

INSURANCE INSTITUTE FOR HIGHWAY SAFETY

NEWS RELEASE

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FORD REDESIGNS PICKUP AND MINIVAN BUT BUMPER PERFORMANCES GET WORSE IN 5 MPH CRASH TESTS

ARLINGTON, VA — The Ford F-150 pickup and Freestar minivan, both new for 2004, didn't perform well in low-speed crash tests conducted recently by the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety. The F-150 earned a rating of poor, and the Freestar is rated marginal.

The Institute's series of four bumper tests includes front- and rear-into-flat-barrier plus front-into-angle-barrier and rear-into-pole impacts. The tests assess how well bumpers can prevent damage in 5 mph collisions simulating the fender benders that are common in commuter traffic and parking lots. A good bumper system should absorb the energy of these minor impacts and protect expensive body panels, headlamp systems, and other components from damage.

The F-150 sustained an average of almost \$1,500 damage in each of the Institute's four tests. The Freestar sustained an average of about \$700 damage.

5 MPH CRASH TEST RESULTS, FORD F-150 PICKUP TRUCK AND FREESTAR MINIVAN

	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
Pickup trucks							
2004 Ford F-150	\$979	\$1,606	\$1,286	\$2,041	\$5,912	\$1,478	POOR
2001 Ford F-150	\$1,353	\$1,127	\$1,279	\$1,711	\$5,470	\$1,368	POOR
Minivans							
2004 Ford Freestar	\$191	\$513	\$1,239	\$869	\$2,812	\$703	MARGINAL
1999 Ford Windstar	\$389	\$0	\$355	\$1,349	\$2,093	\$523	ACCEPTABLE

All repair costs reflect October 2003 parts and labor prices.

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"Ford is touting the safety equipment on the new F-150 and Freestar, but the company missed a good opportunity to protect its customers' pocketbooks as well," says Adrian Lund, the Institute's chief operating officer.

F-150 bumpers don't improve: "The F-150 is all new, but its bumpers are just as flimsy as before and even a little worse," Lund says. "The highest damage total was in the rear-into-pole test. The whole bumper was pushed downward, and the tailgate was crushed. In addition, the left and right ends of the bumper were driven into the rear fenders."

A big downside for the F-150 is that the bumper needed to be replaced after each test. "In both of the frontal tests, most of the damage total was due to replacing the entire bumper assembly, which costs almost \$800," Lund points out.

One reason pickups and minivans generally perform poorly in the Institute's bumper tests is that they aren't subject to any requirements to prevent damage in low-speed impacts. Automobile bumpers have to meet federal standards in 2.5 mph impacts, so cars typically do better in low-speed crash tests.

Minivan bumpers fare worse than predecessor model: The Ford Windstar, the predecessor to the Freestar, was rated acceptable for bumper performance when the Institute tested a 1999 model. Average damage for this model was about \$500 per test, with no damage in the rear-into-flat-barrier impact. In contrast, the new Freestar drops to a marginal rating because its bumpers allowed substantially more damage in two of the four tests. In the front-into-angle-barrier test, there was more than \$1,200 damage because the bumper assembly had to be replaced, and there was damage to the frame.

"Ford could have used this opportunity to design better bumpers," Lund concludes. "A bumper should be tough enough to prevent major damage in a minor collision at a fast walking speed."

End 2-page release on crash tests to assess bumper performance

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