Insurance Institute for Highway Safety
Highway Loss Data Institute

# IIHS NEWS RELEASE

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## IIHS award criteria push manufacturers to scrap inferior headlights

ARLINGTON, Va. — At least 10 manufacturers have improved their 2021 headlight offerings by eliminating or modifying inferior choices, according to new ratings from the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety.

The *TOP SAFETY PICK+* award is driving the improvements. Beginning in 2020, vehicles have only been able to qualify for the higher of the Institute's two awards if they come equipped with good or acceptable headlights across all trims.

Those tougher requirements marked the latest stage in an effort that IIHS began five years ago to address a longstanding problem. About half of all fatal crashes in the U.S. occur in the dark, and more than a quarter occur on unlit roads. Nevertheless, manufacturers have historically sold many models with several different headlight systems of varying quality.

The Institute's first step to encourage better vehicle lighting was to introduce headlight ratings in 2016. At that time, the best-available headlights on only two of the 95 models IIHS tested earned a good rating. The next year, IIHS added headlight ratings to its award criteria.

IIHS adopted the more stringent 2020 criteria for *TOP SAFETY PICK+* to encourage manufacturers to make good-functioning headlights standard equipment. The new headlight requirement will remain in place for the 2021 awards.

"It's common sense that quality headlights protect against nighttime and other low-light crashes," says IIHS President David Harkey. "But even when manufacturers have offered good headlights, too often they were expensive add-ons that could be hard to find."

Many 2020 models fell short of the Institute's highest award as a result of the new headlight requirement. But manufacturers have reacted swiftly. In many cases, they simply stopped offering the systems that didn't perform well enough in IIHS tests.

For model year 2020, 85 out of 185 models tested could be purchased with good-rated headlights. In eight of those models, the good headlights were standard. A total of 42 model year 2020 vehicles came exclusively with good- or acceptable-rated headlights.

Model year 2021 appears slated for further improvement.

So far, manufacturers have boosted 10 models to *TOP SAFETY PICK+* from *TOP SAFETY PICK* by eliminating or changing poor or marginal headlight packages. These include the Audi A7, Honda Accord, Hyundai Palisade, Mazda CX-30, Nissan Altima, Subaru Ascent, Toyota Highlander, Volvo S60, Volvo XC40 and Volvo XC60.

The Honda Odyssey, which did not earn either award for the 2020 model because its pedestrian crash avoidance system was never evaluated, also qualifies for *TOP SAFETY PICK+* for the 2021 model with the elimination of two inferior headlight choices.

In addition to meeting the headlight criteria, *TOP SAFETY PICK* and *TOP SAFETY PICK+* winners must have good ratings in each of the Institute's six crashworthiness tests. They also need available front crash prevention that earns advanced or superior ratings in both vehicle-to-vehicle and vehicle-to-pedestrian evaluations.

Carmakers also improved the headlights on four more vehicles that had earned *TOP SAFETY PICK+* awards for their 2020 models — the Acura RDX, Subaru Forester, Subaru Legacy and Subaru Outback. Previously, these vehicles were available with different headlights that earned both good and acceptable ratings. For 2021, good-rated headlights are standard.

BMW also improved the headlights on the 2021 BMW 5 series by eliminating a marginal option. Though the vehicle doesn't qualify for either award since its pedestrian crash avoidance has not been rated, every 2021 BMW 5 series now comes with good-rated headlights.

"More manufacturers are going to a single headlight package for many 2021 models, which is a big win for consumers," Harkey says. "Sometimes, taking an inferior piece of equipment off the market is as important as the invention of a better one."

**Models with improved headlights**

| | 2021 model year | | 2020 model year | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Headlight rating | Award | Headlight rating | Award |
| Acura RDX | G | ■ | G A | ■ |
| Audi A7 | A A | ■ | A A P | ■ |
| BMW 5 series | G | | G M | |
| Honda Accord | G A | ■ | A M | ■ |
| Honda Odyssey | A | ■ | A M P | |
| Hyundai Palisade | G | ■ | G M | ■ |
| Mazda CX-30* | G G | ■ | G P | ■ |
| Nissan Altima | A A | ■ | A M | ■ |
| Subaru Ascent | G | ■ | G P | ■ |
| Subaru Forester | G | ■ | G A A | ■ |
| Subaru Legacy | G | ■ | G A | ■ |
| Subaru Outback | G | ■ | G A | ■ |
| Toyota Highlander | G A | ■ | G A P | ■ |
| Volvo S60 | G | ■ | G M | ■ |
| Volvo XC40 | G | ■ | G P | ■ |
| Volvo XC60 | A | ■ | A M | ■ |
| Volvo XC90 | A | ■ | A A | ■ |

* The 2021 headlight ratings and *TOP SAFETY PICK+* award apply to models built after September 2020.

G Good M Marginal ■ *TOP SAFETY PICK+*
A Acceptable P Poor ■ *TOP SAFETY PICK*

IIHS rates headlights on the distance that their low beams and high beams illuminate straight and curved roads. On a straightaway, good-rated low beams illuminate the right side of the road ahead to at least 325 feet. Poor ones might light up 220 feet or even less.

IIHS engineers also deduct points for headlights that produce glare that can momentarily blind oncoming drivers. Extra credit is awarded for systems with high-beam assist, a feature that automatically switches between high beams and low beams, since research shows that most drivers don't use their high beams enough.

**For more information, go to iihs.org**

The Insurance Institute for Highway Safety (IIHS) is an independent, nonprofit scientific and educational organization dedicated to reducing the losses — deaths, injuries and property damage — from motor vehicle crashes. IIHS is wholly supported by auto insurers.