
INSURANCE INSTITUTE FOR HIGHWAY SAFETY

NEWS RELEASE

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VNR: Thursday 10/13/2011 10:30-11 am EDT (C) GALAXY 19/Trans. 15 (dl4000V)
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NEW BOOSTER EVALUATIONS: MORE TOP-RATED SEATS HELP PARENTS MAKE A SAFE CHOICE FOR THEIR KIDS

ARLINGTON, VA — A good fit is easier than ever to find when shopping for a booster seat, new ratings from the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety show.

A record 31 seats have been designated *BEST BETS*, meaning they correctly position a vehicle safety belt on a typical 4 to 8 year-old in almost any car, minivan, or SUV. Prices for these top-rated seats range from less than \$15 to several hundred dollars.

In addition to the 31 *BEST BETS*, another 5 seats are *GOOD BETS*, meaning they provide acceptable belt fit in most vehicles. Six boosters are not recommended because they don't provide proper belt fit, and consumers are advised to avoid them (see list p.2).

Booster seats are for children who have outgrown forward-facing child restraints. A booster should elevate a child and route the lap and shoulder belts, which are designed for adults, in the correct position to restrain a child during a crash. Some boosters do this better than others. The problem is that consumers can't tell a good booster from a bad one just by comparing features or prices. The Institute's booster seat ratings, initiated in 2008, are the only evaluations to tell parents which boosters do the best job of improving belt fit for children in the widest range of vehicles.

"A *BEST BET* means any of these top-rated boosters should work well in the family SUV or the babysitter's sedan," says Anne McCartt, the Institute's senior vice president for research.

Engineers evaluated 62 booster models in the latest round. Twenty-one of them show up twice in the lists. These are dual-use seats, which can work as highback or backless boosters. In the ratings, each dual-use model is considered to be 2 separate boosters for a total of 83 seats evaluated, 11 more than last year.

— MORE —

BOOSTER EVALUATIONS

BEST BETS

Britax Frontier 85
 Britax Frontier 85 SICT
 Britax Parkway SGL (highback mode)
 BubbleBum
 Chicco KeyFit Strada (highback mode)
 Clek Oobr (highback mode)
 Cosco Pronto (highback mode)
 Cybex Solution X-Fix
 Diono/Sunshine Kids Monterey (highback mode)
 Eddie Bauer Auto Booster (highback mode)
 Evenflo Big Kid Amp
 Evenflo Big Kid Sport (backless mode)
 Evenflo Maestro
 Evenflo Symphony 65 e3
 Ferrari Dreamway SP (highback mode)
 Graco Argos 70 (highback mode)
 Graco TurboBooster – Baldwin (highback mode)
 Graco TurboBooster Elite (highback mode)
 Harmony Cruz Youth Booster/Harmony Carpooler
 Harmony Dreamtime (backless mode)
 Harmony Dreamtime (highback mode)
 Harmony Olympian/Secure Comfort Deluxe
 Harmony Youth Booster Seat
 Kids Embrace Dale Earnhardt Jr.
 Maxi-Cosi Rodi XR (highback mode)
 Recaro ProBOOSTER
 Recaro ProSPORT
 Recaro Vivo
 Safety 1st Boost Air Protect (highback mode)
 Safety 1st S1 Rūmi Air
 The First Years B570 Pathway

GOOD BETS

Britax Parkway SG (highback mode)
 Combi Kobuk Air Thru (backless mode)
 Combi Kobuk Air Thru (highback mode)
 Evenflo Symphony 65
 Maxi-Cosi Rodi (highback mode)

NOT RECOMMENDED

Evenflo Chase
 Evenflo Express
 Evenflo Generations 65
 Evenflo Sightseer
 Safety 1st All-in-One
 Safety 1st Alpha Omega Elite

Note: Forty-one boosters are designated “check fit.”
 They may provide adequate belt fit for some kids in some vehicles.
 Go to iihs.org for full list of model numbers and booster pictures.

The biggest group of boosters falls into a middle category, designated “check fit.”

These 41 seats may provide good fit for some children in some vehicles, but not as many as *GOOD BETS* or *BEST BETS*. Parents are advised to make sure the lap belt lies flat across a child’s upper thighs and the shoulder belt crosses snugly over the middle of the shoulder. If not, a different seat is needed.

The focus of the Institute’s ratings is belt fit, not crash performance, and no crash tests are conducted as part of the evaluation. To assess belt fit, engineers use a test dummy representing an average-size 6 year-old. They measure how lap and shoulder belts fit the dummy in each booster under 4 conditions representing the range of belt configurations in real-world vehicles.

Improvements and innovations: Boosters have improved a lot in recent years. In 2008 there were 10 *BEST BETS*. That fell to 9 in 2009 but soared to 21 last year after manufacturers began using the Institute’s test protocols as they designed and updated their seats.

“Just 4 years into our ratings program, parents have a wide variety of top-rated seats to choose from,” McCartt says. “Still, boosters that don’t consistently provide good belt fit outnumber the ones that do, so consumers need to keep paying attention to this issue.”



Boosters elevate children and position safety belts so the belts will fit them better. The lap belt should lie flat and on top of a child's upper thighs, not higher up on the abdomen. The shoulder belt should fit across the middle of a child's shoulder. If it falls off the shoulder or rests on the neck, a child might move the belt behind the back or under an arm.



One thing consumers need to be aware of is that most dual-use boosters have different ratings for each mode. For example, 14 dual-use boosters are *BEST BETS* or *GOOD BETS* in highback mode but are designated check fit in backless mode. For one seat, the Evenflo Big Kid Sport, the opposite is true: It's a *BEST BET* in backless mode and a check fit in highback mode.

The Harmony Dreamtime remains the only dual-use booster that's a *BEST BET* in both modes, while the Combi Kobuk Air Thru is a *GOOD BET* in both modes.

A notable newcomer to the *BEST BET* list is the BubbleBum, an inflatable seat that's marketed for vacations, car pools, and taxis, as well as everyday use. When needed, it can be quickly inflated by blowing into a valve at the back of the seat.

Among booster manufacturers, Harmony Juvenile Products continues to be a standout. All 5 seats the Canadian company currently makes, counting the Dreamtime in both modes, are *BEST BETS*. The company is discontinuing the dual-use Baby Armor, which was a *BEST BET* in highback mode but not recommended in backless mode.

Small change, big difference: Diono, which recently changed its name from Sunshine Kids, bumped an existing seat, the Monterey, from check fit to *BEST BET* by changing the shoulder belt guide. The new ranking applies when the dual-use seat is used in high-back mode. The booster remains a "check fit" in backless mode. Consumers should look for Montereys manufactured after July 2011 to ensure they are getting the newer version. Meanwhile, the Evenflo Symphony 65, which has been a *GOOD BET* since 2009, now has a sister seat, the Symphony 65 e3. It has a slightly different shoulder belt guide, and that makes enough of a difference to make it a *BEST BET*.

"Booster manufacturers often use similar names for different seats or, in the case of the redesigned Monterey, even the same names," McCartt says. "It's important for consumers to look at model numbers and manufacture dates when consulting our ratings."

End of 4-page news release on new booster seat evaluations

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