

## Vehicles Feature

# Safest Cars 2007

By Dan Lienert, Electronically reprinted from May 14, 2007

If you're going to get creamed in a car, might as well make it an Audi A4.

That's because it's one of the safest cars on the road, according to data we consulted in forming this year's list of most sound autos.

Joining it at the top? Acura's RL and Saab's 9-3. All three get the highest-possible marks for safety from three of the four most respected sources of such data: *Consumer Reports*, the Department of Transportation, the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety (IIHS) and the Highway Loss Data Institute (HLDI).

What's more, all three vehicles carry CR's highest-possible rating for accident-avoidance capabilities. The Acura RL also has perfect crash-test scores from both the Department of Transportation's National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) and from the IIHS. The A4 and 9-3 have perfect IIHS crash-test scores, as well as substantially better-than-average (in this case, lower-than-average) frequencies of insurance injury-claim filings, according to HLDI.

### Behind The Data

To earn a spot on our list, a vehicle had to have at least two of the following:

- CR's highest-possible rating for accident-avoidance capabilities.
- Perfect NHTSA crash-test scores across the board.
- Perfect IIHS crash-test scores across the board.

– A substantially better-than-average (i.e. lower-than-average) frequency of insurance injury-claim filings, according to the HLDI.

We only looked at cars that the NHTSA and the IIHS have tested in all of their available categories: for NHTSA, two frontal-impact tests, two side-impact tests and a rollover-resistance test; for the IIHS, front, side and rear tests.

The organizations we used as sources do not test every car on the market, nor do the crash-testing agencies put each car through every test they have. The sources we consulted try to assess a broad range of vehicles, but they lack the data or the resources to do all of them. For example, 2007 models not yet tested by NHTSA include Audi's A8 sedan and Porsche's 911 sports car.

The difference between a good crash-test rating and a poor one is significant: A five-star NHTSA frontal-crash rating means a chance of serious injury of 10% or less in a head-on collision in which each vehicle is going 35 mph. A one-star rating means a chance of 46% or higher. NHTSA defines a "serious injury" as one that requires immediate hospitalization and may be life-threatening.

The IIHS conducts a frontal-offset crash test in which the vehicle strikes a deformable barrier at 40 miles per hour. The organization obtains injury measurements from a crash test dummy, representing an average-sized man, in the driver

seat. In the side-impact test a 3,300-pound barrier, which represents the front end of a pickup or SUV, strikes the side of the tested vehicle at 31 mph. The IIHS obtains injury measurements from two crash test dummies, representing a small woman in the driver seat and a small woman or adolescent in the rear seat behind the driver.

*Consumer Reports'* ratings for accident-avoidance capabilities in cars are based on objective tests the organization conducts. *CR* believes the most important factors are braking and emergency handling.

### Safe Sex

Wondering if it's possible to achieve safety and sex appeal?

Answer, please: Yes. Oh Yes.

Take the sporty BMW Z4 coupe. A two-seater, it accelerates from zero to 60 in 4.9 seconds and boasts a 6-cylinder, 3.2-liter engine. Rounded fenders and flat rear glass add a touch of class.

Or the Lexus SC convertible. It reaches a top speed of 149 mph thanks to a 4.3-liter V-8 engine.

Both also received *Consumer Reports'* highest-possible rating for accident-avoidance capabilities and a substantially better-than-average frequency of insurance injury-claim filings, according to the HLDI.

Think about that the next time you're leaning more toward daring than dependability.