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Which cars draw the most tickets?



A yearlong study identifies the vehicle -- and it's a big one -- whose drivers get ticketed the most. The research suggests that what you drive may indicate how you drive.

Drivers of Hummer SUVs were 4.63 times more likely to get a traffic ticket than the average driver, concludes a yearlong study by a company that helps insurers identify risks.

ISO Quality Planning, the San Francisco company that studied the records of 1.7 million drivers, compiled a list of ticket magnets that confirmed some long-held notions: Owners of the 507-horsepower **Mercedes-Benz CLS63 AMG** and similarly muscular **CLK63 AMG** received outsized numbers of tickets, as did the generally young owners of the relatively inexpensive Scion **tC**, **xB** and **xA**, and the **Audi A4** sports sedan. But also on that most-ticketed list were the **Subaru Outback** and the **Toyota Camry Solara** and **Matrix**, three cars not known for great speed or expressing the rebellious nature of their owners. Meanwhile, the **Chevrolet Tahoe** and **Suburban**, virtually identical mechanically to their General Motors sibling Hummer, appeared on the least-ticketed list.

Sharing the bottom of the list? Buicks, minivans and pickups.

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Crash Test — IIHS Rates Small and Compact Cars

Suzuki, Toyota and Chevrolet shine in latest round of tests.



Only two out of eight **small cars** in the latest tests from the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety (IIHS) provide good side crash protection, once again reinforcing the need for consumers to carefully review the **safety equipment** and **safety ratings** for models under consideration for purchase. In this group, the **2009 Suzuki SX4** was the best performer, getting good ratings for front-and side-crash protection. The **Toyota Matrix**, and its twin **Pontiac Vibe**, also got good ratings for side-crash protection. The **Chevrolet HHR** earned good frontal-crash protection and acceptable performance in side crashes.

At the other end of the spectrum, the oldest model in this group, **Chrysler PT Cruiser** was the worst performer in the side test, earning the lowest rating of poor for protection in side crashes. The **Hyundai Elantra** and **Saturn Astra** earn the second lowest rating of marginal.

Words to Live By: Aldous Huxley

If we don't change direction soon,
We'll end up where we're going!

Used Vehicle Prices Fall to New Low in December

Manheim is reporting that wholesale used vehicle prices fell 0.3 percent in December, bringing the Manheim Used Vehicle Value Index to 98.0, which represented a decline of 11.1% from a year ago. On an annual average basis, the Manheim Index declined 6.3% in 2008, the biggest fall in the series' 14-year history.

The falloff in wholesale used vehicle pricing is consistent with what is shaping up to be the worst recession in post-World War II history, the largest percentage decline in used vehicle retail sales in more than 25 years, and a consumer sector that is suffering a significant reduction in both the ability and willingness to buy. Manufacturers are quickly adjusting production plans to the new market reality, but high new vehicle inventories continue to depress wholesale values.

Lower-priced used vehicles (auction price less than \$5,000) remain the strongest segment in an otherwise weak market. Vehicles in the \$8,000 to \$9,000 price range represented the poorest performing sector at auction in December.

Auction prices by market class continued their pattern of recent months as large SUVs and pickups erased some of their steep losses earlier in the year and compact car prices fell from this summer's lofty levels. On a year-over-year basis, vans are down more than any other major segment (-19.7%), with compact vans down 20.1% and full-size vans down 17.3%.

Low new vehicle sales lead to high days supply and weak wholesale prices. A further weakening of the new vehicle sales pace in December kept dealer inventories unacceptably high. And, even with first quarter production scheduled to be down by 30%, the days supply will remain abnormally high if the current sales pace continues.

Dealers started both November and December with a 100+ days supply of new vehicles and it appears that was also the case as we entered 2009 - little wonder, then, that late-model used vehicle values have fallen so sharply. Used vehicle values are more strongly correlated with inventory levels than with new vehicle incentives.

Consumer confidence fell to yet another record low in December, just as the Manheim Index fell to its lowest level in the series' 14-year history. Both measures are reflective of a growing concern that the recession is intensifying. Households are worried about further job losses and dealers are uncertain as to what the spring selling season might bring. As a result, consumers are hunkering down and dealers are buying at auction only to fill specific needs.

How Important Is Customer Contact?

J.D. Power and Associates says based on its survey of 11,700 consumers who'd had an auto claim in the preceding 12 months that proactive contact with the vehicle-owner during and after repairs is a key factor in customer satisfaction. "We asked: Did the customer ever need to initiate any contact with the body shop," Mark Garrett, a senior research manager with J.D. Power said. "Did they have to make calls to find out what was going on during the repair process, or were they being kept informed? We see some companies perform a lot better (at updating customers) than others. Over half the time at top companies they are doing that. On the low end, it happens roughly one-third of the time. So there's a lot of room for improvement here." Customers who felt they didn't have to initiate contact had a satisfaction rating of 876 (on a 1,000-point scale); those who said they had to call at least once for updates had a satisfaction level of 774, a significant drop, Garrett said. Just over half of customers in the survey said neither the shop nor insurer followed up with them after they got their repaired vehicle back, and their satisfaction levels also were 100 points lower than those who said they'd heard back from the shop or insurer.

CHANGE IN STATE FARM AGREEMENT

George Avery of State Farm said changes to the agreement Select Service shops are being required to sign this month are fairly minor and the process is not designed to reduce the number of shops in the program. Wording has been changed, he said, to give shops the option of conducting a more thorough tear-down of a vehicle before uploading an initial estimate (provided adequate photos are taken in advance); shops doing this also may be asked to reattach some parts if the vehicle is a total loss, Avery said, getting prior approval for any charges related to this. The revised agreement also requires participating shops to meet any local, state or federal licensing or certification requirements, and maintain business practices that "are environmentally responsible based on federal, state and local regulatory requirements." The indemnification section of the agreement had been "too one-sided," Avery said, and has been changed to say that both the shop and State Farm will each "hold the other party fully harmless against any lost, damages, claims or expenses" sustained as a result of negligent or intentional acts or omissions of the other.