

Higher Standards: 62 Models Meet Tougher Criteria to Earn IIHS Awards

Just 15 vehicles qualify for the Top Safety Pick+ award from IIHS after the requirements were strengthened to include good-rated headlights and good or acceptable passenger-side protection in small overlap front crashes.

Another 47 vehicles earn the Top Safety Pick award, which now requires acceptable or good headlights. In contrast, headlights weren't factored in for 2017 Top Safety Pick, and an acceptable headlight rating was enough to bump a 2017 award winner into "plus" territory.

The inclusion of a passenger-side crash test is a first for any IIHS award. The Institute developed the passenger-side small overlap front crash test after it became clear that some manufacturers weren't paying sufficient attention to the passenger side as they made improvements to achieve better performance in the driver-side small overlap front test.

In 2012, IIHS began rating vehicles for protection in small overlap crashes, which involve just the front corner of the vehicle, bypassing the main structural components. It wasn't surprising that automakers acted more quickly to improve protection on the driver side than on the passenger side, and improving driver-side protection was arguably more urgent, since every vehicle on the road has a driver, while not every one has a passenger. The ultimate goal, however, was symmetric protection.

The first official passenger-side ratings were released in October, following research tests last year.

"Drivers expect that their passengers, who are often family, will be protected just as well as they are," says IIHS President Adrian Lund. "Manufacturers have been taking this issue seriously since we first shed light on it, and we're confident that good small overlap protection will become the norm on the passenger side, just as it has on the driver side."

The Institute's headlight ratings also are relatively new, with the first ones released in March 2016. Initially, few performed well in IIHS track tests, which measure how well low beams and high beams illuminate the road ahead on the one hand, and the amount of glare they produce for drivers of oncoming vehicles on the other.

"Headlights have long been treated as design elements instead of the critical safety equipment that they are," Lund says. "We're pleased to see this changing. Every one of the 62 award winners for 2018 is available with headlights that are at least acceptable."

The 15 Top Safety Pick+ winners include four small cars, three midsize cars, five large luxury cars, two midsize nonluxury SUVs and one midsize luxury SUV. No minivans, pickups or minicars earn the highest award. Models from a wider range of vehicle types earn Top Safety Pick, but there are no minicars in that category either.



To watch the video for the Top Safety Pick+ Awards, go to <http://bit.ly/2ITzLwj>.

Most of the Top Safety Pick+ awards go to two manufacturers: Hyundai Motor Co. — which owns the Hyundai, Kia and Genesis brands — has six models earning the award, and Subaru has four. Mercedes-Benz has two, while Toyota, BMW and Ford Motor Co. have one each.

Toyota Motor Corp. has the most vehicles — 10 — on the Top Safety Pick list. Hyundai is the runner-up with nine. All but one of the seven vehicles in Subaru's 2018 lineup earn one of the awards. The Impreza, Legacy, Outback and WRX qualify for Top Safety Pick+ when equipped with optional front crash prevention and specific headlights. The Crosstrek and the Forester earn Top Safety Pick, also with optional front crash prevention and specific headlights. The BRZ is the only Subaru model that doesn't qualify.

Across manufacturers, the vast majority of winners qualify only when optionally equipped because front crash prevention and acceptable or good headlights aren't part of their base trims.

Automakers have pledged to make autobrake standard on virtually all passenger vehicles by 2022, but for now the technology remains mostly optional, especially on nonluxury brands.

An exception is Toyota, which has equipped all but a handful of Toyota and Lexus models with standard autobrake and other advanced features. Seven models with standard autobrake — the Toyota Camry, Corolla, Prius, Prius Prime and Highlander and the Lexus IS and NX — also have standard acceptable or good headlights and qualify for Top Safety Pick without any added options. The addition of optional curve-adaptive headlights that earn a good rating boosts the Camry to Top Safety Pick+.

IIHS has been recognizing vehicles with Top Safety Pick since the 2006 model year to help consumers identify vehicles with the highest safety ratings without having to wade through information about individual tests. The Top Safety Pick+ accolade was introduced in the 2013 model year to recognize vehicles that offer a superior level of safety. Over the years, IIHS has added to and strengthened criteria for both awards, pushing automakers to speed up safety advances.

The Institute releases ratings as it evaluates new models, adjusting the list of winners throughout the year. By fall of 2017, 69 vehicles had earned 2017 Top Safety Pick+ and 51 had earned 2017 Top Safety Pick.

"The improvements in occupant protection have been amazing over the past decades," says Lund. "All automakers now recognize the important role of safety in consumer choice, and they are increasingly receptive to working with our engineers to understand the next steps in keeping people from harm in motor vehicle crashes and to make real changes in their vehicle designs."

Source: <http://bit.ly/2Arx5Qk>. Material intended for general information only. January 2018.