Most reliable new cars

Lexus tops our list, but electronic problems plague popular models

Subaru Forester

THE JAPANESE DOMINANCE in auto reliability is showing cracks. In the past decade, brands from Japan typically locked in the top slots in our predicted-reliability rankings, rarely letting another carmaker slip in higher than seventh or eighth place. In our latest subscriber survey, however, Audi, Volvo, and GMC secured places in the top 10.

Audi, which has shown steady improvement in recent years, moved up four places from last year, to fourth overall. Volvo jumped 13 places, to seventh. And GMC emerged as the top domestic brand, finishing ninth, three places higher than last year. Moreover, every model from Audi, GMC, and Volvo scored average or better.

That said, Japanese cars still fare better overall. Lexus, Toyota, and Acura captured the top three spots, with all Lexus and Acura models scoring above average. And all Japanese makes rank among the first 11 except for Nissan, which sank to 22nd among the 28 brands in our rankings. All Infiniti, Mazda, and Toyota models scored average or better.

At the other extreme, new and redesigned models from Ford and its upscale Lincoln brand continue to show teething pains, putting those nameplates near the bottom of the list, higher than only the niche brand Mini.

Those findings are from our 2013 Annual Auto Survey, which was conducted by the Consumer Reports National Research Center. They're based on subscribers' experiences with 1.1 million vehicles. We use that pool of data to compile reliability histories and predict how well new cars that are currently on sale will hold up. (See "Predicted-Reliability Scores," on page 63.)

Highs and lows

- The top predicted-reliability score went to the redesigned 2014 Subaru Forester SUV, which hadn't been on the market for very long when we conducted the survey. The Ford C-Max Energi plug-in hybrid got the worst score, and the regular C-Max Hybrid wasn't much better.
- Hybrids and electric cars continue to do well. The Toyota Prius, Lexus ES 300h, Toyota Prius C, and Honda CR-Z hybrids, as well as the Nissan Leaf electric car, were among the top models. Ford's C-Max and Fusion hybrids were the only exceptions.

Tesla earns our recommendation

In addition to getting our top overall test score, the groundbreaking Tesla Model S electric car has had fairly encouraging reliability. We gathered data on more than 600 2012 and 2013 models. Owners of the 2012 model reported very few problems, although 2013 owners reported quite a few more. When combined, the Model S gets an average overall reliability score, which lets us recommend it.

Surprisingly, the problems don't center on the car's exotic, iPadlike touch-screen control system but mostly on things like wind noise, squeaks and rattles, and body hardware (including the sunroof, doors, and locks). Perhaps there were few electronic problems because of Tesla's ability to download software fixes directly to the car. No one reported problems with the electric drivetrain.

But the growing pains haven't dampened enthusiasm. The Model S also got a near-perfect score in our latest owner-satisfaction survey. Look for the full report next month.

• Mazda slipped from fourth to fifth; still very good. The redesigned Mazda6 debuted with above-average reliability. Subaru and Scion, which also typically rank well in reliability, were torpedoed by their twin sports cars, the Subaru BRZ and the Scion FR-S, which scored below average. This dropped Subaru to 10th place, from last year's fifth. Scion, for which we had only two models with sufficient data, sank from first place to 11th this time.

• The redesigned 2013 Honda Accord V6 scored below average, which means that we can no longer recommend it. The four-cylinder Accord, which earned an average score, is still recommended.

• The redesigned 2013 Nissan Altima also had a lousy debut, with the four-cylinder and V6 models finishing well below average and last in their category. The Altima's problems stem mostly from the transmission, wind noise, and squeaks and rattles. Nissan's troubles also include the Armada and Pathfinder SUVs, and the Titan pickup truck, which scored well below average.

• Of 31 Fords in our survey, only one, the F-150 pickup with the 3.7-liter V6, was above average. Seven achieved an average score.

What's going wrong?

As always, the more gadgets a car has, the greater the chance for things to go wrong. So it's not surprising that one of the key problem areas in our survey results centered on in-car electronics, including the proliferating suite of audio, navigation, communication, and connected systems in newer cars. Of the 17 problem areas we ask about, the category including in-car electronics generated more beefs from owners of 2013 models than for any other category.

In many cases, the touch-screen infotainment systems have been buggy, with frustrating screen freezes, touch-control lag, or a reluctance to recognize a cell-phone, an MP3 device, or a voice command.

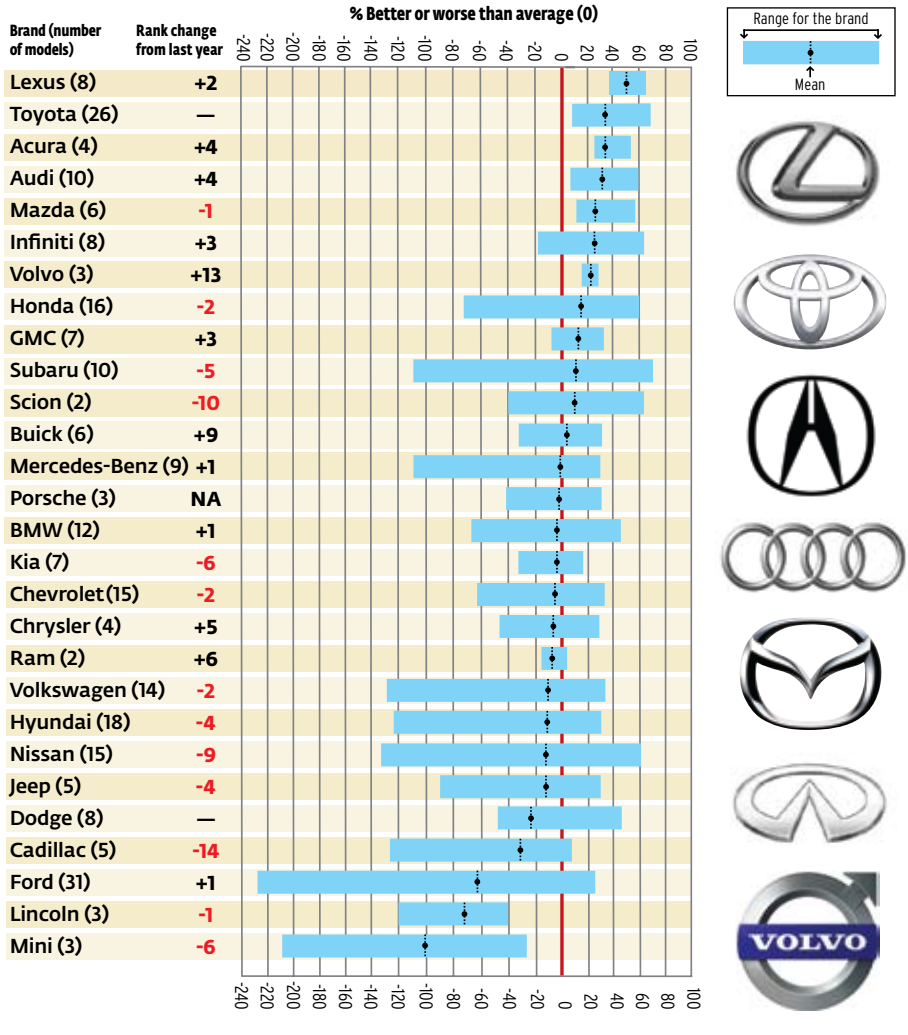
That's an area that has plagued Ford and Lincoln models equipped with the MyTouch systems, which have been unusually troublesome since they arrived in 2011. Yes, Ford has issued numerous fixes and software updates, and the survey respondents' complaint rates for new models have fallen by half. But the problem rate is still high, even as Ford has been putting the systems into more of its vehicles.

Another car with notable audio-system problems is the otherwise excellent 2013 Honda Accord. Because the problem rates are higher in V6 sedans and coupes, the

Audi A7

How the brands compare

This graph shows how the brands rank based on the average of their models' predicted-reliability scores. That score is calculated as a percentage better or worse than the average of all cars. Each bar shows the range between a brand's best and worst model. The rank change shows how many spots a brand moved up or down compared with last year's survey. To include a brand here we needed sufficient data on at least two of that brand's models. The lack of such data meant that we couldn't include Fiat, Jaguar, Land Rover, Mitsubishi, and Tesla in this year's rankings.



trouble seems to involve the up-level touch-screen infotainment systems in those cars.

Cadillac's CUE infotainment system also drew a lot of complaints about the integrated controls and navigation system. Cadillac, Ford, and Honda, however, issued software updates after our survey was completed, which may have addressed some of the problems.

Big Three's mixed results

Ford's problems don't end with the MyTouch systems. Several models with its EcoBoost turbocharged V6 engines have landed on the bottom reliability rung as well. The problems may have more to do with components that go with the engine, such as the fuel pump or the rough-shifting transmission, than the engine itself. Regardless, almost two-thirds of the 34 Fords and Lincolns in our survey got scores that were much worse than average.

General Motors fared much better. As mentioned, GMC is the top domestic brand, and Buick climbed nine slots to 12th place over last year. All Buicks except the V6 LaCrosse were average or better. The only dark spots for Chevrolet are the Camaro and Cruze, which are below average; all other Chevys in our survey rated at least average. Cadillac dropped 14 places, largely because of problems with the new XTS sedan's CUE infotainment system.

Chrysler is still below par overall, but a bright spot is the very nice Chrysler 300 C, which now scores above average; last year it was the company's most troublesome vehicle. Unfortunately, some of Chrysler's most reliable models, such as the Jeep Compass and Patriot SUVs, didn't score well in our testing, while the better performing 2014 V6 Jeep Grand Cherokee has fallen well below average in reliability.

Some General Motors brands rose in our rankings.

Europe on the rise

European automakers have made big strides in the past few years. Audi, whose vehicles tend to score well in our road tests, was the top European brand. The three Volvo models in our survey were average or better, although not having sufficient data on the historically problematic XC90 could have helped Volvo's score.

BMW and Mercedes-Benz remained around midpack among all brands. Most models from those German marques are average or better, with each company having a few problem children: the BMW 335i and turbocharged six-cylinder X3, and the diesel-powered Mercedes M-Class.

Volkswagen, which turned in a middling performance, was especially hampered by the trouble-prone Beetle, GTI, and Touareg. All three Minis in our survey made a very poor showing.

Asia scores—mostly

As a group, the nine Japanese brands in the survey produce a remarkable number of reliable cars. Of the almost 100 models, 90 percent were average or better and almost a third of them received top marks. Ten of those highest scorers were Toyotas. Of the eight Lexus models in our survey, six got top marks.

In recent years, the South Korean automakers Hyundai and Kia were beginning to challenge the Japanese at the top of our reliability rankings. In 2011, they scored well ahead of Detroit and most European companies. But they slipped a bit in the 2013 survey, with Kia ranking midpack and Hyundai sliding to 21st place.

What's up, what's down

Along with our test scores and independent safety tests, reliability predictions play a key role in whether or not we recommend a car. Here we show how our recommendations have changed based on our latest reliability results. We listed models that are newly recommended or no longer recommended, based on improved or declining reliability.

We also listed models for which we have just acquired enough data to make a judgment one way or the other.

Models that have changed status are those that turned out better or worse than we thought they would at this time last year. That happens largely because some predictions are based only on a single year's data and can be somewhat tentative. Many problems don't emerge right away, while others are addressed by the carmaker during production. That uncertainty is one reason we advise people not to buy a car during its first year in the production run. Models marked with an asterisk (*) indicate that our data was based on one model year only.

Newly recommended

Models with improved reliability	Models that now have sufficient data
Buick LaCrosse (4-cyl., eAssist)	BMW X1 (2.0 turbo)
Buick Verano	BMW X3 (2.0 turbo)
Chevrolet Silverado 2500 (diesel)	Cadillac ATS (2.0T)
Chrysler 300 C	Chevrolet Malibu*
Ford Mustang (V8)	Ford Fusion (2.0L EcoBoost, FWD)*
GMC Sierra 2500 (diesel)	Hyundai Azera
Mercedes-Benz M-Class (V6)	Hyundai Santa Fe (V6)*
Porsche Cayenne	Hyundai Santa Fe Sport (4-cyl.)*
	Kia Sorento (V6)*
	Porsche Boxster*
	Tesla Model S

Chrysler 300 C

Not recommended

Models with declining reliability	Models that now have sufficient data but are below average
Chevrolet Camaro (V8)	Cadillac XTS*
Chevrolet Cruze (1.4 turbo)	Ford C-Max Hybrid*
Chevrolet Cruze (1.8)	Ford Escape (1.6L EcoBoost)*
Dodge Durango (V6)	Ford Escape (2.0L EcoBoost)*
Ford F-150 (3.5L EcoBoost)	Ford Focus ST*
Honda Accord (V6)*	Ford Fusion (1.6L EcoBoost)*
Hyundai Veloster	Ford Fusion Hybrid*
Jeep Grand Cherokee (V6)*	Nissan Pathfinder*
Kia Optima (2.0 turbo)	
Kia Sedona	
Mini Cooper	
Nissan Altima (4-cyl.)*	
Nissan Altima (V6)*	
Scion FR-S*	
Subaru BRZ*	
Volkswagen CC	

Ford Escape

Predicted-reliability scores

Every spring Consumer Reports sends out a comprehensive questionnaire asking subscribers about any serious problems they've had with their vehicles in the preceding 12 months. These scores are based on the data we received from that survey.

The following charts show our predicted-reliability scores for 2014 models by vehicle type. Each bar represents a percentage better or worse than the average for all surveyed cars. Our latest survey gathered information on about 260 models, in some cases including multiple variants of the same model, such as a four-cylinder, V6, or hybrid. Our minimum sample size is about 100, although we often get many more.

To rate each model we calculate an overall score for each of the latest three model years, provided that there were no major changes in that time. Then for each of those three model years we compare the vehicle's overall reliability score with the average for all models of the same age. Yearly differences are combined to give the predicted reliability as a percentage better or worse than the average.

In these charts, the zero line is the overall average for all cars, and an "average" rating includes scores within 20 points on either side of that line. A bar with a break in it indicates that the score was outside the range of the chart. If a model was new or redesigned in the past year, or if we lacked sufficient data for some years, we might derive a score using only one year's data. Those models are marked with an asterisk (*).

Subaru Legacy

Toyota Avalon

Midsized cars

Make & model	% Worse	Avg.	% Better
Subaru Legacy (4-cyl.)			
Toyota Camry (4-cyl.)			
Mazda6*			
Volkswagen Passat (5-cyl.)			
Toyota Camry (V6)			
Kia Optima (4-cyl.)			
Honda Accord (4-cyl.)*			
Hyundai Sonata (4-cyl.)			
Chrysler 200			
Chevrolet Malibu (4-cyl.)*			
Subaru Legacy (6-cyl.)			
Ford Fusion (2.5L)*			
Volkswagen Passat TDI			
Ford Fusion (2.0L EcoBoost, FWD)*			
Honda Accord (V6)*			
Hyundai Sonata (turbo)			
Kia Optima (turbo)			
Ford Fusion (1.6L EcoBoost)*			
Nissan Altima (4-cyl.)*			
Nissan Altima (V6)* (-103%)			

-80 -45 -20 0 20 45 80

PREDICTED RELIABILITY

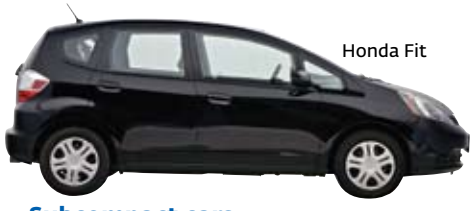
Audi A6

Coupes/convertibles

Make & model	% Worse	Avg.	% Better
Mercedes-Benz E-Class Convertible*			
Infiniti G Coupe			
Audi A5/S5			
Volkswagen Eos*			
Honda Accord Coupe (4-cyl.)*			
Honda Accord Coupe (V6)*			

-80 -45 -20 0 20 45 80

PREDICTED RELIABILITY



Honda Fit

Subcompact cars

Make & model	% Worse	Avg.	% Better
Honda Fit			
Hyundai Accent			
Mazda2*			
Kia Rio*			
Nissan Versa Sedan			
Chevrolet Sonic			
Mini Cooper			
Hyundai Veloster (non-turbo)			
Ford Fiesta			
Fiat 500			
Hyundai Veloster (turbo)* (-90%)			

-80 -45 -20 0 20 45 80

PREDICTED RELIABILITY

Large/upscale cars

Make & model	% Worse	Avg.	% Better
Lexus ES (V6)*			
Acura TL			
Toyota Avalon (V6)*			
Chrysler 300 (V8)			
Nissan Maxima			
Hyundai Azera			
Hyundai Genesis (V6)			
Chrysler 300 (V6)			
Hyundai Genesis (V8)			
Dodge Charger			
Buick LaCrosse (V6)			
Ford Taurus (V6)*			
Ford Taurus (turbo)* (-120%)			

-80 -45 -20 0 20 45 80

PREDICTED RELIABILITY

Luxury cars

Make & model	% Worse	Avg.	% Better
Audi A6 (4-cyl.)*			
Lexus LS			
Audi A7			
Lexus GS*			
BMW 5 Series (4-cyl.)			
Mercedes-Benz E-Class (V6, RWD)			
Infiniti M (V6)			
Audi A6 (V6)			
Mercedes-Benz E-Class (V6, AWD)			
BMW 535i (RWD)			
BMW 535i (AWD)			
BMW 7 Series*			
Hyundai Equus*			
BMW 5 Series (V8)*			
Lincoln MKS*			
Cadillac XTS* (-124%)			

-80 -45 -20 0 20 45 80

PREDICTED RELIABILITY


Porsche Boxster

Sports cars

Make & model	% Worse	Avg.	% Better
Porsche Boxster*			
BMW M3*			
BMW 1 Series			
Audi S4			
Mazda MX-5 Miata			
Ford Mustang (V8)			
Honda Civic Si*			
Ford Mustang (V6)			
Subaru Impreza WRX/STi			
Chevrolet Camaro (V6)			
Scion FR-S*			
Porsche 911*			
Dodge Challenger			
Chevrolet Camaro (V8)			
Ford Focus ST*			
Volkswagen GTI			
Mini Cooper S			
Subaru BRZ* (-108%)			
Hyundai Genesis Coupe* (-122%)			

PREDICTED RELIABILITY


Acura TSX

Luxury compact cars

Make & model	% Worse	Avg.	% Better
Infiniti G37 (AWD)			
Infiniti G37 (RWD)			
Acura TSX (4-cyl.)			
Buick Verano			
Audi A4 (2.0T)			
Acura ILX*			
Mercedes-Benz C-Class (1.8T)			
Volvo S60			
Mercedes-Benz C-Class (V6)			
Cadillac ATS (2.0T)*			
Buick Regal			
BMW 328i			
Volkswagen CC			
Cadillac ATS (V6)*			
BMW 335i *			

PREDICTED RELIABILITY

Full-sized pickups

Make & model	% Worse	Avg.	% Better
Toyota Tundra (V8, 2WD)			
Toyota Tundra (V8, 4WD)			
Ford F-150 (V6)			
Chevrolet Silverado 2500 & 3500 (gas)			
GMC Sierra 2500 & 3500 (gas)			
Chevrolet Silverado 2500 & 3500 (diesel)			
GMC Sierra 2500 & 3500 (diesel)			
Ram 1500 (V8, 4WD)*			
Ford F-150 (V8, 2WD)			
Ford F-150 (V8, 4WD)			
Ram 2500 & 3500 (diesel)			
Ford F-250 & F-350 (diesel)			
Ford F-150 (3.5L EcoBoost)			
Ford F-250 & F-350 (gas)			
Nissan Titan* (-90%)			

PREDICTED RELIABILITY

Luxury compact SUVs

Make & model	% Worse	Avg.	% Better
BMW X1 (4-cyl)*			
Infiniti EX*			
Audi Q5 (V6)*			
Acura RDX*			
Buick Encore*			
Mercedes-Benz GLK			
Volvo XC60			
Audi Q5 (4-cyl.)			
BMW X3 (4-cyl.)*			
Cadillac SRX			
BMW X3 (6-cyl., turbo)			
Mini Cooper Countryman (-209%)			

PREDICTED RELIABILITY


BMW X1


Scion xB

Compact cars

Make & model	% Worse	Avg.	% Better
Scion xB			
Dodge Dart (2.0L)*			
Subaru Impreza Sedan			
Subaru Impreza Hatchback			
Honda Civic Sedan			
Volkswagen Golf			
Honda Civic Coupe*			
Hyundai Elantra Coupe*			
Hyundai Elantra Sedan			
Nissan Sentra*			
Volkswagen Golf TDI			
Volkswagen Jetta (4-cyl.)			
Hyundai Elantra GT*			
Volkswagen Jetta TDI			
Dodge Dart (1.4T)*			
Chevrolet Cruze (1.4T)			
Chevrolet Cruze (1.8)			
Ford Focus Sedan (-89%)			
Ford Focus Hatchback (-91%)			
Volkswagen Beetle (-127%)			

PREDICTED RELIABILITY


Mitsubishi Outlander Sport

Small SUVs

Make & model	% Worse	Avg.	% Better
Subaru Forester (non-turbo)*			
Mitsubishi Outlander Sport			
Toyota RAV4*			
Honda CR-V			
Nissan Rogue			
Jeep Patriot			
Mazda CX-5			
Jeep Compass			
Nissan Juke			
Subaru XV Crosstrek*			
Kia Sportage			
Volkswagen Tiguan			
Hyundai Tucson			
Ford Escape (2.5L)*			
Ford Escape (2.0L EcoBoost)* (-104%)			
Ford Escape (1.6L EcoBoost)* (-223%)			

PREDICTED RELIABILITY


Toyota Prius

Luxury SUVs

Make & model	% Worse	Avg.	% Better
Lexus RX			
Lexus RX Hybrid			
Audi Q7*			
Lexus GX			
Infiniti QX56			
Buick Enclave			
Porsche Cayenne			
Infiniti FX (V6)			
Cadillac Escalade*			
Mercedes-Benz GL-Class*			
Mercedes-Benz M-Class (V6)			
Infiniti JX*			
Volkswagen Touareg			
Lincoln MKX			
Mercedes-Benz M-Class (diesel)* (-108%)			
Lincoln MKT (EcoBoost) (-120%)			

PREDICTED RELIABILITY


Honda Odyssey

Minivans

Make & model	% Worse	Avg.	% Better
Toyota Sienna (FWD)			
Nissan Quest*			
Toyota Sienna (AWD)			
Honda Odyssey			
Kia Sedona			
Chrysler Town & Country			
Dodge Grand Caravan			

PREDICTED RELIABILITY

Wagons

Make & model	% Worse	Avg.	% Better
Mazda5			
Toyota Venza (4-cyl.)			
Audi Allroad*			
Subaru Outback (4-cyl.)			
Toyota Venza (V6)			
Volvo XC70			
Volkswagen Jetta SportWagen*			
Honda Crosstour*			
Subaru Outback (6-cyl.)			
Volkswagen Jetta SportWagen TDI			

PREDICTED RELIABILITY

Hybrids/electric cars

Make & model	% Worse	Avg.	% Better
Toyota Prius			
Lexus ES 300h Hybrid*			
Toyota Prius C			
Nissan Leaf			
Honda CR-Z*			
Lexus CT 200h			
Toyota Camry Hybrid			
Honda Insight*			
Toyota Prius V			
Honda Civic Hybrid*			
Toyota Avalon Hybrid*			
Kia Optima Hybrid*			
Tesla Model S			
Toyota Prius Plug-in Hybrid			
Chevrolet Volt			
Chevrolet Malibu Eco (eAssist)*			
Hyundai Sonata Hybrid			
Buick LaCrosse (4-cyl., eAssist)*			
Ford Fusion Hybrid*			
Ford C-Max Hybrid* (-144%)			
Ford C-Max Energi (Plug-in Hybrid)* (-226%)			

PREDICTED RELIABILITY

Large SUVs

Make & model	% Worse	Avg.	% Better
Toyota Sequoia			
Chevrolet Tahoe			
GMC Yukon			
Chevrolet Suburban			
GMC Yukon XL			
Chevrolet Traverse			
Ford Expedition			
GMC Acadia			
Ford Flex			
Dodge Durango (V8)			
Dodge Durango (V6)			
Nissan Armada*			
Ford Flex (3.5L EcoBoost) (-120%)			

PREDICTED RELIABILITY

Midsized SUVs

Make & model	% Worse	Avg.	% Better
Toyota 4Runner			
Toyota Highlander (V6)			
Toyota Highlander (4-cyl.)			
Toyota Highlander Hybrid			
Nissan Murano			
Honda Pilot			
Mazda CX-9			
Toyota FJ Cruiser*			
Chevrolet Equinox (V6)			
GMC Terrain (V6)			
Chevrolet Equinox (4-cyl.)			
GMC Terrain (4-cyl.)			
Kia Sorento (V6)*			
Hyundai Santa Fe Sport (turbo)*			
Nissan Xterra			
Hyundai Santa Fe Sport (4-cyl.)*			
Hyundai Santa Fe (V6)*			
Jeep Wrangler (2-door)			
Jeep Wrangler (4-door)			
Dodge Journey			
Ford Edge (V6)			
Ford Explorer (V6, 2WD)			
Ford Edge (2.0L EcoBoost)			
Jeep Grand Cherokee (V6)* (-90%)			
Ford Explorer (3.5L EcoBoost)* (-91%)			
Ford Explorer (V6, 4WD) (-123%)			
Nissan Pathfinder* (-131%)			

PREDICTED RELIABILITY

Compact pickups

Make & model	% Worse	Avg.	% Better
Honda Ridgeline			
Nissan Frontier			
Toyota Tacoma (4-cyl., 2WD)			
Toyota Tacoma (V6, 4WD)			
Toyota Tacoma (V6, 2WD)			
Toyota Tacoma (4-cyl., 4WD)			

PREDICTED RELIABILITY


Chevrolet Tahoe