u>	Total damage <u>4 tests</u>	Average damage <u>per test</u>	Bumper <u>rating</u>
2003 Subaru Forester	\$359	\$110	\$681	\$271	\$1,421	\$355	GOOD
1998 Subaru Forester	\$10	\$0	\$885	\$1,442	\$2,337	\$584	MARGINAL
2002 Saturn VUE	\$396	\$534	\$1,149	\$1,310	\$3,389	\$847	POOR
2002 Land Rover Freelander	\$932	\$2,723	\$719	\$2,096	\$6,470	\$1,618	POOR
2002 Honda CR-V	\$505	\$2,505	\$870	\$2,727	\$6,607	\$1,652	POOR
1998 Honda CR-V	\$1,089	\$826	\$554	\$1,065	\$3,534	\$884	POOR

All repair costs reflect May 2002 prices.

Note: The pole test of the Saturn VUE was conducted off-center because of reinforcement in the middle of the rear bumper system that's effective in only a narrow range of impacts.

Subaru also is paying attention to the cost of repairing the Forester when it does get damaged. Initially this manufacturer was going to sell some bumper parts — the rear bumper bar and two brackets — only as a package for \$199, which would have meant repair shops needing a bracket would have to buy the bar, too. But after reviewing the Institute's test results, Subaru agreed to 'unbundle' the parts to lower the repair costs. Now the brackets can be purchased for \$18 apiece.

"This is what all manufacturers should do — work to both reduce the damage that occurs in low-speed impacts by improving the bumper designs and lessen the cost of fixing the damage that does occur," Lund says.

CR-V and Freelander are worst performers: In contrast to the Forester are the performances of the Honda CR-V and Land Rover Freelander. These vehicles sustained four times as much damage as the Forester in the Institute's 5 mph tests. One contributor to the high repair costs is that, like a lot of SUVs, these two have spare tires mounted on the tailgates, and the tires extend beyond the bumper systems. "The spare essentially serves as the bumper, and it doesn't bump very well," Lund points out.

The Freelander has a flimsy rear bumper bar and no foam at all to absorb crash energy. In both rear tests at 5 mph, the rear door was damaged beyond repair. Replacement of the door and glass, which shattered, cost more than \$1,000. The electric motor that operates the rear window also had to be replaced (\$337 for the part alone), and fender damage had to be repaired after the rear-into-flat-barrier test. Total damage exceeded \$2,000 after each of the rear tests, flat-barrier and pole.

The CR-V's performance was even worse. It sustained more than \$2,500 damage in each of the two rear impacts.

"The spare tires mounted on the backs of the CR-V and Freelander were driven into the rear bodies of these vehicles. This is an unacceptable way to design any vehicle because it all but assures that expensive damage will occur in minor bumps," Lund says, adding that "the worst news is from the rear-into-flat-barrier tests. This is a very minor impact because the energy is spread across the whole rear of the vehicle. Any vehicle should routinely withstand this test unscathed, but the Freelander and CR-V each sustained thousands of dollars worth of damage."

The same two SUVs turned in poor front-into-angle-barrier test performances. The Freelander's hood and front fenders were pushed out of line, and there was safety-related damage — a broken headlight. The CR-V's headlight was damaged in the same test, and there was costly-to-fix damage to the car body.

Overall, the CR-V sustained about \$6,600 damage in the Institute's four bumper tests, nearly double the total damage sustained by a 1998 CR-V in the same tests. "When Honda redesigned the CR-V, the manufacturer obviously didn't care about the bumpers. The result is that CR-V owners can expect a lot of costly damage, even in minor bumps," Lund says.

End 3-page release on damage in 5 mph tests
Video news release Tues., 7/2, 1-1:30 p.m. EDT
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