

Contact: David Zuby +1 434 985 4600 (office) or +1 434 227 9028 (cell)

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Midsize SUVs have mixed results in latest round of small overlap tests

ARLINGTON, Va. — Three more midsize SUVs achieved good or acceptable ratings from the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety in the latest round of small overlap front crash testing, but many models, including three newly rated SUVs from Fiat Chrysler Automobiles and one from Hyundai, continue to struggle with the test.

The Nissan Murano earns a good rating and, with a superior-rated optional front crash prevention system, qualifies for the Institute's highest award, *TOP SAFETY PICK+*. The Ford Flex earns an acceptable rating and qualifies for *TOP SAFETY PICK*.

Consumers looking for a midsize SUV now have seven choices that qualify for awards from IIHS. The earlier winners are the Toyota Highlander with *TOP SAFETY PICK+* and the Chevrolet Equinox, GMC Terrain, Kia Sorento and Nissan Pathfinder, which all earn *TOP SAFETY PICK*.

Among the seven 2015 models in this round of testing, the Jeep Wrangler 4-door model also picked up a good small overlap rating. However, the Wrangler offers only marginal protection in side and rear crashes, so it's not a recommended choice. It also lacks a fixed roof, so it can't provide good protection in rollover crashes.

Aside from the Wrangler, three other Fiat Chrysler SUVs were tested for small overlap protection and didn't fare well. The Dodge Journey earns a poor rating, and the Dodge Durango and Jeep Cherokee earn marginal ratings. The Hyundai Santa Fe also earns a marginal rating.

The small overlap test replicates what happens when the front corner of a vehicle collides with another vehicle or an object such as a tree or utility pole. In the test, 25 percent of a vehicle's front end on the driver's side strikes a rigid barrier at 40 mph.

The test is more difficult than either the head-on crashes conducted by the government or the longstanding IIHS moderate overlap test. That's because, in a small overlap test, the main structures of the vehicle's front-end crush zone are bypassed, making it hard for the vehicle to manage crash energy. The occupant compartment can collapse as a result.

Since IIHS began small overlap testing in 2012, manufacturers have responded to the challenge in two ways. One is by taking the test into account when models are redesigned. The other is by making smaller modifications to beef up the front structure and improve airbags even before a model gets a full overhaul.



BEST AND WORST: The Nissan Murano's structure (top) held up well. In contrast, the occupant compartment of the Dodge Journey (bottom) collapsed.

"This test presented a major challenge for manufacturers when it was introduced three years ago, and many have adapted quickly," says IIHS Chief Research Officer David Zuby. "Chrysler, Dodge and Jeep have had some successes with redesigned models, but they haven't done much in the way of interim improvements. As a result, they still have many models that rate poor or marginal."

The best performer in the current group of seven is the redesigned 2015 Murano. It hit all the marks for ideal small overlap protection. The driver space held up well, with maximum intrusion of 5 inches at the lower door hinge pillar. The dummy's movement was well-controlled, and its head hit the front airbag and stayed there until rebound. The side curtain airbag deployed with sufficient forward coverage to protect the head from contact with side structure and outside objects. Measures taken from the dummy indicate a low risk of any significant injuries in a crash of this severity.

In addition to earning a good small overlap rating, the Murano improved its roof strength rating to good from the previous generation's marginal rating.

The optional front crash prevention also is new for 2015. The Murano's autobrake nearly avoided a collision in the 12 mph IIHS track test and reduced the vehicle's speed by 11 mph in the 25 mph test. The Murano also earns a point for meeting federal criteria for forward collision warning systems.

The Journey is the worst performer in the group and a classic example of poor small overlap protection. The occupant compartment failed to hold up, with intrusion measuring as much as 9 inches at the instrument panel and the parking brake pedal, which tore through the dummy's left lower leg. Injuries to the left hip, left knee and right lower leg also would be possible.

The dummy's head barely contacted the front airbag before sliding off the left side, as the steering column moved to the right. The side curtain airbag failed to deploy, leaving the dummy's head vulnerable to contact with side structure and outside objects.

The Journey was introduced in 2009, and its poor rating applies to the previous models.

Small overlap front crash test ratings for midsize SUVs

		Dummy injury measures						
		Overall	Structure	Restraints & kinematics	Head & neck	Chest	Hip & thigh	Lower leg & foot
2015 IIHS TOP SAFETY PICK+	Nissan Murano	G	G	G	G	G	G	G
2015 IIHS TOP SAFETY PICK	Ford Flex	A	M	A	G	G	G	G
	Jeep Wrangler 4-door	G	G	A	G	G	G	A
	Hyundai Santa Fe	M	P	A	G	G	G	M
	Jeep Cherokee	M	M	P	G	G	G	A
	Dodge Durango	M	P	A	G	G	A	P
	Dodge Journey	P	P	M	G	G	M	M

G

 Good

A

 Acceptable

M

 Marginal

P

 Poor

For more information, go to iihs.org

The Insurance Institute for Highway Safety is an independent, nonprofit scientific and educational organization dedicated to reducing the losses — deaths, injuries and property damage — from crashes on the nation's roads. The Institute is wholly supported by auto insurers.