

INSURANCE INSTITUTE FOR HIGHWAY SAFETY

NEWS RELEASE

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NEW FRONTAL CRASH TEST RESULTS: FORD'S FREESTYLE SUV IS A TOP PERFORMER

ARLINGTON, VA — Ford's Freestyle, a midsize SUV introduced for the 2005 model year, earned the highest rating of good in a 40 mph frontal offset test recently conducted by the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety. The Freestyle also earned the "best pick" designation for frontal crash test performance.

This brings to seven the number of current midsize SUV designs that have earned good ratings in the Institute's frontal crash test. Four of the good performers also are "best picks" (see attached ratings). Results show that manufacturers have made dramatic improvements in how well their vehicles perform since the Institute first began frontal offset tests in 1995.

The integrity of the Freestyle's occupant compartment was maintained very well. There was minimal intrusion. Injury measures recorded on the dummy's neck, chest, and both legs were low. However, a high head acceleration occurred when the driver dummy's head bottomed out the airbag, indicating that a person in a similar crash could sustain a head injury such as a concussion.

"In the frontal test, the driver's side of the vehicle needs to absorb the energy of the crash and keep the occupant compartment intact," says Institute chief operating officer Adrian Lund. "The Freestyle's performance is what we like to see. A driver in a real-world crash of this severity would be likely to sustain only minor injuries. The Freestyle is a good performer and a 'best pick' in the frontal test."

Ford requested the test: It's unusual for the Institute to release crash test results for just one vehicle. Ford requested the Freestyle test, and the Institute's longstanding policy is to grant such requests if a manufacturer provides reimbursement for the cost of the vehicle.

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When the Institute first evaluated midsize SUVs in frontal tests in 1996 and 1997, none of the vehicles earned a good rating. Four designs were rated marginal or poor. In contrast, it's now rare for an SUV to earn a rating that's less than good.

"Ford has done a good job of designing its newest vehicles to better protect occupants in frontal crashes," Lund says. Other recent good performers include the Five Hundred family sedan, F-150 pickup, and Freestar minivan.

Institute and government crash tests complement each other: The Institute's crashworthiness evaluations are based on results of frontal offset crash tests at 40 mph. Each vehicle's overall evaluation is based on three aspects of performance — measurements of intrusion into the occupant compartment, injury measures from a Hybrid III dummy positioned in the driver seat, and analysis of slow-motion film to assess how well the restraint system controlled dummy movement during the test.





The federal government has been testing new passenger vehicles in 35 mph full-front crash tests since 1978. This New Car Assessment Program has been a major contributor to crashworthiness improvements, in particular improved restraint systems in new passenger vehicles. The Institute's offset tests, conducted since 1995, involve 40 percent of a vehicle's front end hitting a deformable barrier at 40 mph. This test complements the federal test involving the full width of the front end hitting a rigid barrier. Both tests are contributing to improvements in crashworthiness, in particular improved crumple zones and safety cages.

The same 40 mph offset crash test is used to evaluate new cars by the European Union in cooperation with motor clubs, by an Australian consortium of state governments and motor clubs, and by a government-affiliated organization in Japan.

**End 2-page news release on Freestyle's frontal crash test results
1-page attachment: crashworthiness ratings for midsize SUVs**

For more information go to www.iihs.org

ATTACHMENT: CRASHWORTHINESS EVALUATIONS

		Frontal Offset Crash Test Performance						
		OVERALL EVALUATION	Structure/ Safety Cage	Injury Measures			Restraints/ Dummy Kinematics	
				Head/ Neck	Chest	Leg/Foot Left, Right		
Midsize SUVs								
	TOYOTA 4RUNNER 2003-06 models test vehicle = 4,191 lbs. <i>Note: Results also apply to Lexus GX 470</i>	G	G	G	G	G	G	G
		G	G	A	G	G	G	G
	NISSAN MURANO 2004-06 models test vehicle = 3,999 lbs.	G	G	A	G	G	G	G
		G	A	G	G	G	G	G
	SUZUKI GRAND VITARA XL-7 2001-06 models test vehicle = 3,682 lbs.	G	G	G	G	A	G	A
	TOYOTA HIGHLANDER 2001-06 models test vehicle = 3,880 lbs.	G	G	A	G	G	A	G
	MITSUBISHI ENDEAVOR 2004-06 models test vehicle = 4,079 lbs.	G	G	A	G	G	A	G
	KIA SORENTO 2003-06 models test vehicle = 4,625 lbs.	A	G	A	G	G	G	M
	BUICK RENDEZVOUS 2002-06 models test vehicle = 4,191 lbs.	A	A	G	G	G	G	M
	JEEP LIBERTY 2002-06 models test vehicle = 4,100 lbs.	M	G	M	G	A	G	A

G GOOD **A** ACCEPTABLE **M** MARGINAL **P** POOR

Caution: The kinetic energy a vehicle must absorb in a crash test increases with vehicle weight, so barrier tests are more demanding of heavier vehicles. But people in heavier vehicles in real-world, 2-vehicle crashes typically fare better than people in lighter vehicles (in many single-vehicle crashes, weight offers no safety advantage). This is why test results shouldn't be compared among vehicles with large weight differences. The weight range (about 1,000 pounds) of the SUVs listed here is greater than in most other groups of vehicles the Institute has tested. But since the weight benefit in 2-vehicle crashes is only slight for vehicles weighing more than 4,000 pounds, and because a greater proportion of midsize SUV occupant deaths (compared with car occupant deaths) occur in single-vehicle crashes in which vehicle weight often offers no advantage, the crash test results for these vehicles can be compared.