



NEWS RELEASE

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A record number of booster seats earn highest rating for safety belt fit; 27 of 41 new models for 2014 receive BEST BET designation from IIHS

ARLINGTON, Va. — The ranks of top-rated booster seats continue to grow as manufacturers design models to earn high marks in the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety's annual booster seat evaluations, plus offer the style and convenience parents look for when it's time to pick a safe seat for their booster-age children.

Among the 41 models new for 2014, there are 27 BEST BET seats — more than in any prior year — and three GOOD BETs. Eight boosters are in a category the Institute calls "Check Fit," and there are three new models that the Institute doesn't recommend using as boosters. Prices for BEST BET boosters start around \$25 and go up to about \$370, depending on features, and several models are LATCH compatible.

Boosters earn a rating of BEST BET, GOOD BET, Check Fit or Not Recommended, based on a protocol that involves measuring how three-point lap and shoulder belts fit a child-size test dummy seated in the booster on a stationary test fixture. Measurements are taken under four conditions spanning the range of safety belt configurations in passenger vehicles. The evaluations focus on belt fit and don't involve crash tests.

A BEST BET booster correctly positions belts on a typical 4-to-8-year-old child in almost any car, minivan or SUV. A GOOD BET provides acceptable belt fit in most vehicles. Correct belt fit means that the lap belt lies flat across a child's upper thighs, and the shoulder belt crosses snugly over the middle of the shoulder.

The Check Fit designation means that the booster may provide good belt fit for some children in some vehicles, but not as many as boosters that earn either of the top two ratings. Belt fit can vary depending on child size and vehicle model. Before buying these boosters, parents should try them out to see if they properly position safety belts on their children in the vehicles they will ride in.

In addition to information on models new this year, consumers can find IIHS ratings for older booster seats still on the market at iihs.org/boosters. Altogether, IIHS has ratings for 69 BEST BET and eight GOOD BET boosters, 35 Check Fit boosters and five Not Recommended seats for 2014.

IIHS ratings of 2014 booster seat models

BEST BET

Baby Trend Hybrid 3-in-1 (backless mode)
Baby Trend Hybrid No Back (backless)
Britax Frontier 90 (highback)
Britax Pinnacle 90 (highback)
Britax Pioneer 70 (highback)
BubbleBum Neon (backless)
Cybex Solution X-Fix (highback)
Diono Solana (backless)
Dream On Me Turbo Booster (highback mode)
Eddie Bauer Deluxe Belt-Positioning Booster (highback mode)
Eddie Bauer Deluxe Highback 65 (highback)
Evenflo Chase (highback)
Evenflo Symphony 65 (highback)
Graco Argos 80 Elite 3-in-1 (backless mode)
Graco Argos 80 Elite 3-in-1 (highback mode)
Graco 4Ever All-in-1 (backless mode)
Graco 4Ever All-in-1 (highback mode)
Graco Milestone All-in-1 (highback)
Graco Nautilus 3-in-1 with Safety Surround (highback mode)
Kids Embrace Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtle (highback)
Maxi-Cosi Rodi AP (highback mode)
Maxi-Cosi RodiFix (highback)
Peg Perego Viaggio HBB 120 (highback mode)
Recaro Performance Booster (highback)

Safety 1st Store 'n Go (highback mode)

Safety 1st Store 'n Go No-Back (backless)

Safety 1st Summit 65 (highback)

GOOD BET

Baby Trend Hybrid 3-in-1 (highback mode)

Cybex Solution Q-Fix (highback)

Diono Rainier (highback)

Check Fit

Dream On Me Coupe Booster (backless)

Dream On Me Turbo Booster (backless mode)

Eddie Bauer Deluxe Belt-Positioning Booster (backless mode)

Graco Nautilus 3-in-1 with Safety Surround (backless mode)

Harmony Folding Travel Booster (highback)

Maxi-Cosi Rodi AP (backless mode)

Peg Perego Viaggio HBB 120 (backless mode)

Safety 1st Store 'n Go (backless mode)

Not Recommended

Diono Olympia (highback)

Diono Pacifica (highback)

Kids Embrace Batman No Back Booster (backless)

Go to iihs.org/boosters for a full list of ratings, including carry-over models, and a breakdown by manufacturer.

“Buying a booster seat can be confusing,” says Jessica Jermakian, a senior research scientist at the Institute and an expert on child passenger safety. “There are lots of models and features to choose from. Until we started our ratings six years ago, parents couldn’t be sure that the booster they’d put in their shopping cart would actually provide the right belt fit for their child once they unpacked the seat and installed it in the family vehicle. Our ratings take the guesswork out of purchasing a booster seat.”

She notes that most new models in recent years earn a BEST BET or GOOD BET rating, and many manufacturers check in with the Institute during the development process to gauge how their designs will rate.

Missing the mark

In a setback this year, three new boosters landed in the Not Recommended category. They are the highback Diono Olympia and Diono Pacifica and the Kids Embrace Batman No Back Booster.

Shoulder belt fit is the issue with both Diono models. Highback boosters have guides to route lap and shoulder belts and can offer some head support. The shoulder belt guides on the Olympia and Pacifica put the belt in a position that

touches the face in several safety belt configurations instead of placing the belt across the center of the chest. The guides aren't adjustable. In contrast, another new Diono model, the Rainier, earns a GOOD BET rating when used as a highback booster. The Rainier's adjustable headrest allows parents to change the position of the shoulder belt guide to achieve acceptable shoulder belt fit.

Lap belt fit is the problem with the Batman No Back booster. The armrests that serve as the lap belt path keep the belt too far out on the thighs. A better choice for kids who dig superheroes would be a highback model from Kids Embrace, the Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtle booster, which is a BEST BET. Kids Embrace also sells a highback Batman and a highback Spider-Man booster, which would rate the same as the highback Ninja Turtle. Other BEST BET backless-only options are the Baby Trend Hybrid No Back and the Diono Solana.

The Institute continues to advise consumers to avoid using as boosters two carryover models from Dorel Juvenile, the Safety 1st All-in-One and Safety 1st Alpha Omega Elite. These seats have been on the Not Recommended list since 2009 because they don't provide proper belt fit. They leave the lap belt too high on the abdomen and the shoulder belt too far out on the shoulder.

As with any child safety seat, consumers should be on the lookout for manufacturer recalls. The Institute includes recall information for booster seats on its ratings page at iihs.org/boosters.

Improved design

Three redesigned highback boosters from Britax made the BEST BET list this year. They are the Frontier 90, Pinnacle 90 and Pioneer 70. Last year's models were designated as Check Fit boosters, and Britax has discontinued them. The new models have an improved armrest design that puts the lap belt in the correct position for proper fit. In addition to highback boosters, these combination seats can be used as a harness-equipped forward-facing child restraint. Parents in the market for a BEST BET combination seat could consider any of these Britax seats, plus the Eddie Bauer Deluxe Highback 65 Booster.

Some seats show up twice in the ratings list. That's because they can be converted for use as either a highback booster or a backless booster. The Institute treats these as two distinct seats for ratings purposes. Consumers should pay attention to each rating and consider how they will use the seats in their vehicles.

Ratings for dual-use models can vary by how they are used. For example, the Safety 1st Store 'n Go is a BEST BET when used as highback booster, but it is designated a Check Fit when used as a backless booster. For the right shoulder belt fit in backless mode, the booster needs an accessory belt clip, which isn't included in the box and must be ordered separately. Safety 1st also sells a backless-only version of the Store 'n Go. The Store 'n Go No-Back Booster comes with a shoulder belt clip that puts the belt in the right place for proper fit, making it a BEST BET. Backless models usually need a plastic clip to properly position shoulder belts.

Another example is the Maxi-Cosi Rodi AP. The seat is a BEST BET when used as a highback booster and designated a Check Fit when used as a backless booster.

For new parents looking for the convenience of a single child restraint that will take their baby through the grade school years, there are some good options on the Institute's 2014 ratings list.

The Graco 4Ever All-in-1 and the Graco Milestone All-in-1, both BEST BETs, also can be used as rear-facing and forward-facing child restraints. The 4Ever accommodates infants from 4 pounds as a rear-facing seat all the way up to 120 pounds when used with older children as a backless booster. The Milestone can be used as a rear-facing child restraint for babies weighing 5 to 40 pounds, forward-facing for children 20 to 65 pounds, and as a highback booster for kids up to 100 pounds.

More boosters are LATCH-compatible

This year 15 of the newly introduced models use LATCH to secure the booster seat to the vehicle for use when a child is sitting in the booster. LATCH, or Lower Anchors and Tethers for Children, is a system that is intended to make it easier to attach child restraints securely. Typically, LATCH has only been used with rear-facing or forward-facing child restraints. A booster doesn't need LATCH to provide safety benefits.

With all booster seats, the job of restraining a child is done by the vehicle safety belts, not the booster. Consumers should check their booster seat's instruction manual to see when the manufacturer recommends using LATCH. Some recommend using the attachment system only when the booster is unoccupied.

Among BEST BETs, the following 2014 models specify using LATCH when the booster is occupied: Britax Frontier 90, Pinnacle 90 and Pioneer 70; Cybex Solution X-Fix; Diono Solana; Graco 4Ever All-in-1 and Milestone All-in-1; Evenflo Chase and Symphony 65; Kids Embrace Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtle; Maxi-Cosi RodiFix and Peg Perego Viaggio HBB 120. Among GOOD BETs, the Baby Trend Hybrid 3-in-1, Cybex Solution Q-Fix and Diono Ranier also have LATCH for use when the booster is occupied.

Shopping considerations

"With backless BEST BET boosters retailing for as little as \$25 and top-rated highback versions starting at about \$60, parents should be able to find a booster seat to fit their budget and transportation needs," Jermakian says.

"It's also important to consider whether your child is big enough to graduate to a booster seat," she adds. "Don't put your child in a booster seat if they still fit in a forward-facing child restraint."

Children should stay in a harness-equipped child restraint in the back seat as long as possible, up to the height and weight limits of the seat as recommended by the seat manufacturer. Parents can find this information on the child seat label and in the instruction manual. When children outgrow child restraints, they should use boosters until adult belts fit properly. For some children, that's not until about age 12.

Children ages 4-8 in boosters are 45 percent less likely to sustain injuries in crashes than kids restrained by belts alone. Children who are using improperly fitted belts are at risk of a host of crash injuries known as "seat belt syndrome." These include spine injuries and internal organ injuries. Boosters help by elevating a child into position and guiding the belts for better protection.

For more information, go to www.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.