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CONSUMER REPORTS 2011 ANNUAL AUTO SURVEY: NEW MODELS TARNISH FORD'S SOLID RELIABILITY RECORD

Jeep & Chrysler models on the rise; Japanese brands still dominate

YONKERS, NY — In recent years Ford has been a model of American reliability, competing well against Japanese makes that have dominated for decades. But three of its new models are blemishing that record, according to Consumer Reports.

The new Explorer, Fiesta, and Focus all had below-average reliability in their first year. As a result, Ford's overall reliability rank among 28 major car makes slipped from the 10th to the 20th spot this year—the biggest drop for any major nameplate in Consumer Reports 2011 Annual Auto Survey.

Survey results were scheduled to be announced today before the Automotive Press Association in downtown Detroit.

“We have often found that new or revamped models have more problems in their first year than in subsequent model years. Ford's problems illustrate why we recommend to our subscribers to hold off buying a first-year model,” said David Champion, Sr. Director of Consumer Reports' Automotive Test Center.

Ford's drop can also be attributed to problems with new technologies: the new MyFord Touch infotainment system and the new automated-manual transmission used in the Fiesta and Focus. Lincoln finished above Ford, although the freshened MKX, a cousin of the Edge, suffered from the MyLincoln Touch system. On the bright side, the Ford Fusion Hybrid sedan remained outstanding, and other Fusion versions were above average.

While Ford's star has fallen, Chrysler's has risen. Jeep has moved up seven spots to 13, becoming the most reliable domestic brand, and all its models for which Consumer Reports has sufficient data scored average in predicted reliability. Chrysler and Dodge moved up 12 and three spots in ranking, respectively.

Chrysler had better results with its new models, including the freshened Chrysler 200 (formerly



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Sebring) sedan and the redesigned Dodge Durango and Jeep Grand Cherokee SUVs. The Chrysler brand moved up in Consumer Reports survey, but its rank is based on just two models: the 200, which was well above average, and the freshened Town & Country minivan, which tanked. The remaining model, the 300, is too new for Consumer Reports to have sufficient data.

Findings are based on responses on 1.3 million vehicles owned or leased by subscribers to Consumer Reports or its Website, www.ConsumerReports.org. The survey was conducted in the spring of 2011 by Consumer Reports' National Survey Research Center and covered model years 2002 to 2011.

Consumer Reports' expert team of statisticians and automotive engineers used the survey data to predict reliability of new 2012 models. Predicted reliability is Consumer Reports' forecast of how well models currently on sale are likely to hold up. To calculate predicted-reliability ratings, CR averages the overall reliability scores (used car verdicts) for the most recent three model years, provided that the model remained unchanged in that period and also didn't substantially change for 2012. If a model was new or redesigned in the past couple of years, one or two years' data may be used, or if that's all that's available. On rare occasions, Consumer Reports makes predictions for a newly redesigned model, but only if previous versions had outstanding reliability.

Fortunes Change for the Big Three:

Even with Chrysler's improvement, Detroit models still have reliability problems. Of the 97 domestic models and versions for which Consumer Reports has sufficient data, 62 (64 percent) rated average or better in CR's new-car reliability ratings.

General Motors has stumbled after edging up last year. The Buick and Cadillac brands, in particular, appear to have taken a step backward; Chevrolet held steady and GMC dropped one spot. The new Buick Regal and Chevrolet Cruze were below par in reliability.

The Buick LaCrosse, an all-wheel-drive version of the Buick Enclave, and the Cadillac SRX were all deemed reliable last year but dropped to below average and are no longer recommended.

General Motors' bright spots include the above-average Chevrolet Avalanche and the Cadillac CTS, which has improved to average. The gas/electric Chevrolet Volt, with much better than average predicted reliability, ranks as GM's most reliable car but with a caveat: The sample size was just a little more than Consumer Reports' minimum threshold of 100 cars, and most respondents had owned theirs for only a few months.

Asian brands roll on:

Japanese brands continue to dominate Consumer Reports survey's upper echelons and took the top nine spots. They were led by Scion, Lexus, Acura, Mazda, Honda, and Toyota. Of the 91 Japanese models for which Consumer Reports has sufficient data, 87 (96 percent) were rated average or better in predicted reliability; 24 Japanese models earned the highest rating.

The biggest improvement was from Mazda, which moved up eight spots from last year. All its models were rated above average. Scion remains the top brand in Consumer Reports survey, but only two models of its three, the xB and xD, had sufficient data to be included. Lexus, with 11 models included, rebounded seven places from last year.

Toyota finished sixth overall, the same as last year, and every Toyota model except the all-wheel-drive version of the Sienna minivan was average or better. Honda also had just one below-average

vehicle, the redesigned Odyssey minivan. The South Korean brands rank 11th and 12th in Consumer Reports' survey. Hyundai had just one below-par entry, the V6 Santa Fe. The V6 version of its corporate cousin, the Kia Sorento, also finished below average.

Mixed results from Europe:

European models continue to be a blend of reliable and not so reliable vehicles. Overall, European vehicles' reliability is slightly below that of domestic models. Of the 58 European models for which Consumer Reports has sufficient data, 37 (64 percent) scored average or better in predicted reliability.

Among European brands, Volvo ranked the highest at 10th overall. It was helped by the redesigned S60, which was above average in its first year. Volkswagen was able to hold on to 16th place in the ranking; seven of its 11 models scored average or better.

Mercedes-Benz and BMW improved, but results were inconsistent for their various models. BMW's redesigned X3 SUV did well, for example, but the redesigned 5 Series sedan was well below average. Mercedes' compact GLK SUV improved, but its flagship S-Class luxury sedan fell to below average.

Porsche dropped from being the second-best brand last year to the second-worst. That big shift occurred because CR has data for only two models, one of which, the redesigned Cayenne SUV, had a terrible debut year. Jaguar trails the pack. Its XF and the new XJ were the two least reliable new cars in the survey, but that's not surprising, given Jaguar's history.

Consumer Reports Annual Auto Survey Ratings are unrelated to Consumer Reports vehicle road-test results, but are a key factor in determining whether or not Consumer Reports recommends a car. CR only recommends models that have performed well in tests conducted at its 327-acre Auto Test Center in Connecticut, and that have average or better predicted reliability based on its annual survey. In addition, vehicles must perform at least adequately in government or insurance-industry crash and rollover tests, if tested, in order to be Recommended by Consumer Reports.

Full reliability history charts and predicted-reliability ratings on hundreds of 2012 models, plus a list of what's up and what's down, best and worst models, and a comparison chart of brands can be found online at www.ConsumerReports.org, in the December issue of the magazine and in the latest Consumer Reports Cars publication, *Best & Worst New Cars for 2012* (\$7.99 U.S./\$8.99 Canada), on sale November 15, 2011 everywhere magazines are sold.

Consumer Reports is the world's largest independent product-testing organization. Using its more than 50 labs, auto test center, and survey research center, the nonprofit rates thousands of products and services annually. Founded in 1936, Consumer Reports has over 8 million subscribers to its magazine, website and other publications. Its advocacy division, Consumers Union, works for health reform, food and product safety, financial reform, and other consumer issues in Washington, D.C., the states, and in the marketplace.

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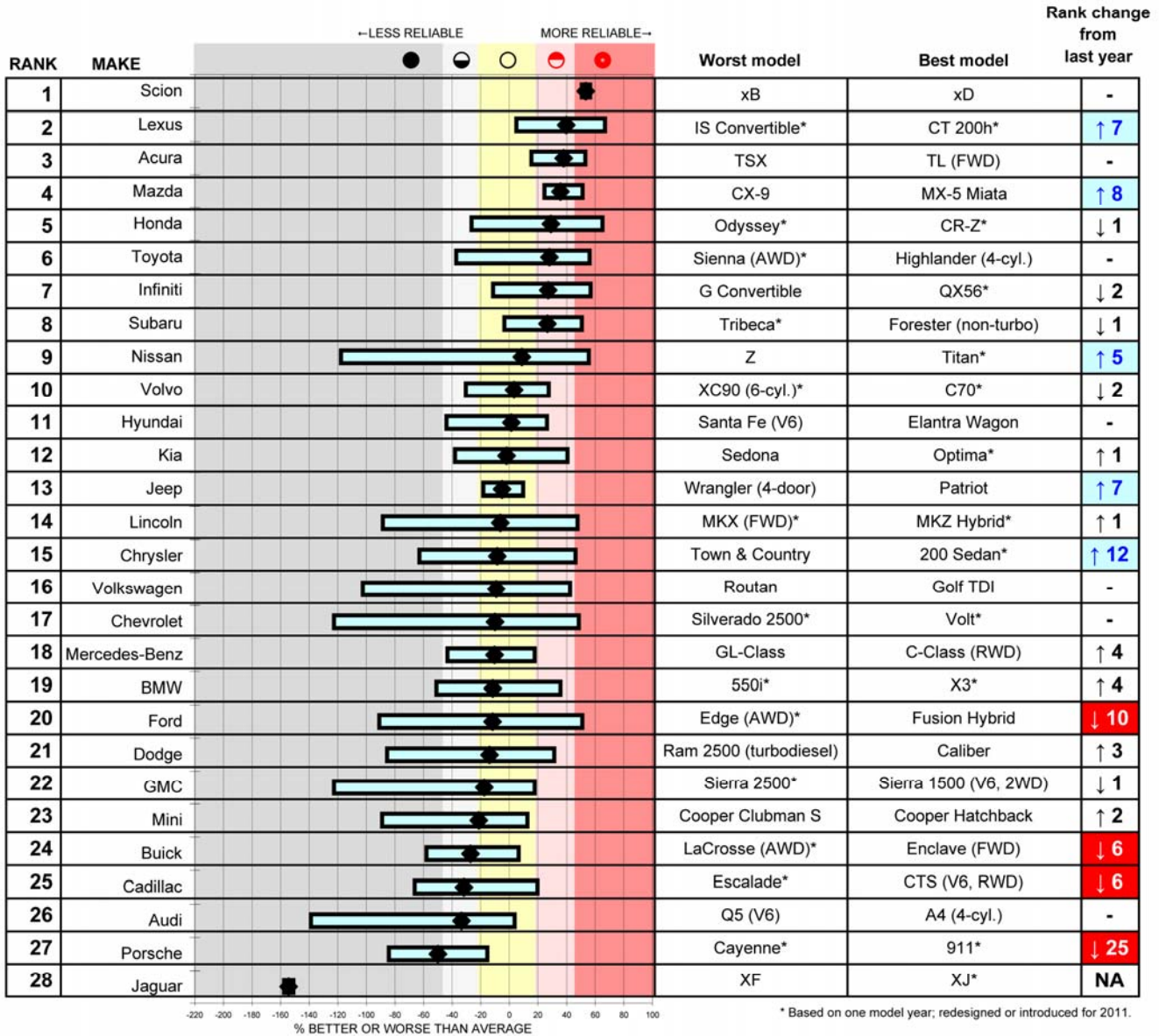


Predicted Reliability: 2012 Models

This graph shows how the makes rank based on average predicted reliability scores, and which models by each make have the highest and lowest ratings. The score is the overall reliability calculated as a percentage better or worse than the average for all cars. The rank order change from our 2011 survey compared with last year's is noted as well. Large changes are highlighted.

Key to Reliability ratings

- Much better than avg.
- Better than avg.
- Average
- Worse than avg.
- Much worse than avg.



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