

INSURANCE INSTITUTE FOR HIGHWAY SAFETY

NEWS RELEASE

May 14, 2007

NEW ACURA AND FORD MODELS ARE TOP PERFORMERS IN CRASH TESTS

ARLINGTON, VA — The 2007 Acura MDX luxury SUV plus the 2008 Ford Taurus and twin Mercury Sable large family cars earn the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety's *TOP SAFETY PICK* award. Vehicles earning this designation afford superior overall crash protection among the vehicles in their class. To qualify for *TOP SAFETY PICK*, vehicles must earn the highest rating of good in all three Institute tests — front, side, and rear. They also have to be equipped with electronic stability control (ESC), which is a standard feature on the MDX and optional on the Taurus and Sable beginning with 2008 models.

"Criteria to win *TOP SAFETY PICK* are tough because they're intended to drive continued safety improvements such as high crash test ratings and rapid addition of ESC," says Institute president Adrian Lund. "Recognizing vehicles at the head of their class for safety helps consumers distinguish the best overall choices without having to sort through multiple results."

Initially only 13 cars, minivans, and SUVs qualified for the 2007 awards. As automakers introduce new models or make safety changes to existing ones, the Institute adds winners throughout the year. With the addition of the MDX, Taurus, and Sable, consumers now may choose among 18 cars, SUVs, and minivans that offer top-rated crash protection and ESC.

Automakers make changes to earn *TOP SAFETY PICK*: The Taurus replaces the Five Hundred, which was introduced in the 2005 model year and earned *TOP SAFETY PICK* in 2006 but lost the designation for 2007 when the Institute, based on new research, tightened award criteria to include the availability of ESC. The Five Hundred didn't offer ESC, which is optional on the 2008 Taurus and Sable. These cars also include side airbags with head protection as standard equipment.

"We're pleased that manufacturers are making rapid vehicle changes to reflect the latest safety research," Lund says. "It's only relatively recently that research has shown the dramatic benefits of ESC in preventing crashes. In a competitive marketplace, automakers are moving quickly to make ESC at least available and increasingly standard on most new cars and SUVs."

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Rear crash protection is another area of improvement. When the 2007 MDX was introduced, its seat/head restraints were rated marginal overall, the second lowest rating. The head restraints are attached to a lever arm that moves the restraint up and forward as an occupant's back pushes into the seatback during a rear-end crash. Honda engineers changed the design of the lever mechanism so the head restraint moves toward the head earlier in a crash. The Institute tested a seat/head restraint with the new design, and it improved to an overall rating of good. *TOP SAFETY PICK* applies to MDXs with the new seat design built after May 2007.

How vehicles are evaluated: The Institute's frontal crashworthiness evaluations are based on results of 40 mph frontal offset crash tests. Each vehicle's overall evaluation is based on measurements of intrusion into the occupant compartment, injury measures recorded on a Hybrid III dummy in the driver seat, and analysis of slow-motion film to assess how well the restraint system controlled dummy movement during the test.

Side evaluations are based on performance in a crash test in which the side of a vehicle is struck by a barrier moving at 31 mph. The barrier represents the front end of a pickup or SUV. Ratings reflect injury measures recorded on two instrumented SID-IIIs dummies, assessment of head protection countermeasures, and the vehicle's structural performance during the impact. Injury measures obtained from the two dummies, one in the driver seat and the other in the back seat behind the driver, are used to determine the likelihood that a driver and/or passenger in a similar real-world crash would sustain serious injury to various parts of the body. The movements and contacts of the dummies' heads during the test also are evaluated. Structural performance is based on measurements indicating the amount of B-pillar intrusion into the occupant compartment.

Rear crash protection is rated according to a two-step procedure. Starting points for the ratings are measurements of head restraint geometry – the height of a restraint and its horizontal distance behind the back of the head of an average-size man. Seat/head restraints with good or acceptable geometry are tested dynamically using a dummy that measures forces on the neck. This test simulates a collision in which a stationary vehicle is struck in the rear at 20 mph. Seats without good or acceptable geometry are rated poor overall because they cannot be positioned to protect many people.

**End 2-page news release on new *TOP SAFETY PICK* winners
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