

# STATUS INSURANCE INSTITUTE FOR HIGHWAY SAFETY REPORT

Vol. 46, No. 11, Dec. 15, 2011

# 115

Fiat 500 » Ford Fiesta » Honda Fit » Toyota Yaris » Chevrolet Cruze » Chevrolet Sonic » Chevrolet Volt » Ford Focus » Honda Civic » Honda CR-Z » Honda Insight » Hyundai Elantra » Kia Forte » Kia Soul » Lexus CT 200h » Mazda 3 » Mini Cooper Countryman » Mitsubishi Lancer » Nissan Cube » Nissan Juke » Nissan Leaf » Scion tC » Scion xB » Scion xD » Subaru Impreza » Toyota Corolla » Toyota Prius » Volkswagen Golf » Volkswagen GTI » Buick Verano » Audi A3 » Chevrolet Malibu » Chrysler 200

## **WINNERS FOR 2012**

» Dodge Avenger » Ford Fusion » Honda Accord » Hyundai Sonata » Kia Optima » Subaru Legacy » Subaru Outback » Toyota Camry » Toyota Prius v » Volkswagen Jetta sedan » Volkswagen Jetta SportWagen » Volkswagen Passat » Volvo C30 » Acura TSX » Audi A4 » Lincoln MKZ » Mercedes C-Class » Volkswagen CC » Volvo S60 » Buick LaCrosse » Buick Regal » Chrysler 300 » Dodge Charger » Ford Taurus » Toyota Avalon » Acura TL » Audi A6 » BMW 5 series » Cadillac CTS » Hyundai Equus » Hyundai Genesis » Infiniti M » Lincoln MKS » Mercedes E-Class » Mercedes E-Class coupe » Saab 9-5 » Volvo S80 » Honda CR-V » Hyundai Tucson » Jeep Patriot » Kia Sportage » Subaru Forester » Volkswagen Tiguan » Chevrolet Equinox » Dodge Durango » Dodge Journey » Ford Edge » Ford Explorer » Ford Flex » GMC Terrain » Honda Pilot » Hyundai Santa Fe » Jeep Grand Cherokee » Kia Sorento » Subaru Tribeca » Toyota Highlander » Toyota Venza » Acura MDX » Audi Q5 » BMW X3 » Cadillac SRX » Infiniti EX35 » Lexus RX » Lincoln MKT » Lincoln MKX » Mercedes GLK » Mercedes M-Class » Saab 9-4X » Volvo XC60 » Volvo XC90 » Buick Enclave » Chevrolet Traverse » GMC Acadia » Volkswagen Touareg » Chrysler Town & Country » Dodge Grand Caravan » Honda Odyssey » Toyota Sienna » Volkswagen Routan » Ford F-150 » Honda Ridgeline » Toyota Tundra

**TOP  
SAFETY  
PICK** 2012

INSURANCE INSTITUTE  
FOR HIGHWAY SAFETY

The list of winners of the Institute's *TOP SAFETY PICK* award is longer than ever this year, with vehicles in nearly every size category the Institute evaluates earning accolades. From minicars to sedans to pickup trucks, consumers have a record number of choices among 2012 models.

In all, 69 cars, 38 SUVs, 5 minivans, and 3 pickups earn *TOP SAFETY PICK*. The award recognizes vehicles that do the best job of protecting people in front, side, rollover, and rear crashes based on ratings in Institute evaluations. The ratings, which cover all 4 of the most common kinds of crashes, help shoppers pick vehicles that offer the highest levels of crash protection. Because the federal government now requires all 2012 and later passenger vehicles to have electronic stability control to help drivers avoid loss-of-control crashes, ESC no longer is a requirement to win as it was in prior years.

The winners' circle includes 18 new recipients for 2012, while 97 models that previously qualified for the 2011 award carry over to 2012.

"For the second year running a record number of models qualify," says Institute president Adrian Lund. "It's tough to win, and we commend auto manufacturers for making safety a top priority."

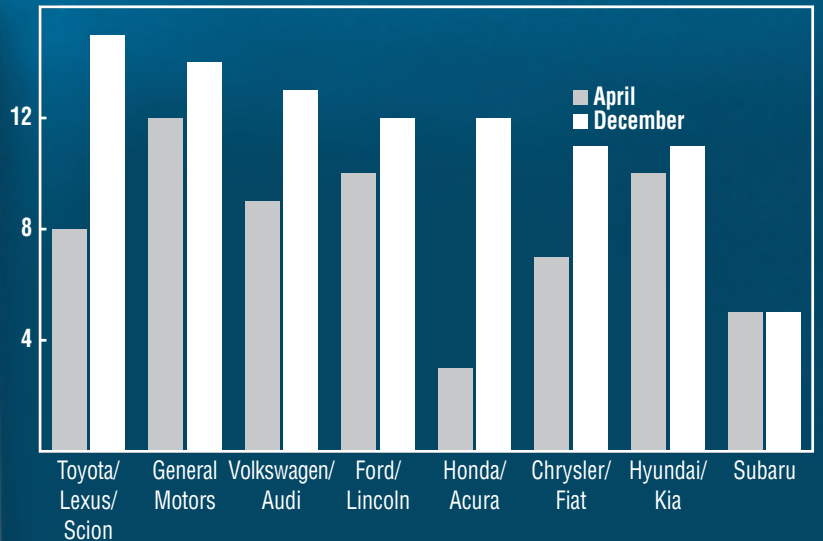
That commitment to protect-

ing people in crashes is evident in the fast pace of design improvements automakers have made during the past year.

Initially 66 vehicles qualified for last year's award as less-than-perfect rollover ratings held back many contenders (see *Status Report*, Dec. 22, 2010; on the web at [iihs.org](http://iihs.org)).

Later the number climbed to 100 as manufacturers redesigned roofs to make them stronger or introduced new models to win. The Institute's rolling test schedule allows for recognition of additional winners throughout the year, so many 2012 models qualified for a 2011 *TOP SAFETY PICK*.

**TOP SAFETY PICKS BY MANUFACTURER, APRIL VS. DECEMBER 2011**



**AUTOMAKERS QUICKLY IMPROVED DESIGNS TO WIN. THE HONDA ACCORD AND TOYOTA CAMRY, TWO OF THE TOP-SELLING MIDSIZE CARS IN THE U.S. MARKET, JOIN THE WINNERS' CIRCLE FOR 2012.**



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Again this year every major automaker has at least one winner. Subaru remains the only manufacturer with the distinction of earning awards for every model it builds. Subaru picks up 5 awards, including one for the redesigned Impreza, a small car.

Toyota/Lexus/Scion has 15 winners for 2012, more than any other auto manufacturer. General Motors is next in line with 14, followed by Volkswagen/Audi with 13, and Ford/Lincoln and Honda/Acura with 12 awards apiece.

**Honda improves:** Ten of the 18 new additions are Honda/Acura models, including the midsize Accord sedan, which hasn't earned *TOP SAFETY PICK* since the Institute toughened criteria to win the 2010 award by adding a test to assess roof strength in a rollover crash (see *Status Report*, Nov. 18, 2009).

Vehicles rated good for rollover protection have roofs more than twice as strong as the current federal standard requires. The Institute estimates that such roofs reduce the risk of serious and fatal injury in single-vehicle rollovers by about 50 percent compared with roofs meeting the minimum requirement. A new federal standard for roof strength will phase in beginning with 2013 models (see *Status Report*, June 11, 2009).

Roofs on the 2009 Honda CR-V and 2010 Pilot scored marginal ratings in prior Institute tests, while earlier models of the Accord, CR-Z, Fit, and Insight rated acceptable. Now all of these 2012 models earn good ratings and *TOP SAFETY PICK*.

"Honda/Acura deserves credit for most-improved status," Lund says. "The automaker buckled down and upgraded roofs on 10 models that (continues on p. 6)



## 2012 TOP SAFETY PICK WINNERS

<b>MINICARS</b>	Fiat 500 built after July 2011	Ford Fiesta sedan and hatchback	Honda Fit Toyota Yaris 4-dr hatchback
<b>SMALL CARS</b>	Chevrolet Cruze Chevrolet Sonic Chevrolet Volt Ford Focus Honda Civic 4-dr Honda CR-Z, Insight Hyundai Elantra Kia Forte sedan	Kia Soul Lexus CT 200h Mazda 3 sedan and hatchback Mini Cooper Countryman Mitsubishi Lancer except Ralliart & Evolution Nissan Cube	Nissan Juke Nissan Leaf Scion tC, xB, xD Subaru Impreza except WRX Toyota Corolla Toyota Prius Volkswagen Golf 4-dr Volkswagen GTI 4-dr
<b>MIDSIZE MODERATELY PRICED CARS</b>	Audi A3 Buick Verano Chevrolet Malibu Chrysler 200 4-dr Dodge Avenger Ford Fusion	Honda Accord Hyundai Sonata Kia Optima Subaru Legacy Subaru Outback Toyota Camry	Toyota Prius v Volkswagen Jetta sedan Volkswagen Jetta SportWagen Volkswagen Passat Volvo C30
<b>MIDSIZE LUXURY/NEAR LUXURY CARS</b>	Acura TL built after Sept. 2011 Acura TSX sedan and wagon	Audi A4 Lincoln MKZ Mercedes C-Class	Volkswagen CC except 4wd Volvo S60
<b>LARGE FAMILY CARS</b>	Buick LaCrosse Buick Regal	Chrysler 300 Dodge Charger	Ford Taurus Toyota Avalon
<b>LARGE LUXURY CARS</b>	Audi A6 BMW 5 series except 4wd & V8 Cadillac CTS sedan Hyundai Equus	Hyundai Genesis Infiniti M except M56x 4wd Lincoln MKS	Mercedes E-Class sedan Mercedes E-Class coupe Saab 9-5 Volvo S80
<b>SMALL SUVs</b>	Honda CR-V Hyundai Tucson	Jeep Patriot with optional side torso airbags	Kia Sportage Subaru Forester Volkswagen Tiguan
<b>MIDSIZE SUVs</b>	Chevrolet Equinox Dodge Durango Dodge Journey Ford Edge, Explorer	Ford Flex GMC Terrain Honda Pilot Hyundai Santa Fe	Jeep Grand Cherokee Kia Sorento Subaru Tribeca Toyota Highlander, Venza
<b>MIDSIZE LUXURY SUVs</b>	Acura MDX Audi Q5 BMW X3 Cadillac SRX	Infiniti EX35 Lexus RX Lincoln MKT Lincoln MKX	Mercedes GLK, M-Class Saab 9-4X Volvo XC60 Volvo XC90
<b>LARGE SUVs</b>	Buick Enclave Chevrolet Traverse	GMC Acadia Volkswagen Touareg	
<b>MINIVANS</b>	Chrysler Town & Country	Dodge Grand Caravan Honda Odyssey	Toyota Sienna Volkswagen Routan
<b>LARGE PICKUPS</b>	Ford F-150 crew cab models	Honda Ridgeline	Toyota Tundra crew cab models



## **N.J. TEEN DECALS BOOST CITATIONS, NOT COMPLIANCE**

A New Jersey law intended to help police enforce graduated licensing restrictions by requiring young drivers to display special decals is unpopular, widely flouted, and hasn't led to better compliance with the restrictions, an Institute study has found.

Still, citations for graduated licensing violations went up after the law went into effect, suggesting the decals are resulting in better enforcement.

"Decals seem to aid in the enforcement of graduated licensing restrictions, but New Jersey teens tell us they haven't been violating any less," says Anne McCartt, the Institute's senior vice president for research. "And when we checked out student vehicles at 4 high schools, we found that at 3 of them, the vast majority of teen drivers weren't using the decals."

Since May 1, 2010, New Jersey has required all drivers younger than 21 with learner's permits or probationary licenses to display red reflective decals on their license plates when they drive.

The requirement is part of "Kyleigh's Law," named after a teenage girl who was killed while riding as a passenger in another teen's vehicle in violation of graduated licensing restrictions. In addition to mandating decals, the law also moved the curfew for teen drivers from midnight to 11 p.m. and did away with a sibling exception to the 1-passenger limit.

The theory behind the decals is that providing police with an easy way to spot a probationary license or learner's permit holder will help them enforce graduated licensing restrictions. Proponents also say teens are more likely to comply with restrictions if they know they can be readily identified.

New Jersey has long had one of the strictest and most successful graduated licensing systems in the country. It's the only state where a teenager can't get a license, even a restricted one, before age 17. However, the decal requirement, the first in the United States, has proved controversial, and some state legislators have vowed to repeal it. Opponents say it makes teenagers easy targets for sexual predators.

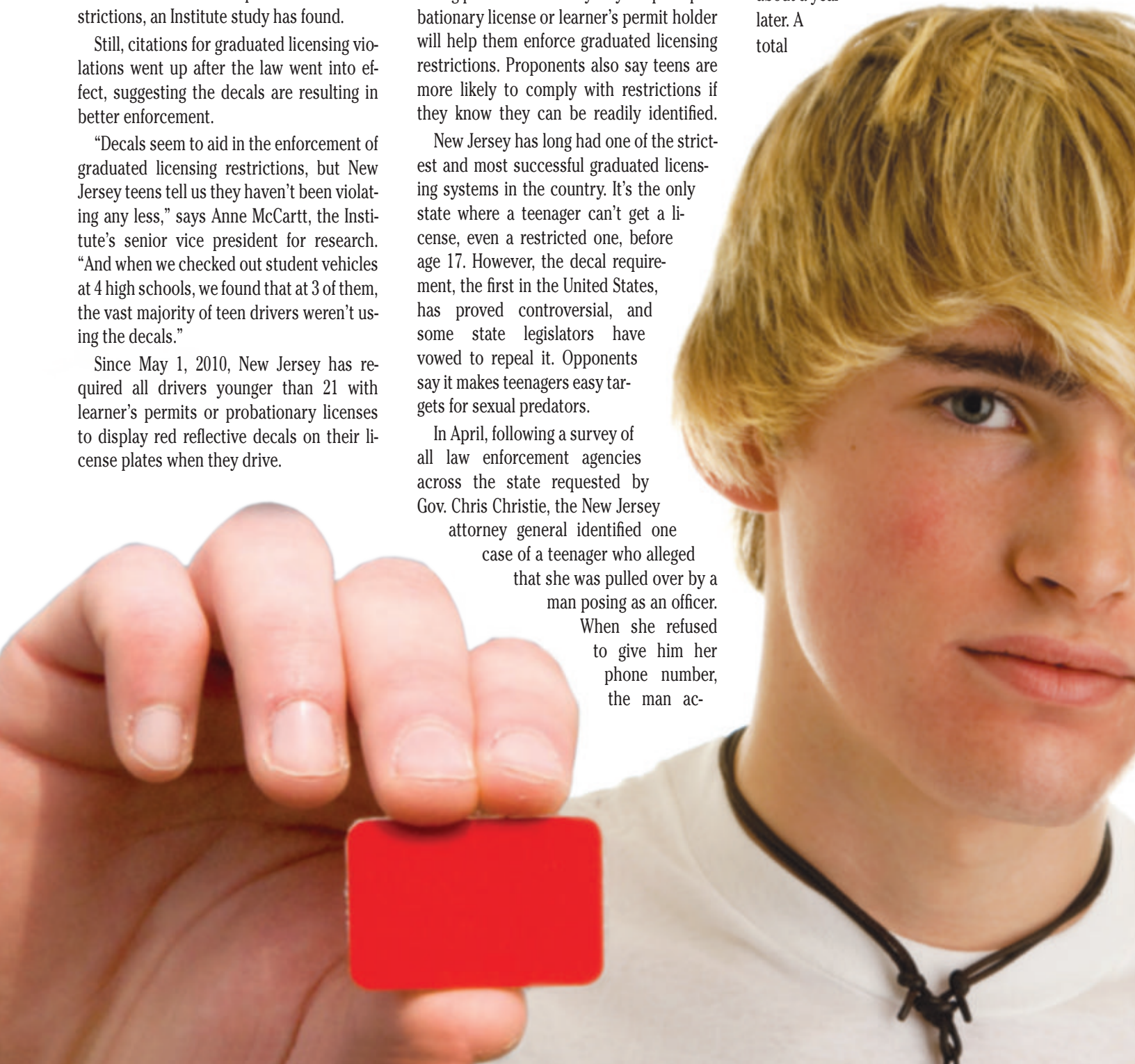
In April, following a survey of all law enforcement agencies across the state requested by Gov. Chris Christie, the New Jersey attorney general identified one

case of a teenager who alleged that she was pulled over by a man posing as an officer.

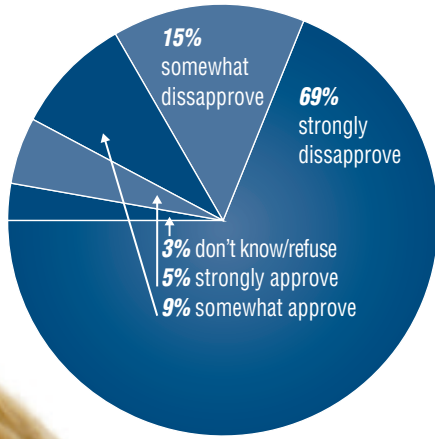
When she refused to give him her phone number, the man ac-

knowledged he wasn't an officer and drove away, the teen said. The driver quoted the man as saying he had stopped her because of the decal. No other case of a teen being targeted because of the decals was reported.

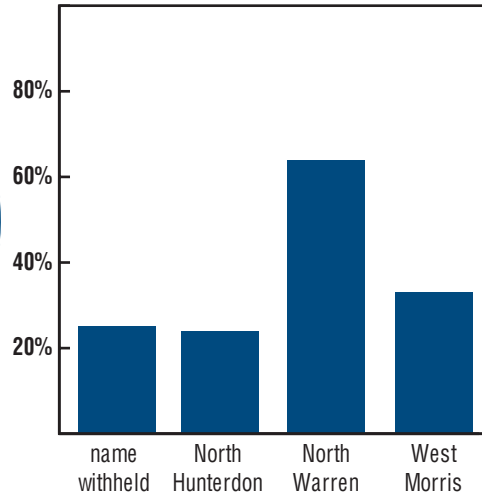
To gauge opinions about the decal requirement and its effect on compliance with teen driving restrictions, researchers conducted telephone surveys immediately before it went into effect and about a year later. A total



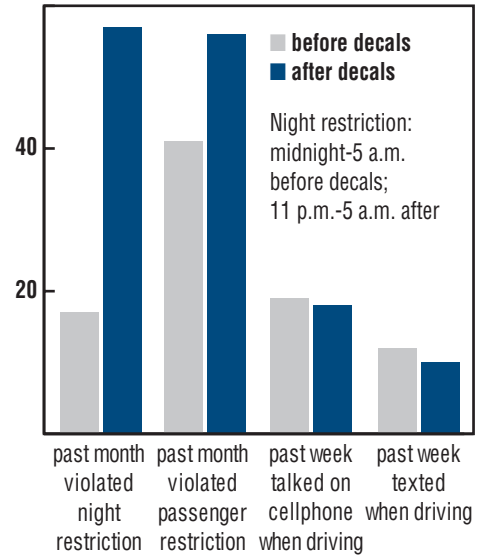
**OPINIONS ABOUT DECAL REQUIREMENTS FOR PROBATIONARY DRIVERS AMONG PARENTS OF TEENS WITH PROBATIONARY LICENSES IN 2011**



**OBSERVED DECAL USE BY PROBATIONARY LICENSE HOLDERS AT HIGH SCHOOLS; SPRING 2011**



**PERCENT OF TEENAGERS WHO SAID THEY VIOLATED SPECIFIC GRADUATED LICENSE RESTRICTIONS**



of 655 parents of probationary license holders and 501 parents of learner's permit holders were interviewed in 2010 and 700 parents of probationary license holders and 283 parents of learner's permit holders in 2011. More than 400 teens with probationary licenses were surveyed each time.

Researchers also observed rates of decal use among students driving to 4 high schools in different counties and compared the number of citations for violations of graduated licensing restrictions before and after the decal requirement went into effect.

Opinions about decals for probationary license holders were mostly negative before the requirement went into effect, and disapproval increased substantially afterward. In

2011, 75 percent of parents of learner's permit holders, 83 percent of parents of probationary license holders, and 90 percent of teenagers with probationary licenses disapproved of

decals. Opinions for learner's permit holders were more positive, but even that requirement met with the disapproval of about two-thirds of both sets of parents.

Among the common reasons parents of probationary license holders cited for opposing the decals were concerns about teens being profiled or targeted by other drivers (41 percent in the 2011 survey) or police (14 percent), identifying or drawing negative attention to teen drivers (28 percent), and the risk of predators (23 percent).

Teens were asked how often they violated probationary driving restrictions in the past month. Before the decals, 17 percent said they violated the nighttime driving prohibition. After the decal requirement, 57 percent said they had. (Even if Kyleigh's Law hadn't changed the curfew from midnight to 11 p.m., more teens would have been in violation post-decals, with 36 percent saying they drove after midnight.) Before the decals, 41 percent said they violated the passenger restriction. Afterward, 56 percent did. Reports of talking on a cellphone or texting while driving changed little.

Researchers found low rates of decal use. Observations were done at high schools in the fall of 2010 and spring of 2011. Use increased somewhat at 2 schools between the 2 surveys and fell slightly at the other 2. Only about a quarter of teen drivers at 2 of the schools were displaying decals in the spring.

At another high school, one-third of student vehicles had decals, and at the fourth 64 percent did.

Citations for graduated licensing violations nearly doubled in the year after Kyleigh's Law took effect compared with the year before. Excluding decal violations, citations rose 52 percent.

That increase seems to indicate that the decals do aid in enforcement. However, other



NEW JERSEY MOTOR VEHICLE COMMISSION

aspects of Kyleigh's Law, more attention to teen drivers amid the controversy, and unrelated enforcement may have played a role.

For a copy of "New Jersey's license plate decal requirement for graduated driver licenses: attitudes of parents and teenagers, observed decal use, and citations for teenage driving violations" by A.T. McCartt et al., email [publications@ihs.org](mailto:publications@ihs.org).

(continued from p. 3) missed winning last year because of rollover protection. Now, the automaker has winners in the minicar, small car, mid-size car, small SUV, midsize SUV, minivan, and large pickup categories.”

Another midsize sedan, the Toyota Camry, earns its first-ever *TOP SAFETY PICK*. Last year, the Camry missed the mark because of a marginal rating for seat/head restraints. The Toyota Yaris also earns its first *TOP SAFETY PICK* award. Toyota upgraded the roof and seat/head restraints of the 4-door hatchback model to win. Good ratings secure the Yaris a spot alongside 3 other minicars, the Fiat 500, Ford Fiesta, and Honda Fit, as 2012 winners.

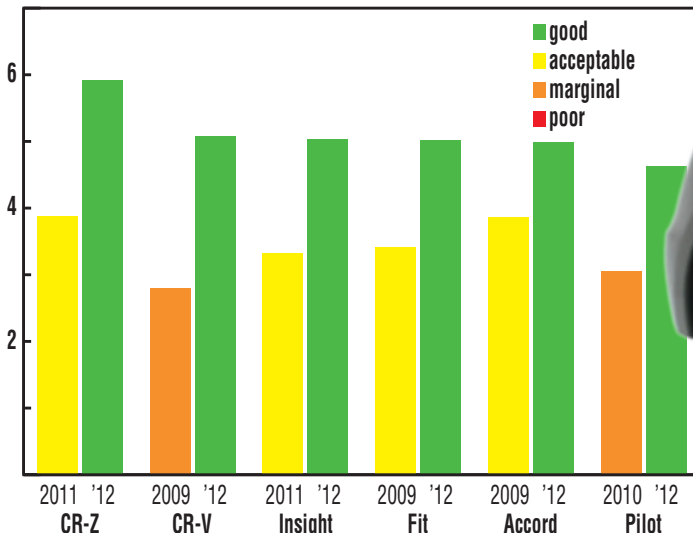
“It’s great to see the Accord and Camry, 2 of the top-selling mid-size cars in the U.S. market, join the *TOP SAFETY PICK* ranks this year,” Lund says. “The Accord previously won the 2009 award but has been missing from the list since then.”

“When we launched *TOP SAFETY PICK* in 2005, consumers had 11 models to pick from. Six years later, finding a winner that fits most budgets and lifestyles is easy,” Lund says. “It’s a testament to the commitment automakers have made to going above and beyond minimum safety standards.”

**About the award:** The Institute awarded the first *TOP SAFETY PICK* to 2006 models (see *Status Report*, Dec. 17, 2005) and then raised the bar the next year by requiring good rear test results and ESC as either standard or optional equipment. In 2010, the Institute toughened criteria by adding a requirement that all qualifiers must earn a good rating for performance in a roof strength test to assess protection in a rollover crash.

The Institute groups winners according to vehicle type and size. Lund advises consumers to keep in mind that size and weight influ-

**IMPROVED ROLLOVER PROTECTION RATINGS FOR HONDA MODELS, BASED ON TEST OF ROOF STRENGTH-TO-WEIGHT RATIO**



## **HONDA/ACURA DESERVES CREDIT FOR MOST-IMPROVED STATUS. THE AUTOMAKER UPGRADED ROOFS ON 10 MODELS THAT MISSED WINNING LAST YEAR BECAUSE OF ROLLOVER PROTECTION.**

With fuel efficiency and reduced emissions on many buyers’ wish lists, the winners’ circle includes more green choices. Toyota’s all-new Prius v is among them. Roomier than the original, the v hybrid brings to 15 the number of winners available as hybrids. The plug-in electric Chevrolet Volt and Nissan Leaf, winners in 2011, also earn this year’s award.

For drivers who need to haul loads, the Ford F-150, Honda Ridgeline, and Toyota Tundra are good choices in the large pickup category. Small pickups continue to be shut out. None the Institute has evaluated qualify for the award.

ence crashworthiness. Larger, heavier vehicles generally afford better occupant protection in serious crashes than smaller, lighter ones. Even with a *TOP SAFETY PICK*, a small car isn’t as crashworthy as a bigger one.

**How vehicles are evaluated:** The Institute’s frontal crashworthiness evaluations are based on results of 40 mph frontal offset crash tests. Each vehicle’s overall evaluation is based on measurements of intrusion into the occupant compartment, injury measures recorded on a 50th percentile male Hybrid III dummy in the driver seat, and



analysis of slow-motion film to assess how well the restraint system controlled dummy movement during the test.

Side evaluations are based on performance in a crash test in which the side of a vehicle is struck by a barrier moving at 31 mph. The barrier represents the front end of a pickup or SUV. Ratings reflect injury measures recorded on 2 instrumented SID-IIIs dummies representing a 5th percentile woman, assessment of head protection countermeasures, and the vehicle's structural performance during the impact.

In the roof strength test, a metal plate is pushed against 1 side of a roof at a displacement rate of 0.2 inch per second. To earn a good rating for rollover protection, the roof must withstand a force of 4 times the vehicle's weight before reaching 5 inches of crush. This is called a strength-to-weight ratio.



Rear crash protection is rated according to a 2-step procedure. Starting points for the ratings are measurements of head restraint geometry — the height of a restraint and its horizontal distance behind the back of the head of an average-size man.

Vehicle seat/head restraints with good or acceptable geometry are tested dynamically using a dummy that measures forces on the neck. This test simulates a collision in which a stationary vehicle is struck in the rear at 20 mph. Seats without good or acceptable geometry are rated poor overall because they can't be positioned to protect many people.

For more vehicle ratings and information on the winners, go to [iihs.org](http://iihs.org).

## **EARLY MONTHS OF DRIVING ARE RISKIEST FOR TEENS, MONITORING STUDY CONFIRMS**

Crashes and near crashes are more common in the first six months of independent driving than in the following year, a new study that observed teenage drivers using cameras and other sensors has found. Previous research has shown that teen crash rates decline quickly as young drivers gain experience (see *Status Report*, Feb. 17, 2001; on the web at [iihs.org](http://iihs.org)), but the study by the National Institutes of Health and the Virginia Tech Transportation Institute is the first to use in-vehicle monitoring to confirm that trend.

In the study, vehicles driven by 42 newly licensed 16 year-olds were equipped with cameras, sensors, and computers. For each trip, the devices collected information on passengers, crashes, and near crashes. Data also were gathered when parents drove the vehicles.

A total of 40 crashes and 279 near crashes by all drivers were recorded during the 18-month study period. Teens' rates of both crashes and near crashes per distance driven were higher during the first 6 months than the prior year. The teenagers had 13.3 crashes or near crashes per 16,000 kilometers in the first period and 8.5 in the second. As expected, the teen crash and near crash rates were much higher than those of their parents. The teen rate averaged about 10 per 16,000 kilometers during the entire 18 months, while the parent rate was about 2.

In a separate analysis of data from the same study, researchers looked at different variables such as the presence of adult or teen passengers to see how they affected the young drivers' crash and near crash rates. In addition to crashes and near crashes, the researchers also measured risky driving, including things like rapid acceleration, hard braking, and hard turns.

Not surprisingly, teens drove better when they were with their parents. In the presence of adults, the rate of crashes and near crashes was 75 percent lower, and risky driving fell 67 percent compared with teens driving alone. When other teenagers were in the car, the crash/near crash rate did not vary, and risky driving was 18 percent less frequent than when the teenagers drove alone. Those results were surprising because fatal crashes are known to be more likely when there are teenage passengers riding along.

The researchers also looked at how rates of risky driving among teens changed over time. They found these rates were nearly 5 times as high as those of their parents and didn't decline as the teenagers gained more experience at the wheel.

"Naturalistic assessment of novice teenage crash experience" by B.G. Simons-Morton et al. was published in the July issue of *Accident Analysis and Prevention*. "The effect of passengers and risk-taking friends on risky driving and crashes/near crashes among novice teenagers" by B.G. Simons-Morton et al. appears in the December issue of the *Journal of Adolescent Health*. "Crash and risky driving involvement among novice adolescent drivers and their parents" by B.G. Simons-Morton et al. appears in the December issue of the *American Journal of Public Health*.

## **THE RATE OF CRASHES AMONG TEENS FELL AFTER THE FIRST SIX MONTHS OF INDEPENDENT DRIVING, BUT RISKY MANEUVERS DIDN'T.**

# STATUS REPORT

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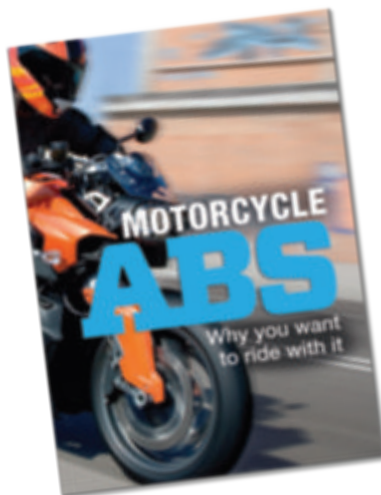
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Phone 703/247-1500 Fax 247-1588  
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**A NEW BROCHURE FOR MOTORCYCLISTS EXPLAINS THE BENEFITS OF ANTILOCK BRAKES. FOR COPIES, EMAIL [PUBLICATIONS@IIHS.ORG](mailto:PUBLICATIONS@IIHS.ORG).**

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