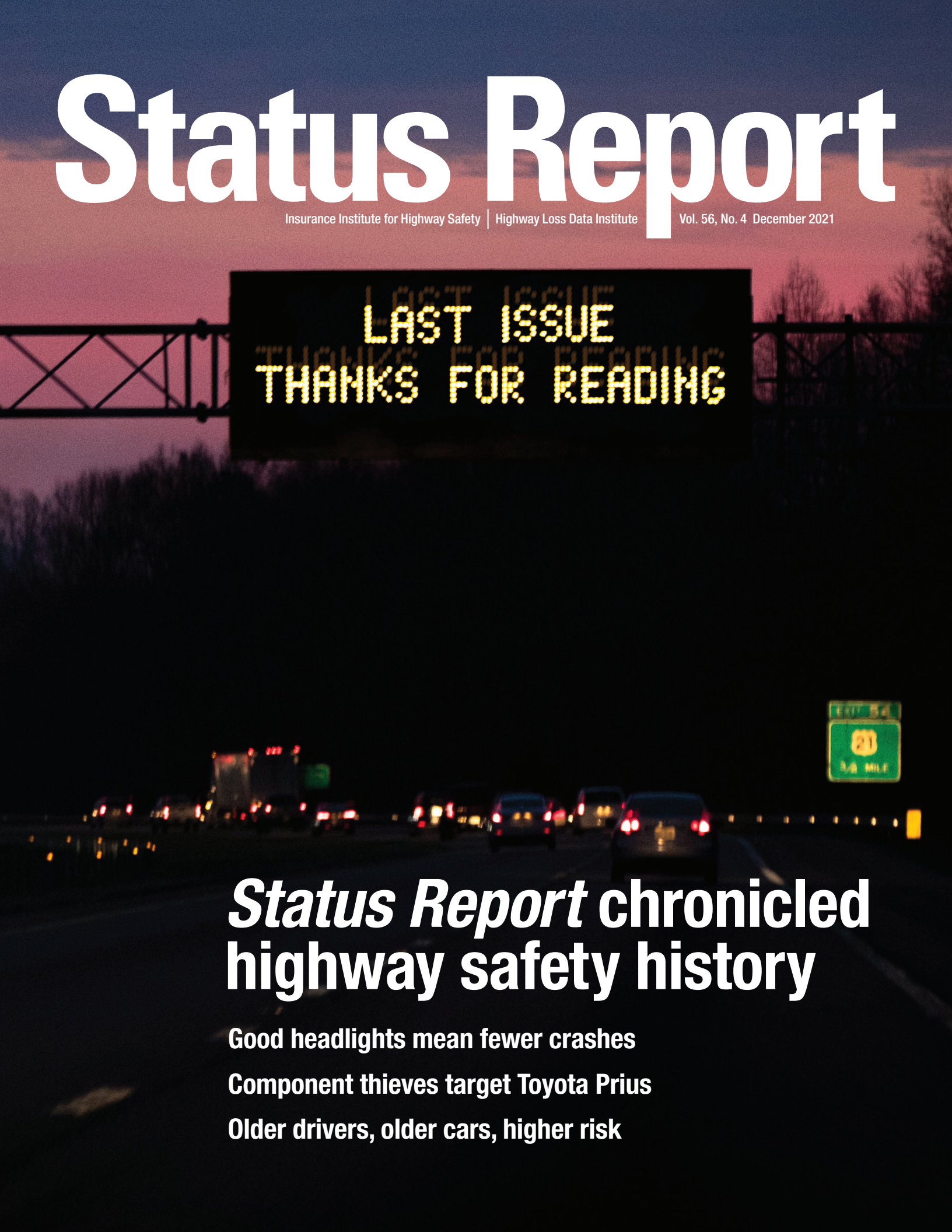
Status Report

Insurance Institute for Highway Safety | Highway Loss Data Institute Vol. 56, No. 4 December 2021



Status Report chronicled highway safety history

Good headlights mean fewer crashes

Component thieves target Toyota Prius

Older drivers, older cars, higher risk

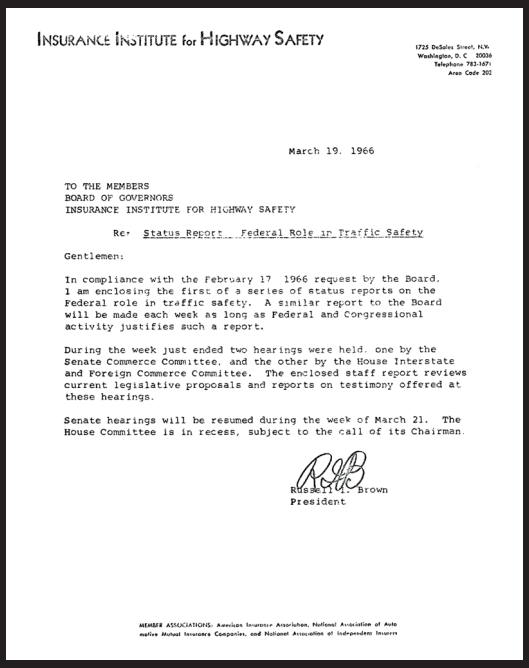
Closing out the print era for IIHS-HLDI communications

Conducting research, crunching numbers and testing vehicles are all crucial to the IIHS-HLDI mission. So is communicating the results of those activities. It's only after our findings reach consumers, policymakers, safety advocates and industry decision-makers that they can be used to reduce risk and save lives.

For years, our main outlet for such communication was this newsletter. *Status Report* was a must-read for anyone interested in road safety from Capitol Hill to Detroit and beyond.

But just as highway safety has evolved, so have our communications tools. Today, most of the people interested in our work read about it online. Even as the influence of IIHS-HLDI has held steady or grown, the number of *Status Report* subscribers has declined. Today it's a fraction of what it was a decade ago.

In response to these trends, we have decided to stop publishing *Status Report* after more than half a century. This issue will be our last print edition. In the coming weeks, we'll evaluate how best to continue communicating with you, our readers. In the meantime, we encourage you to bookmark our website and follow us on social media. These will continue to be the best ways to get timely information about our research and ratings.



INSURANCE INSTITUTE for HIGHWAY SAFETY

1725 DeSales Street, N.W.
Washington, D. C. 20036
Telephone 783-1671
Area Code 202

March 19, 1966

TO THE MEMBERS
BOARD OF GOVERNORS
INSURANCE INSTITUTE FOR HIGHWAY SAFETY

Re: Status Report - Federal Role in Traffic Safety

Gentlemen:

In compliance with the February 17 1966 request by the Board, I am enclosing the first of a series of status reports on the Federal role in traffic safety. A similar report to the Board will be made each week as long as Federal and Congressional activity justifies such a report.

During the week just ended two hearings were held: one by the Senate Commerce Committee, and the other by the House Interstate and Foreign Commerce Committee. The enclosed staff report reviews current legislative proposals and reports on testimony offered at these hearings.

Senate hearings will be resumed during the week of March 21. The House Committee is in recess, subject to the call of its Chairman.

Russell I. Brown
President

MEMBER ASSOCIATIONS: American Insurance Association, National Association of Automotive Mutual Insurance Companies, and National Association of Independent Insurers

A look back

Ever wonder how *Status Report* got its name? It began as a literal "status report" on federal highway safety action sent by the first IIHS president, Russell Ira Brown, to the IIHS Board of Governors. The first report was dated March 19, 1966, and focused on hearings on the Traffic and Motor Vehicle Safety Act of 1966, then under consideration in the Senate. The legislation, signed later that year by President Lyndon B. Johnson, allowed the federal government for the first time to set safety standards for automobiles.

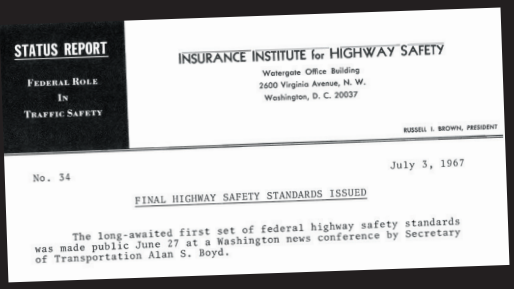
In his cover letter, Brown committed to sending updates each week "as long as Federal and Congressional activity justifies such a report."

In the early years, the typewritten missives covered the actions of Congress, as well the newly created National Traffic Safety Agency and National Highway Safety Bureau, which later became the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration. *Status Report* writers attended hearings on Capitol Hill so that they could report back to the IIHS board on the many federal policy developments related to highway safety during that period.

The Institute itself was undergoing major changes around that time too. In 1968, nine years after its founding as a conduit for insurance industry support for highway safety efforts by academic institutions and others, IIHS reinvented itself as an independent research organization. This transition was overseen largely by William Haddon Jr., M.D., who became IIHS president in 1969 after serving as the nation's first federal highway safety chief.

Status Report continued to highlight federal legislation and regulatory changes but gradually began to focus more on the Institute's own research. It also began to showcase findings by HLDI, the IIHS affiliate founded in 1972 to collect, analyze and publish insurance loss data.

Here is a look back at some of the headlines from *Status Report* that helped shape the highway safety agenda over the years.



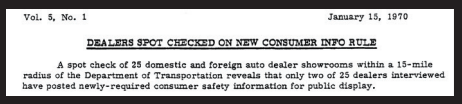
STATUS REPORT
FEDERAL ROLE IN TRAFFIC SAFETY

INSURANCE INSTITUTE for HIGHWAY SAFETY
Watergate Office Building
2600 Virginia Avenue, N. W.
Washington, D. C. 20037
RUSSELL I. BROWN, PRESIDENT

No. 34 July 3, 1967

FINAL HIGHWAY SAFETY STANDARDS ISSUED

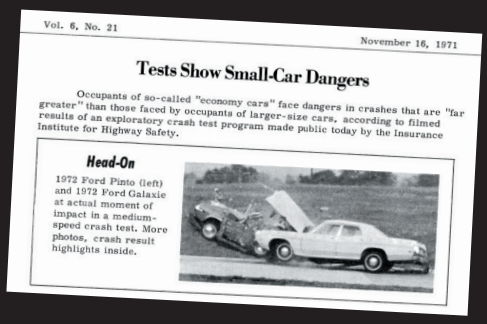
The long-awaited first set of federal highway safety standards was made public June 27 at a Washington news conference by Secretary of Transportation Alan S. Boyd.



Vol. 5, No. 1 January 15, 1970

DEALERS SPOT CHECKED ON NEW CONSUMER INFO RULE

A spot check of 25 domestic and foreign auto dealer showrooms within a 15-mile radius of the Department of Transportation reveals that only two of 25 dealers interviewed have posted newly-required consumer safety information for public display.



Vol. 6, No. 21 November 16, 1971

Tests Show Small-Car Dangers

Occupants of so-called "economy cars" face dangers in crashes that are "far greater" than those faced by occupants of larger-size cars, according to filmed results of an exploratory crash test program made public today by the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety.

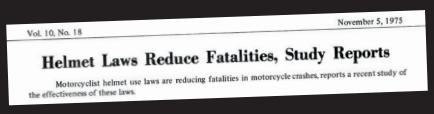
Head-On

1972 Ford Pinto (left) and 1972 Ford Galaxie at actual moment of impact in a medium-speed crash test. More photos, crash result highlights inside.

Vol. 7, No. 10 May 22, 1972

'Crackdown' On Drunks Found Ineffective

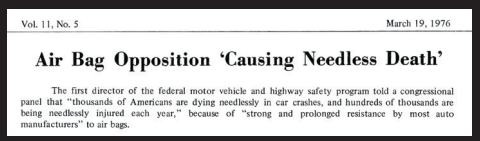
Chicago's recent, much-touted "crackdown" on drunk driving actually produced no reductions in that city's number of car-crash fatalities or drunk driving arrests, according to researchers. Claims of great effectiveness had been made for Chicago's "get tough" court actions against drunk drivers.



Vol. 10, No. 18 November 5, 1975

Helmet Laws Reduce Fatalities, Study Reports

Motorcyclist helmet use laws are reducing fatalities in motorcycle crashes, reports a recent study of the effectiveness of these laws.



Vol. 11, No. 5 March 19, 1976

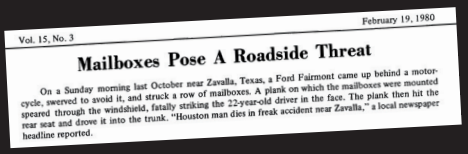
Air Bag Opposition 'Causing Needless Death'

The first director of the federal motor vehicle and highway safety program told a congressional panel that "thousands of Americans are dying needlessly in car crashes, and hundreds of thousands are being needlessly injured each year," because of "strong and prolonged resistance by most auto manufacturers" to air bags.

Vol. 13, No. 16 November 17, 1978

Institute Urges Stronger Child Restraint Standards

The Insurance Institute for Highway Safety has agreed with federal officials on the need for revised standards on child restraints, and has suggested ways to strengthen the eventual rules.



Vol. 15, No. 3 February 19, 1980

Mailboxes Pose A Roadside Threat

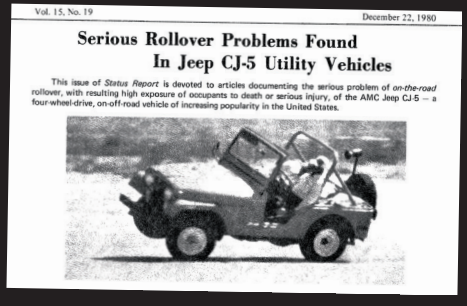
On a Sunday morning last October near Zavalla, Texas, a Ford Fairmont came up behind a motorcycle, swerved to avoid it, and struck a row of mailboxes. A plank on which the mailboxes were mounted speared through the windshield, fatally striking the 22-year-old driver in the face. The plank then hit the rear seat and drove it into the trunk. "Houston man dies in freak accident near Zavalla," a local newspaper headline reported.

Vol. 15, No. 18 December 9, 1980

More Crashes, Pedestrian Injuries

Right-Turn-On-Red Laws Raise Intersection Toll

Adoption of right-turn-on-red laws throughout the United States as a fuel-saving measure has cost the nation a 20 percent increase in the number of crashes involving right turns at traffic lights and a 57 percent increase in the number of pedestrians struck during right-turn maneuvers, a new research study has concluded. In real numbers, that means an additional 20,000 crashes each year, 1,400 of them involving pedestrians.



Vol. 15, No. 19 December 22, 1980

Serious Rollover Problems Found In Jeep CJ-5 Utility Vehicles

This issue of *Status Report* is devoted to articles documenting the serious problem of *on-the-road* rollover, with resulting high exposure of occupants to death or serious injury, of the AMC Jeep CJ-5 — a four-wheel-drive, on-off-road vehicle of increasing popularity in the United States.

Vol. 17, No. 14 October 5, 1982

Curfews Reduce Crashes of 16-Year-Olds


STATUS REPORT

Survivor: 'I'll Never Buy Another Car Without an Air Bag'

Senate Bill Would Extend Standards To Multipurpose Vehicles

IN TEMPO WITH SAFETY

Good IIHS headlight ratings linked to lower crash rates

The headlight ratings program developed by IIHS has spurred industry changes that are reducing dangerous nighttime crashes in the real world, a recent study shows.

Nighttime crash rates per mile are nearly 20 percent lower for vehicles with headlights that earn a good rating in the IIHS evaluation, compared with those with poor-rated headlights, the study found. For vehicles with acceptable or marginal headlights, crash rates are 15 percent and 10 percent lower than for those with poor ratings.

"Driving at night is 3 times as risky as driving during the day," says IIHS Senior Research Engineer Matthew Brumbelow, who conducted the study. "This is the first study to document how much headlights that provide better illumination can help."

Until 2016, when IIHS launched its headlight ratings program, neither drivers nor researchers had any real way to compare how well different headlights lit up the roadway. The illumination provided by different headlights in real-world conditions varied greatly, but the outdated federal standard effectively branded them all equal. Five years on, IIHS has rated around 1,000 different headlight systems, allowing Brumbelow to examine how headlights with good, acceptable, marginal and poor ratings affect crash rates.

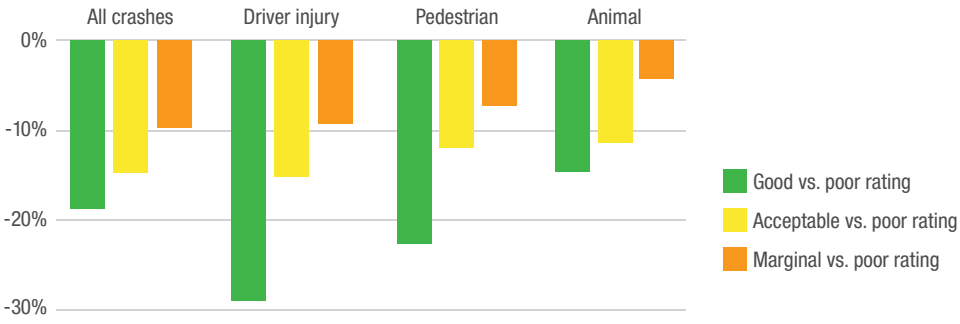
Brumbelow first identified 187 vehicle models from model years 2015 to 2020 that were either available with a single IIHS-rated headlight system or multiple systems that could be determined by the vehicle identification number.

He then examined police-reported crashes involving those vehicles from 11 states that maintain especially detailed records and isolated around 44,000 single-vehicle crashes that happened in darkness. He adjusted the ratings to exclude any point deductions for excessive glare because it is not a factor in single-vehicle crashes.

Controlling for differences in miles traveled, driver-related risk factors and other variables such as differing road conditions, good-rated headlights were associated with a 19 percent reduction in the nighttime single-vehicle crash rate, compared with poor-rated ones. Acceptable and marginal headlights were associated with reductions of about 15 and 10 percent.

In contrast, IIHS uses vehicles driven on a test track to conduct its evaluations. The ratings are based on how far the low and high beams illuminate the path to 5 lux on curves and straightaways while traveling at 40-50 mph. Points are also deducted for glare that can temporarily blind oncoming drivers. (For reference, the end of twilight on a clear day is about 3 lux and the ambient light in the hallway of a typical office building is about 80).

Nighttime crash reductions associated with good, acceptable and marginal headlights



Brumbelow also found that the reductions were greater for specific types of crashes. Compared with poor ones, good-rated headlights reduced the rate of crashes in which the driver was injured by 29 percent and the rates of tow-away crashes and pedestrian crashes by about a quarter each.

"These real-world results show that better scores in our headlight tests translate into safer nighttime driving on the road, which is of course what really matters," says Brumbelow.

Those reductions make clear that federal headlight regulations, which have not changed significantly since 1968, are not stringent enough. The federal standard specifies minimum and maximum brightness levels for headlights at various angles. However, it focuses on the headlight itself, without considering how well it is aimed once it is installed on a particular vehicle or how newer technologies such as curve-adaptive headlights may change that orientation when the vehicle is moving.

Performance varies greatly. The low-beam illumination of headlights evaluated by IIHS ranges from 125 feet to 460 feet. For the driver of a vehicle going 50 mph, that means a difference of 2 seconds versus 6 seconds to recognize a potential hazard and respond by braking or steering.

By exposing those gaps and making high-quality headlights a requirement for the *TOP SAFETY PICK* and *TOP SAFETY PICK+* awards, IIHS has given manufacturers an incentive to make better headlights available on more vehicles.

Since the program began, the proportion of headlights earning a good rating has increased from 4 percent to 29 percent. Irrespective of their ratings, the average low-beam illumination distance for all the headlights tested rose from less than 180 feet to more than 200 feet.

Though Brumbelow did not consider excessive glare in his analysis, measuring glare

IIHS RESEARCH

"Lighting the way: IIHS headlight ratings predict nighttime crash rates"
by M.L. Brumbelow

To request this paper, email researchpapers@iihs.org.

to oncoming drivers is also an important part of IIHS evaluations. Here, too, the ratings have driven improvements. In 2016, the headlight systems rated by IIHS emitted 15 percent more glare on average than the level IIHS determined to be acceptable. In 2020, average glare was 10 percent below that threshold.

The difference is sometimes stark. The headlights on one recently evaluated vehicle, the 2022 Mitsubishi Outlander, went from poor to good due solely to aim adjustments the manufacturer made to reduce glare in its bid for a *TOP SAFETY PICK+* award, IIHS Manager of Active Safety Testing David Aylor points out. The adjustment did not affect visibility for the Outlander's driver.

"Based on some of the comments we get on social media, it seems like some people think we're just pushing brighter headlights and ignoring glare," Aylor says. "The reality is quite the opposite."

Quality headlights have also become easier for customers to find as the Institute's award criteria have evolved.

When the headlight ratings program began, the scores did not affect the *TOP SAFETY PICK* and *TOP SAFETY PICK+* awards. In 2017, the Institute began requiring that at least one good or acceptable headlight system be available for a vehicle to qualify for *TOP SAFETY PICK+*. In 2019, that standard was adopted for the lower-tier award and at least one good-rated option was required for the "plus." But in most cases the best headlights remained expensive add-ons that weren't stocked by many dealers, so IIHS raised the bar again in 2020, requiring good or acceptable headlights across all trim levels for *TOP SAFETY PICK+* and the availability of at least one good or acceptable headlight system for *TOP SAFETY PICK*.

That recent move has accelerated the disappearance of substandard headlights from the market and prompted manufacturers to simplify their offerings. Between 2019 and 2021, manufacturers reduced the number of headlight systems available for each vehicle model by 17 percent. Now many automakers are equipping models with a single, good-rated headlight system as standard equipment. Examples include the 2021 Acura RDX, BMW 5 series, Hyundai Palisade and Subaru Outback.

Automakers have made midyear design changes to nearly 200 headlight systems in the quest for one of the two awards. Genesis went as far as to undertake a service campaign to make free, retroactive adjustments for buyers of the 2021 Genesis G80 to make sure it qualified for the highest accolade.

"Our awards have been a huge motivator for automakers to improve their headlights," Brumbelow says. "Now, with our new study, we have confirmation that these improvements are saving lives." ■

Catalytic converters make 2004-09 Toyota Prius unlikely theft target

A spike in demand for precious metals has made Toyota Prius vehicles that are more than 10 years old an unlikely target of thieves, a recent HLDI report shows.

Theft claim frequency for 2004-09 Prius models was more than 40 times higher in 2020 than in 2016, HLDI analysts found. As a hybrid car, the Prius is being targeted for the precious metals in its catalytic converter. The catalytic converters of hybrids need more of the precious metals to work properly because they don't get as hot as those installed on conventional vehicles, since the combustion engines of hybrids only run part of the time.

Thanks to higher prices for platinum, rhodium, palladium and other metals found in the components, catalytic converter thefts rose from about 100 a month in 2018 to more than 1,200 a month in 2020, according to the National Insurance Crime Bureau. While thieves hit all kinds of vehicles, the catalytic converters from some models command higher prices from the recyclers who process them because they contain more of the high-priced metals.

Theft claim frequency was 58.1 claims per 1,000 insured vehicle years for 2004–09 Toyota Prius models in 2020, compared with 1.4 claims in 2016. Overall theft losses for those Prius vehicles in 2020 were nearly $137 per insured vehicle year — a more than 45-fold increase from $3 in 2016, HLDI found. In contrast, theft claim frequency for all other 2004-09 vehicles hardly changed from 2016 to 2020, and overall losses remained about $7. (A standard industry measure, an insured vehicle year equals one vehicle insured for one year, two vehicles insured for six months, and so on).

"Car thieves know their market," explains HLDI Senior Vice President Matt Moore. "The demand is high for catalytic converters, and they seem to know which ones command the highest prices, like those on the older Priuses."

The recent scrap price for the GD3+EA6 catalytic converter used in the 2004-09 second-generation Prius 1.5 was $1,022, according to marketplace website AutoCatalystMarket.com, while the scrap price for the GP1+TB1 converter used in the 2010-15 third-generation Prius was $548. In comparison, the converter used in General Motors models such as the Chevrolet Impala and Pontiac Grand Am from 1999-2006 was valued at $269, and the converter used in the 2007 Ford F-150 FX4 was priced at just $143.

The HLDI database does not include information about the specific component reported stolen in insurance claims, but the dollar value of the typical claim provides some clues. For the high-theft years of 2019–20, there was a spike in claims in the $2,501 to $3,000 range (about the amount needed to replace the catalytic converter and exhaust system, minus the deductible). For calendar years 2016-17, most claims were for losses of less than $500 or between $1,501 and $2,500.

Newer, 2010-15 Prius models saw only slight increases in claim frequency and overall theft losses. For calendar year 2020, the claim frequency was only 1.3 claims per 1,000 insured vehicle years for 2010-15 models, up from 0.8 in 2016. Similarly, overall theft losses for 2020 were $5 for 2010-15 models, compared with $3 in 2016.

Processing catalytic converters for their metals requires sophisticated equipment, but bulk scrap buyers have mushroomed with the spike in prices for certain metals. All but a handful of states require buyers to record sellers' driver's license numbers or other official identification, and many prohibit cash payments above a certain threshold. However, because catalytic converters are not stamped with vehicle identification numbers, it isn't easy to identify stolen components once they have been sold as scrap.

Prices for the metals have soared due to lower mining production in recent years, a trend that was exacerbated by the pandemic. Meanwhile, the recent tightening of emissions standards means that the newest catalytic converters require more of the valuable metals. ■

HLDI RESEARCH

"Toyota Prius theft losses" (April 2021)

To request this report, email researchpapers@iihs.org.

‘Retirement vehicles’ raise older drivers’ fatality risk

Older drivers, who are less likely to survive severe crashes than any other age group, tend to drive outdated vehicles that lack crucial safety features, a recent pair of studies from IIHS show.

Healthier than ever before, Americans in their 70s and 80s are driving more miles and crashing less often than in past decades. But age-related fragility still makes older drivers less likely to survive crashes than other demographics. Drivers 75 and older are about 4 times as likely to die as middle-aged drivers when they’re involved in a side-impact crash and about 3 times as likely to die in a frontal crash, a previous IIHS study found.

The two new studies show that drivers 70 and over tend to drive older, smaller vehicles that are not equipped with important safety features. The first study compared the vehicles driven by 1.5 million crash-involved Florida drivers ages 35-54 and 70 and older over 2014-18. The second surveyed 900 drivers in those age groups from various states about the factors that influenced their most recent vehicle purchase.

“Persuading older drivers to take another look at the vehicles they’re driving could reduce crash fatalities substantially,” says Jessica Cicchino, the Institute’s vice president of research. “One big challenge is that, for those on a fixed income, cost often overrides other concerns.”

The study of Florida crashes found that drivers in their 70s and older were significantly more likely to be driving vehicles that were at least 16 years old than drivers ages 35-54. The older drivers were also less likely to be driving vehicles less than 3 years old.

As driver age increased, vehicles were less likely to be equipped with electronic stability control (ESC) and head-protecting side airbags as standard features. Vehicles without ESC had 37 percent higher odds of driver fatality for drivers 70 and over, while vehicles without standard head-protecting side airbags were associated with double the odds of an older driver fatality.

Sedans and hatchbacks were also more common among older drivers, with the proportion of people driving midsize passenger cars increasing and the numbers driving SUVs declining with age. Along with vehicle design and safety features, vehicle size and weight are important factors in crash survival, since the occupants of smaller vehicles are exposed to greater forces in collisions with larger ones.

Drivers 75 and older were significantly less likely to drive vehicles with good ratings in the IIHS moderate overlap front and original side crash tests than drivers ages 35-54.

“All these vehicle characteristics have big impacts on crash survival rates, and older drivers are more often driving the least-safe vehicles by every parameter,” says Cicchino. “This only gets worse as their age increases, since many older adults stick with a single ‘retirement vehicle’ for the remainder of their driving years.”

The researchers determined that crash fatalities could be reduced by 3 percent for drivers 70 and older and 5 percent for drivers 80 and older if they drove vehicles with the same safety profile as drivers ages 35-54. Based on the crash data for 2019, that would translate to about 90 lives saved a year.

Many older drivers don’t understand the value of advanced safety features or good safety ratings, the survey showed.

When choosing their current vehicle, drivers 70 and older were less likely than middle-aged drivers to have required ESC, blind spot monitoring, side or curtain airbags, and forward collision warning or automatic emergency braking (AEB). Only about a quarter of older drivers said they required AEB, compared with 40 percent of middle-aged drivers, for example.

Similarly, about 10 percent of older drivers said that safety ratings are not at all important, compared with 4 percent of middle-aged drivers.

In all age groups, most drivers agreed that a 10-year-old, well-maintained car with low mileage is just as safe as a new one — though drivers 70 and older were substantially more likely to report owning a vehicle of that vintage.

“The older drivers who participated in the survey didn’t appear to understand the value of today’s vehicle safety features,” says Cicchino. “At the same time, they perceived less need to replace their older vehicles because they don’t drive many miles per year and think of low mileage as synonymous with overall vehicle safety.”

That’s especially problematic because statistics show that crash risk per mile is higher for drivers who drive less. ■

IIHS RESEARCH

“Changing vehicles to reduce older driver fatalities: an effective approach?”
by A.E. Cox, J.B. Cicchino and E.R. Teoh

“Older driver vehicle preferences and perceptions of safety: a survey”
by A.E. Cox and J.B. Cicchino

To request these papers, email researchpapers@iihs.org.

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Status Report

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IIHS is an independent, nonprofit scientific and educational organization dedicated to reducing deaths, injuries and property damage from motor vehicle crashes through research and evaluation and through education of consumers, policymakers and safety professionals.

HLDI shares and supports this mission through scientific studies of insurance data representing the human and economic losses resulting from the ownership and operation of different types of vehicles and by publishing insurance loss results by vehicle make and model.

Both organizations are wholly supported by auto insurers and insurance associations.

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