

Lexus tops 2014 vehicle dependability list

February 12 2014, by Dee-Ann Durbin

The race to increase vehicle fuel economy is taking a toll on quality.

Owners of three-year-old vehicles are reporting more problems than they did a year ago, according to J.D. Power and Associates' annual survey of vehicle dependability. It's the first time since 1998 that the average number of problems per [vehicle](#) has increased.

J.D. Power, a California-based ratings and consulting company, said engine issues accounted for most of the increase in problems reported by the original owners of cars and trucks from the 2011 model year. Owners reported an average of 133 problems per 100 vehicles, up from 126 problems a year ago. Only problems within the prior 12 months are counted.

Automakers are rapidly implementing new engine technology to save fuel, including direct fuel injection and turbocharging, stop-start systems that automatically shut cars down at traffic lights and transmissions with higher gears. But those more complex systems can cause problems. David Sargent, J.D. Power's vice president of global automotive, said the company saw an increase in complaints about engine hesitation, rough transmission shifts and lack of power.

"While striving to reduce fuel consumption, automakers must be careful not to compromise quality," Sargent said in a statement.

The scores could improve in coming years because since 2011, automakers have worked to make new transmissions shift more

smoothly, they've refined clunky stop-start systems and improved other fuel-saving technologies.

Lexus, Mercedes-Benz and Cadillac had the vehicles with the fewest reported problems. Lexus had just 68 problems per 100 vehicles, the only brand with fewer than 100 problems.

General Motors Co. had the most winners in each segment, with eight, including the highest-ranked compact car, the Chevrolet Volt, and the highest-ranked pickup, the GMC Sierra. Toyota Motor Co. was second with seven segment winners, including the Toyota Camry minivan and Lexus ES luxury compact car.

Mini, Dodge and Land Rover had the most reported problems. Mini, the worst performer, had 185 [problems](#) per 100 vehicles.

The survey questioned 41,000 owners of 2011 model year vehicles between October and December of last year.

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Citation: Lexus tops 2014 vehicle dependability list (2014, February 12) retrieved 16 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2014-02-lexus-tops-vehicle.html>

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