

**National Highway Traffic Safety Administration**  
***5-Star Safety Ratings***  
**SUMMARY OF FOCUS GROUP FINDINGS**  
**July 2008**

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- **Factors Considered and Information Sources Used When Purchasing a Vehicle**
  - When asked which factors are important when considering a new or used vehicle, nearly all participants mention safety, price, and overall look/style. Used car purchasers are more likely to be concerned over a vehicle's reliability, warranty, and mileage.
  - Most participants mention crash test ratings when asked what comes to mind when thinking of vehicle safety. Other common thoughts include air bags, brakes (anti-lock) and vehicle size. A select few participants mention looking for stability control and lane change monitors.
  - Consumer Reports, both in print and online, is often used for general vehicle research and vehicle safety research. Participants generally view Consumer Reports to be a very credible source. Other commonly used sources include dealer and manufacturer websites, Kelly Bluebook's website, and Google.
    - Non-internet sources, such as recommendations from friends and family, newspapers and magazines, and car salespeople are also used.
    - Many participants will seek out crash test ratings on the internet; however, no one is familiar with or uses [safercar.gov](http://safercar.gov).
    - NHTSA, though recognized by a few participants, is not immediately thought of as a vehicle safety source. Several participants expect to find vehicle safety information in vehicle television commercials and other primetime programming, such as Dateline or 20/20.
- **Crash Test Ratings**
  - Nearly all participants have some level of familiarity with crash test ratings. However, participants are divided in their consultation of crash test ratings when considering purchasing a new or used vehicle.
    - Several use crash test ratings as a deciding factor in their vehicle purchase – citing they would not buy a vehicle unless it had four or five stars. Others report never using the crash test ratings as a decision making factor in the past.
  - Most participants believe the crash test ratings are put out by a government organization but are unable to readily name NHTSA. However, when specifically asked if they had heard of NHTSA before, about half indicate that they have.
  - After viewing the treatment illustrating the crash test ratings, participants agree that more information is needed on the speed of impact, the size of cars involved, and the metrics of the rating scale. Most participants indicate that having the ability to click on the various terms for more information online would be invaluable to their overall understanding of the crash test rating system.

- Most participants recognize that the star ratings are based on testing vehicles in the same weight class; however, there should be some indication of this on the layout or in the descriptions.
- After seeing the layout and hearing the description of the NHTSA crash test ratings, participants from all groups agree they would feel safer in a vehicle that tested well in a crash and would use the ratings to avoid purchasing vehicles that test poorly. Several participants who did not use crash test ratings in the past reported that they would consult them in the future.
- In general, participants prefer to see the full number of stars the crash test ratings can have (hollowed out stars) rather than the number of stars the specific vehicle achieved. This allowed participants to better understand the pros and cons of each vehicle.
- **Crash Prevention Features**
  - Most participants can readily identify a few crash prevention features, but not by the exact name. Rear view cameras, crash warnings, stability control, and lane change monitors are often mentioned.
  - Participants generally understand the difference between crash prevention and crash protection features, citing that one is proactive while the other is reactive.
    - Participants most often list air bags, seat belts, and anti-lock brakes as crash protection features.
  - Overall, participants view crash prevention features as “nice-to-haves” rather than necessities in their vehicles. Nearly all express concern over the cost implications of crash prevention features. The female, used car purchasers, in particular, assume they would not be able to afford the features or would not have access to the features in older used vehicles. Participants from all groups express concern that crash prevention features may allow drivers to become lazy and inattentive on the road.
  - Female participants are more likely to believe crash prevention features should be mandatory for all vehicles; however, they do not believe this should impact vehicle cost. In general, male participants believe the features should be optional.
  - Though participants indicate they would feel safer in a vehicle with crash prevention features, they unanimously agree that crash test ratings are more important overall. Most recognize that crashes will inevitably happen, even with the presence of crash prevention features, and they want to know that their vehicle will be able to protect them.
  - Participants believe a variety of entities should communicate the importance of crash prevention features and crash test ratings, specifically dealer and manufacturer websites, government organizations, Consumer Reports, insurance companies, and the media.