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Contact: Joe Young +1 434 985 9244 (office) or +1 504 641 0491 (cell)

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Jeep Wagoneer excels as other large SUVs falter in IIHS tests

ARLINGTON, Va. — For drivers of large SUVs, their imposing size comes with a sense of security. But some models are safer than others, new ratings from the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety show.

The Jeep Wagoneer is the only model out of three popular large SUVs tested to qualify for a 2024 *TOP SAFETY PICK* award. Other bestsellers, the Chevrolet Tahoe and Ford Expedition, fell short for multiple reasons, including subpar performance in the small overlap front crash test. More than 90% of new models have sailed through this evaluation with good ratings since 2021.

These vehicles are designed to be people haulers, as well as to tow boats and campers. But none of them offers good protection for back seat passengers — a shortcoming that prevents the Wagoneer from earning the higher-tier *TOP SAFETY PICK+* award.

“The huge mass of these large SUVs provides some additional protection in crashes with smaller vehicles, though that also means they present more danger to other road users,” IIHS President David Harkey said. “The flip side of their large size is that there is a lot more force to manage when they crash into a fixed obstacle like a tree or bridge abutment or the barrier we use in our front crash tests.”

Those high forces proved to be a challenge for all three vehicles, but the Wagoneer outperformed the others.

In the small overlap evaluation, based on tests conducted on both sides of the vehicle, the good-rated Wagoneer did a good job maintaining survival space for the driver and front passenger. It performed slightly worse in the driver-side test: Slight intrusion in the footwell resulted in a modest risk of injury to the driver’s left foot and ankle. In both the driver- and passenger-side tests, the front and side curtain airbags worked correctly to prevent the dummies’ heads from coming close to the stiff structures of the vehicle, and measures taken from the dummies did not show any other heightened risk.

In the driver-side test, the acceptable-rated Tahoe maintained adequate survival space for the driver, and the airbags and restraints worked well. However, there was enough intrusion into the footwell that injury measures taken from the driver dummy showed a substantial risk of lower leg injuries. Performance was worse in the passenger-side test. Extensive intrusion into the footwell contributed to a high risk of injury to the right foot and moderate risk of injury to the left leg of the passenger.

The structure of the marginal-rated Expedition did not hold up in the tests of either side. In the driver-side test, the steering column partially detached from the instrument panel, and in both tests the A-pillar separated from the rocker

panel. Excessive intrusion into the footwell contributed to a high risk of injury to the driver's right leg and moderate risk to the left. Footwell intrusion was also seen in the passenger-side test to a lesser extent.

All three vehicles earn a good rating in the original moderate overlap front evaluation, which only considers the level of protection provided in the front seat. None allowed substantial intrusion into the driver's survival space. However, the driver dummy's head hit the steering wheel through the airbag in the Wagoneer, and the driver's side curtain airbag in the Expedition did not deploy during the test.

For these vehicles, the test was run with an additional dummy in the second row so that updated moderate overlap ratings could be calculated too. Factoring in restraint performance and injury risk for a second-row passenger, none of the vehicles performed well. In all three, measurements taken from the rear dummy showed a fairly high risk of chest injuries because of high seat belt forces, though the airbags and restraints in the marginal-rated Wagoneer functioned well otherwise.

Only the marginal-rated Expedition has second-row belt pretensioners, which can mitigate belt forces, but its injury metrics were no better than those seen in the other two SUVs. The Expedition's side curtain airbag for the rear passenger also failed to deploy, but that wasn't enough to change its overall rating.

In the poor-rated Tahoe, measurements taken from the rear dummy showed a high risk of head or neck injuries, along with the chest injury risks. The second-row lap belt in the Tahoe also slid onto the rear dummy's abdomen from the ideal position on the pelvis, increasing the risk of abdominal injuries.

"These discouraging results show that some popular vehicles still lag behind in meeting the most advanced safety standards," said Raul Arbelaez, vice president of the Institute's Vehicle Research Center. "The good news is that the top performer in this class proves that automakers can readily address these problems."

All three SUVs breezed through the updated side test with good ratings, though the rear dummy's head thumped hard against the side curtain airbag in the Expedition.

In the pedestrian crash avoidance evaluation, the standard front crash prevention systems provided with the Expedition and Wagoneer earn good ratings. Both vehicles avoided collisions with the pedestrian dummy in most of the daytime and nighttime test scenarios. All trims of the Wagoneer also come with acceptable- or good-rated headlights. The headlights supplied on all trims of the Expedition only earn a marginal rating. They struggle to illuminate the road well enough on curves, and the low beams produce too much glare for oncoming drivers.

In contrast, the Tahoe earns only a marginal rating in the pedestrian test. Its standard system avoided hitting the pedestrian dummy or slowed substantially to mitigate the force of impact in all the daylight tests, but it faltered in the dark. In the 12 mph scenario that simulates an adult walking across the roadway in front of the vehicle at night, the Tahoe only reduced its speed by 3 mph when using its high beams and did not slow at all when using its low beams, for example. It also slowed only 2 mph when using its low beams in the 25 mph crossing adult test.

The poor-rated headlights supplied with all trims of the Tahoe may be a contributing factor in those lackluster results. Along with creating excessive glare for oncoming drivers, the Tahoe's low beams don't light up the right side of straightaways well. In the IIHS test, the pedestrian dummy crosses the test track from right to left.

Good headlights and effective pedestrian crash avoidance systems are especially important for larger vehicles, since their greater height and weight make them more dangerous than smaller cars for pedestrians and other road users.

The seat belt reminders in the Expedition earn a good rating, while the Tahoe's are rated acceptable because there is no reminder for the second-row seating positions. The Wagoneer earns a marginal rating because its unbelted occupant alert doesn't come on fast enough. It also lacks a second-row belt reminder.

Both the Wagoneer and Tahoe earn good+ ratings for the ease of use of their LATCH systems, which are intended to make it easier to install a child seat properly. The Expedition earns an acceptable rating.

Full ratings for 3 popular large SUVs

	Small overlap front	Moderate overlap front	Side	Headlights	Front crash prevention: pedestrian	Seat belt reminders	LATCH ease of use
2023-24 Jeep Wagoneer	G	G ORIGINAL TEST	G UPDATED TEST	G A	G	M	G +
		M UPDATED TEST					
2023-24 Chevrolet Tahoe	A	G ORIGINAL TEST	G UPDATED TEST	P	M	A	G +
		P UPDATED TEST					
2023-24 Ford Expedition	M	G ORIGINAL TEST	G UPDATED TEST	M	G	G	A
		M UPDATED TEST					

G Good A Acceptable M Marginal P Poor

For more information, go to [iihs.org](https://www.iihs.org)

The Insurance Institute for Highway Safety (IIHS) is an independent, nonprofit scientific and educational organization dedicated to reducing deaths, injuries and property damage from motor vehicle crashes through research and evaluation and through education of consumers, policymakers and safety professionals. IIHS is wholly supported by auto insurers.