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Helping Consumers With Vital Auto Safety Information

Louis V. Lombardo

New Information for Auto Safety

In 2014, a projected 16 million new vehicles will be purchased in the U.S. – many by people poorly informed on safety.

At an estimated average cost of a new vehicle exceeding \$30,000 this amounts to about \$500 Billion from the pockets of consumers to new automobile manufacturers and dealers in 2014 – too many of these dollars transferred in costly safety ignorance.

Currently each day in the U.S. crashes result in nearly 100 deaths, several hundred serious injuries, and \$1 Billion in losses. See <http://www.careforcrashvictims.com/clock.php>

Most new vehicle purchasers will choose a vehicle without information that can save their lives, livelihoods, time, money, and aggravation – and prevent harm for all of us. As citizens, consumers, taxpayers, and insurance (health and auto) premium payers, we all pay for poor choices made in the purchase of new vehicles.

Some new vehicles have many advanced safety features both for protecting themselves and their occupants with crashworthiness technologies and for protecting themselves and others with crash avoidance technologies. But many new vehicles still do poorly in safety tests so making wise choices are important.

Wiser Choices Avoid Buyer's Remorse

There is a new book out that many new vehicle purchasers do not know about that holds vital information – both for purchasers and for all of us.

The Car Book 2014, the 34th Edition, is now available. See <http://www.autosafety.org/>

The Car Book is well-organized – a treasure trove of information on safety, fuel economy, tires, insurance, complaints, warranties, maintenance, repair costs, and show room strategies. For example, The Car Book advises that Credit Unions often “charge fewer and lower fees and offer better rates than banks.” The result can be savings of hundreds and perhaps thousands of dollars in savings over the life of the loan. Yet most vehicle purchasers currently finance through dealers rather than Credit Unions.

Particularly useful are the one-page profiles of model year 2014 vehicles – 190 models. Each profile contains summary information on Ratings, Safety Features, Photos, Specifications, Fuel Economy, Pricing and Competitive Models.

I especially like the Safety Checklist that gives model information on the availability of various safety technologies. My favorite example is “Roll Sensing” technology. The latest NHTSA Report describes the value of roll curtain air bags with roll sensors as follows:

“NHTSA anticipates curtains that deploy in rollovers will generally be used to meet FMVSS No. 226, “Ejection mitigation,” which is scheduled to phase in from MY 2014 to 2017.” (p. iv) See attached NHTSA Report.

“FARS now also has enough data for initial statistical analyses of curtains that deploy in rollover crashes. Although the data is still limited, it shows these curtains save lives in first-event rollovers. The estimated fatality reduction is a statistically significant 41.3 percent, with confidence bounds ranging from 22.5 to 55.5 percent.” (p. v)

“The combination of rollover sensors, larger curtains, and prolonged inflation ought to reduce an occupant’s risk of complete or partial ejection from the vehicle in rollover crashes – but it might also help prevent ejection in side impacts that are not rollovers and/or reduce injury risk from interior contacts in rollovers and side impacts.” (p.3)

Since rollovers are the 2nd most deadly crash mode and perhaps the most dangerous crash mode for suffering brain, spinal cord, burn and limb amputation injuries, this Car Book info is of vital importance to new vehicle purchasers.

Another Safety Checklist feature that I look for is the availability of Backup Cameras to avoid killing or injuring children. Most new Hondas have such cameras as Standard equipment. Some other manufacturers offer it as an Option.

Then there is the safety feature of Pedestrian Crash Avoidance. It is available as an Option on Volvos and some other automakers. Imagine if Mayors started pressuring for new vehicles to have Pedestrian Crash Avoidance technologies as standard equipment. As a start, Mayors might create web sites identifying new vehicles with Pedestrian Crash Avoidance technologies as Standard Equipment. Think of Mayors’ Seals of Safety Approval for purchase and use in their cities. This could help meet NY Mayor de Blasio’s noble and moral goal of Zero Crash fatalities in NYC by 2024.

Consider, too, the value of the Car Book information in the Ratings, Tips, Techniques, and Warnings throughout this book that can help all consumers make wise choices that increase safety, save money, and avoid problems.

All individual new vehicle purchases are to some extent a gamble. But trustworthy information can help consumers make better choices. The people who have been producing The Car Book have been working to help consumers for decades. Disclosure: I had the privilege to comment on the First Edition published by NHTSA in 1980. Jack Gillis had the lead on producing the book under NHTSA Administrator Joan Claybrook. When Reagan was elected he stopped NHTSA production of the Car Book. Thankfully for consumers, Clarence Ditlow of the Center for Auto Safety began publishing the Car Book. Nader acknowledged Clarence and Joan at <http://nader.org/2014/02/12/academic-awards/>

Appropriately, safety is still the highest priority of the Car Book authors in empowering consumer choices. Although, I hope that the safety ramifications of car color are mentioned in future Car Book editions. White cars have been found to be about 10% safer. See <http://www.careforcrashvictims.com/blog-whitecars.php>

Here are some examples from the Car Book Ratings of new vehicles to indicate which buyer's choice would likely be for the better -- or for worse.

Subcompact:

Chevrolet Sonic or a Fiat 500?

Sonic: Rated 10 Overall, Very Good Crash Tests, Good Warranty, Average Complaints

Fiat 500: Rated 4 Overall, Very Poor Crash Tests, Poor Warranty, Poor on Complaints

Compact:

Buick Verano or a Ford Focus?

Verano: 10 Overall, Very Good Crash Tests, Average Warranty, Good on Complaints

Focus: 5 Overall, Average Crash Tests, Poor Warranty, Very Poor on Complaints

Intermediate:

Volvo S60, or Nissan Maxima?

Volvo S60: 10 Overall, Very Good Crash Tests, Good Warranty, Average on Complaints

Maxima: 2 Overall, Very Poor Crash Tests, Very Poor Warranty, Good on Complaints

Large:

Buick LaCrosse, or Ford Taurus?

Buick LaCrosse: 8 Overall, Very Good Crash Tests, Average Warranty and Complaints

Ford Taurus: 4 Overall, Good Crash Tests, Poor Warranty, Average on Complaints

What Can We Do To Help Consumers Make Safer & Wiser Choices?

Too many new car purchasers are unaware of the Car Book and its value to them. So let us ask why? Why not have:

- Book Reviews in the NY Times, LA Times, Washington Post, etc.?
- Author interviews on NPR, C-Span, and online programs, etc.?
- Car Books available in all Barnes and Noble stores?
- Car Books in more Public Libraries?

- Car Books used in Universities as teaching tools? Think Schools of Medicine, Law, Engineering, Business, Public Health, Public Administration, and Journalism. Imagine the interest of students considering the many safety facets!
- Car Books available in Starbucks?
- Car Books available in more Co-Ops?
- Car Books available in more Supermarkets and Drug Stores?
- Car Books in more Credit Unions and available on their web sites?
- Car Books in Reception Rooms of Doctors, Dentists, and CPAs?

These organizations can use the Car Book as a Customer Care symbol and customer and public service. They could show that they value their customers' safety and money. The organizations and businesses would benefit. Their customers would benefit. And we all would be better off.

Let us all do our part to prevent tragedies and make our society safer and stronger with useful and valuable information. Safety information can help us build a safer America.