



NEWS RELEASE

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More booster seats grab top ratings for safety belt fit: 19 of 31 new models for 2013 earn BEST BET designation

ARLINGTON, Va. — Child restraint manufacturers continue to roll out new booster seats that do a good job of improving the way an adult safety belt fits a typical booster-age child. This year, 19 of 31 new models evaluated by the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety earn the top rating of BEST BET, and one model is a GOOD BET.

A surprise came from Britax, a company whose boosters have consistently earned the top two ratings. This year, three new Britax models didn't make their debuts as BEST BETs or GOOD BETs. They are the Frontier 90, Pinnacle 90 and Pioneer 70. These highback seats replaced two Britax boosters that previously earned the top rating. At the same time, Britax improved the design of the Parkway SG to earn a BEST BET rating when it is used as a highback booster. It has a lower rating when it is used as a backless seat. The Britax Parkway SGL also is a BEST BET in highback mode.

The Institute began rating boosters five years ago because research indicated that most seats weren't doing a good job of fitting safety belts correctly and consistently on children in a variety of vehicles. 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 under four conditions that span the range of safety belt configurations in passenger vehicles. The evaluations focus on safety belt fit and don't involve crash tests.

"Parents should have an easy time finding a top-rated booster seat since there are more this year than ever before," says Anne McCartt, IIHS senior vice president for research. "At the same time, consumers should continue to consult our ratings before buying because name brand, price and style don't always equate with proper lap and shoulder belt fit."

In all, there are 58 BEST BET and five GOOD BET boosters for 2013, including the newest seats and older models whose ratings carry over from prior years. The Institute assesses boosters as they are introduced to the market. Ratings of boosters with designs that carry over into the next model year remain on the list until the seats are discontinued. Dual-use seats that can be used as either a highback booster or a backless booster get two ratings, one for each mode. The Institute treats these as two distinct seats for ratings purposes, so the names of some models show up twice in the list. Consumers should pay attention to each rating and consider how they will use the seats in their vehicles.

IIHS ratings of 2013 booster seat models

BEST BET	GOOD BET
Britax Parkway SG (highback mode)	Ferrari Beline SP (highback mode)
Britax Parkway SGL (highback mode)	
Evenflo Amp (backless)	Check Fit
Evenflo Big Kid LX (backless mode)	Britax Frontier 90 (highback)
Evenflo Chase (highback)	Britax Parkway SG (backless mode)
Evenflo Right Fit (highback and backless modes)	Britax Parkway SGL (backless mode)
Ferrari Beline SP (backless mode)	Britax Pinnacle 90 (highback)
Graco Affix (highback and backless modes)	Britax Pioneer 70 (highback)
Graco Argos 70 Elite (highback mode)	Cosco Stack-It (backless)
Graco Connex (backless)	Evenflo Big Kid LX (highback mode)
Graco Nautilus Elite (highback mode)	Graco Argos 70 Elite (backless mode)
Graco Nautilus Plus (highback mode)	Graco Nautilus Elite (backless mode)
Graco Nautilus with Safety Surround (highback mode)	Graco Nautilus Plus (backless mode)
Harmony Transit Deluxe (backless)	Graco Nautilus with Safety Surround (backless mode)
Recaro Performance SPORT (highback)	
Recaro ProSPORT II (highback)	Go to iihs.org for a full list of ratings, including carry-over models, and a breakdown by manufacturer.
Safety 1st BoostAPak (backless)	

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.

Among the booster seat designs introduced in 2013, 11 are categorized as Check Fit. The 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 be riding in.

When the Institute published its first-ever ratings in 2008, only 10 of 41 models earned a BEST BET rating, and there were 13 seats on the Not Recommended list. Now only two seats aren’t recommended and when the Institute evaluates a new design, more often than not it lands in BEST BET territory. That is largely because manufacturers have taken note of the ratings and work with the Institute to build seats to do what they are supposed to do — elevate children so safety belts that were designed for adults better fit their smaller frames and put lap/shoulder belts in the proper place for the best protection in a crash.

In IIHS evaluations of the Britax Frontier 90, Pinnacle 90 and Pioneer 70, the lap belt was too high on the dummy’s abdomen in 2 of 4 test conditions that represent a range of vehicle safety belt setups. Although all three seats offer good

shoulder belt fit, low average lap belt scores put them in the Check Fit category. A booster seat needs good lap belt fit, in addition to good shoulder belt fit, in all four conditions to earn a BEST BET rating. The Parkway SG and SGL also are a Check Fit when used as backless boosters.

The two booster seats in the lowest ratings category — Not Recommended — have languished there since 2009. They are the Safety 1st All-in-One and Safety 1st Alpha Omega Elite, both made by Dorel Juvenile Group Inc. The Institute continues to advise consumers to avoid using them as boosters because they don't provide proper belt fit. In IIHS tests, the lap belt was too high in 4 of 4 test conditions, and the shoulder belt didn't provide proper fit either. The two seats are 3-in-1s that can be used as rear-facing and forward-facing child restraints with a built-in harness. They can be converted to highback boosters by removing the harness and using lap and shoulder belts as restraints. Although these seats should work well as child restraints, they aren't the best option for boosters because they leave the lap belt too high on the abdomen and the shoulder belt too far out on the shoulder.

Dorel has six BEST BETs and a GOOD BET this year. Six of these are carry-over models from prior years. The company's brands include Cosco, Eddie Bauer Baby, Maxi-Cosi and Safety 1st.

A new BEST BET for Dorel is a backless booster called the Safety 1st BoostAPak. The seat doubles as a child's backpack and is marketed for carpools and travel for children 4 to 12 years old and up to 80 pounds.

Booster seats are available in both highback and backless styles and at a variety of price points. Highbacks have guides to route lap and shoulder belts and can offer some head support. Backless models have lap belt guides but usually need a plastic clip to properly position shoulder belts. The Institute follows booster and vehicle owner's manual instructions for proper installation and uses belt clips if they come with the booster, and the instruction manual stipulates their use. Older children may be more comfortable in — and less likely to object to — a backless booster. Either style is effective as long as it provides good belt fit.

Two new dual-use boosters are BEST BETs in both backless and highback modes. They are the Evenflo Right Fit and the Graco Affix.

Some booster seats also can be converted for use as a harness-style child restraint for children who aren't big enough to use vehicle safety belts. Parents looking for a convertible seat that earns a BEST BET rating as a highback booster could consider four Graco models — the Argos 70 Elite, Nautilus Elite, Nautilus Plus and Nautilus with Safety Surround — or the Recaro Performance SPORT and ProSPORT II.

The newest top-rated boosters retail for as little as \$18 to as much as \$300. Among 2013 BEST BETs, the backless Graco Connex can be bought for about \$18, the backless Harmony Transit Deluxe sells for about \$25, the Evenflo Right Fit retails for about \$75, and the Graco Affix starts at about \$85. The priciest BEST BET seats are the Ferrari Beline SP, a dual-use booster that's a BEST BET in backless mode, and the Recaro Performance SPORT. Both sell for about \$300.

Besides style and price, an important thing to consider before shopping for a booster is whether a child is old enough and big enough to graduate to one.

“Parents shouldn’t be in a rush to move their young children from a forward-facing restraint to a booster seat or a safety belt alone,” says Jessica Jermakian, senior research scientist at the Institute and an expert on child passenger safety. “It’s best to keep kids seated in the back seat in a harness-equipped child restraint as long as possible, up to the height and weight limits of the seat.”

When children outgrow child restraints, they should use boosters until adult belts fit properly. For some children, that’s not until about age 12.

“A belt-positioning booster seat provides the best protection for a child who has outgrown a harness restraint,” Jermakian says.

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.