

INSURANCE INSTITUTE FOR HIGHWAY SAFETY

NEWS RELEASE

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5 OF 6 MIDSIZE CARS EARN LOW RATINGS IN 5 MPH CRASHES TO TEST THE BUMPERS

Arlington, VA — Five of six new midsize cars earned poor or marginal ratings in low-speed crash tests conducted by the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety. Only one model, the Mitsubishi Galant, earned the second highest rating of acceptable. The Suzuki Verona, Nissan Maxima, and Acura TL are rated marginal. The Chevrolet Malibu and Acura TSX earned the lowest rating of poor. All six cars are 2004 models.

"These midsize models range from inexpensive to luxury, but all but one of them share bumpers that don't bump," says Adrian Lund, Institute chief operating officer. "Poor bumper design hits consumers in their pocketbooks, and it's an inconvenience because a vehicle will have to be in the shop for several days or more to repair the damage."

5 MPH BUMPER CRASH TEST RESULTS, MIDSIZE CARS

	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>Inexpensive models</u>							
2004 Mitsubishi Galant	\$384	\$153	\$853	\$709	\$2,099	\$525	ACCEPTABLE
2004 Suzuki Verona	\$405	\$496	\$897	\$743	\$2,541	\$635	MARGINAL
2004 Chevrolet Malibu	\$394	\$898	\$1,366	\$1,149	\$3,807	\$952	POOR
<u>Moderately priced models</u>							
2004 Nissan Maxima	\$416	\$369	\$964	\$702	\$2,451	\$613	MARGINAL
2004 Acura TSX	\$550	\$579	\$1,269	\$1,559	\$3,957	\$989	POOR
<u>Luxury model</u>							
2004 Acura TL	\$326	\$451	\$1,381	\$765	\$2,923	\$731	MARGINAL

All repair costs reflect January 2004 parts and labor prices.

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The Institute's series of four bumper tests includes front- and rear-into-flat-barrier plus front-into-angle-barrier and rear-into-pole. These tests assess how well bumpers can prevent damage in 5 mph collisions simulating the fender-bender impacts 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.

Acura TSX and Chevrolet Malibu are worst: The TSX sustained the heaviest damage in the rear-into-pole test because the bumper was too weak to protect the car body.

"The bumper couldn't keep the damage away from the trunk and rear body panel," Lund says. "The lid alone cost more than \$500 to straighten and refinish. The bumper is supposed to take the hit so the car's fenders and body don't have to."

Another problem is that the TSX's bumpers are nearly flush against the body — a design favored by some automotive stylists.

"That design may please the styling department, but it's terrible for consumers because it puts expensive sheet metal and safety components such as the headlamps closer to the point of impact in a routine fender-bender."

The Malibu sustained more than \$1,300 damage in the front-into-angle-barrier test because the bumper cover tore, the body was driven out of line, and the right fender buckled.

"One of the least demanding tests is the rear-into-flat-barrier because the energy of the impact is spread across the rear of the vehicle," Lund explains. "But the damage to the Malibu was almost \$900 in this test, in part because the bumper mountings were driven into the body panels. In contrast, the Mitsubishi Galant sustained only about \$150 damage in the same test because all that needed to be replaced was the steel reinforcement bar under the bumper cover."

As a result of the Institute's tests, General Motors says it's re-engineering Malibu bumpers. "Hopefully the Malibu will do significantly better the next time we test it," Lund says.

Mitsubishi makes effort to design better bumpers for Galant: Damage to the Galant's bumpers averaged about \$500 per test, compared with an average of almost \$1,000 per test for the poor performers. Early in production, Mitsubishi changed the design of some of the front bumper components to improve the Galant's performance, "but there's still a lot of room to make them better," Lund notes.

There was more than \$2,000 damage in all four tests, so the Galant didn't earn the Institute's top rating of good. But the damage totals were \$1,800 less than the TSX sustained and \$1,700 less than the Malibu.

"It's not expensive for manufacturers to build decent bumpers. The Galant is one of the lowest priced vehicles in this group of cars we tested, but it has the best bumpers," Lund says.

Bumpers themselves sustain big damage: For some of the cars, the high repair costs reflect the expense of replacing bumper components that should be able to resist major damage in a low-speed impact.

"In the rear-into-pole test, the TL's bumper kept damage away from the car's body, but just to repair the bumper cover and replace parts cost more than \$750," Lund points out. "The Verona sustained nearly \$900 damage in the front-angle test, and all but about \$70 was to repair and replace bumper components. Manufacturers need to pay more attention to what it costs owners to repair damage in minor collisions. A lot of the damage to these cars could have been avoided if the bumpers had been designed to absorb the energy of a minor impact."

A federal bumper standard used to require no damage in the flat-barrier impacts. A 1981 Ford Escort withstood all four of the Institute's bumper tests with no damage at all. The 1998 Volkswagen New Beetle sustained only minimal damage in the same impacts.

**End 3-page release on crash tests to assess bumper performance
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