

J.D. Power Reports: Leather or Leatherette? Vehicle Owners Often Can't Tell The Difference

[New Level of Quality in Leatherette Seats Offers Similar Look, Feel and Durability as Leather at a Lower Cost](#)

WESTLAKE VILLAGE, Calif.: 20 August 2015 — The quality of synthetic leather materials used on new-vehicle seats has gotten so good that new-vehicle owners often don't know or can't tell if their vehicle's seats are leather or leatherette—a synthetic leather-like material— according to the J.D. Power [2015 Seat Quality and Satisfaction StudySM](#) released today.

The study provides automotive manufacturers and suppliers with quality and satisfaction information related to seating systems. New-vehicle owners are asked to rate the quality of their vehicle's seats and seat belts with regard to whether they have experienced defects/malfunctions or design problems during the first 90 days of ownership.

Consumer responses indicate that leather and leatherette have such a similar look, feel and durability that it's difficult to tell the difference between the two. That's beneficial to both automakers, who can offer leatherette at a fraction of the cost of leather, and consumers, who save money without compromising the luxury and quality associated with leather.

"It's really a compliment to the suppliers that they can produce a synthetic material that customers indicate looks and feels so much like leather that they often times cannot tell the difference, despite automakers marketing the leatherette as a synthetic leather-like material," said Brent Gruber, director, global automotive division at J.D. Power. "And it's not just the look and feel that makes it difficult for owners to differentiate between the two: the quality and durability are also very similar. Leather is viewed as a premium product that, in addition to its upscale look and feel, offers added scuff and soil resistance over cloth seating. Leatherette provides similar benefits to those provided by leather, yet at a reduced cost to manufacturers and owners and without a decline in quality or customer satisfaction."

Many of today's entry-level luxury vehicles offer leatherette as standard seating material, with leather only available in upgraded trim levels. Among owners of one midsize premium car model, 94 percent indicate their vehicle has leather seats; however, given owners' survey responses regarding the trim level of their vehicle, approximately 13 percent of these owners actually have leatherette. In another example, 79 percent of owners of a mass market midsize car say their vehicle has leather seats when in fact 41 percent of them most likely have leatherette given the vehicle's trim level.

In the midsize premium car segment, where both options are frequently offered, models that offer both seat material options receive similar satisfaction ratings for their seats in comparison with models that offer only leather seats. Models that offer both leatherette and leather seat options actually perform slightly higher (0.06 points) for the feel of the seat material than models that offer authentic leather seats only (9.00 vs. 8.94, respectively, on a 10-point scale), but this highlights the fact that owners perceive little difference between the two seating materials.

Owners of midsize premium car models that offer both leatherette and leather seat options report slightly more problems with seat materials scuff/soil easily than owners of models that offer only leather seats—1.6

problems per 100 vehicles (PP100) vs. 0.9 PP100, respectively—but report no problems related to seat material imperfections, while owners of models that offer only leather seats report an average of 0.2 PP100.

Among owners of midsize premium cars, overall satisfaction with the vehicle’s seats, the driver seat, styling of the seats and comfort of the driver’s seat bottom cushion is higher among owners of models that offer both leatherette and leather seats than among those whose model offers leather seats only.

KEY FINDINGS

- The overall industry average for seat-related problems is 8.3 PP100 in 2015, an improvement of 0.8 PP100 from 2014.
- On average, overall satisfaction with the ease of adjusting driver seat to desired position is 8.12; however, when more power-adjustable features are added to the seat, satisfaction increases. For example, when power-adjustable sliding, reclining, height, and memory seats are added, satisfaction increases to 8.68.
- Designing seats to accommodate the range of consumer sizes continues to be an issue for seat suppliers. Owners who are 5 feet 3 inches tall or shorter experience more seat-related problems than average (9.7 PP100 vs. 8.1 PP100, respectively), specifically with the seat height adjustment and headrest adjustment. Owners who weigh less than 135 pounds or more than 239 pounds report more seat problems than the rest of the industry (8.6 PP100 and 10.2 PP100 vs. 7.9 PP100, respectively).

Seat Supplier Quality Rankings

Among seat suppliers, Johnson Controls, Inc. receives three segment awards for seat quality, while Lear Corporation, Magna, Toyo Seat and TS Tech Co., Ltd. receive one award each.

Johnson Controls, Inc. ranks highest in the luxury SUV segment for its seats in the Land Rover Range Rover Evoque, the mass market midsize/large car segment for the Kia Cadenza and the mass market midsize/large SUV segment for the Hyundai Santa Fe.¹

Lear Corporation ranks highest in the mass market truck/van segment for the Chevrolet Silverado LD. Magna ranks highest in the mass market compact SUV/MPV for the Ford C-Max. Toyo Seat ranks highest in the mass market compact car segment for the Mazda MX-5 Miata. TS Tech Co., Ltd. ranks highest in the luxury car segment for the Acura RLX.

The 2015 Seat Quality and Satisfaction Study is based on responses from 84,367 purchasers and lessees of new 2015 model-year cars and light trucks. The study was fielded from February through May 2015.

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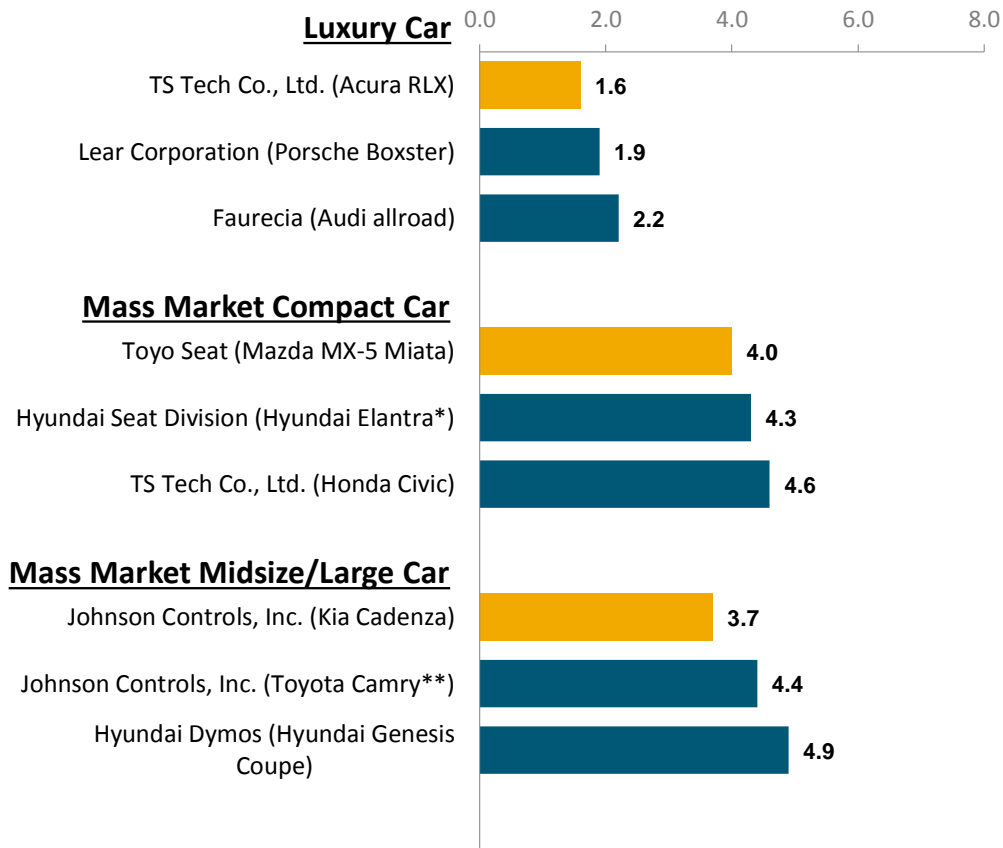
NOTE: Two charts follow.

¹ Johnson Controls, Inc., award is for its seats supplied for Hyundai Santa Fe assembled at the West Point, GA, plant.

J.D. Power 2015 Seat Quality and Satisfaction StudySM

Top Three Seats per Segment Overall Quality

Problems per 100 Vehicles (PP100)



NOTES: * Hyundai Seat Division's ranking in the mass market compact car segment is for its seats supplied for the Hyundai Elantra assembled at the Ulsan Plant 3, Korea, plant.

** Johnson Control's ranking in the mass market midsize/large car segment is for its seats supplied for the Toyota Camry assembled at the Georgetown 1 and Georgetown 2, GA plants.

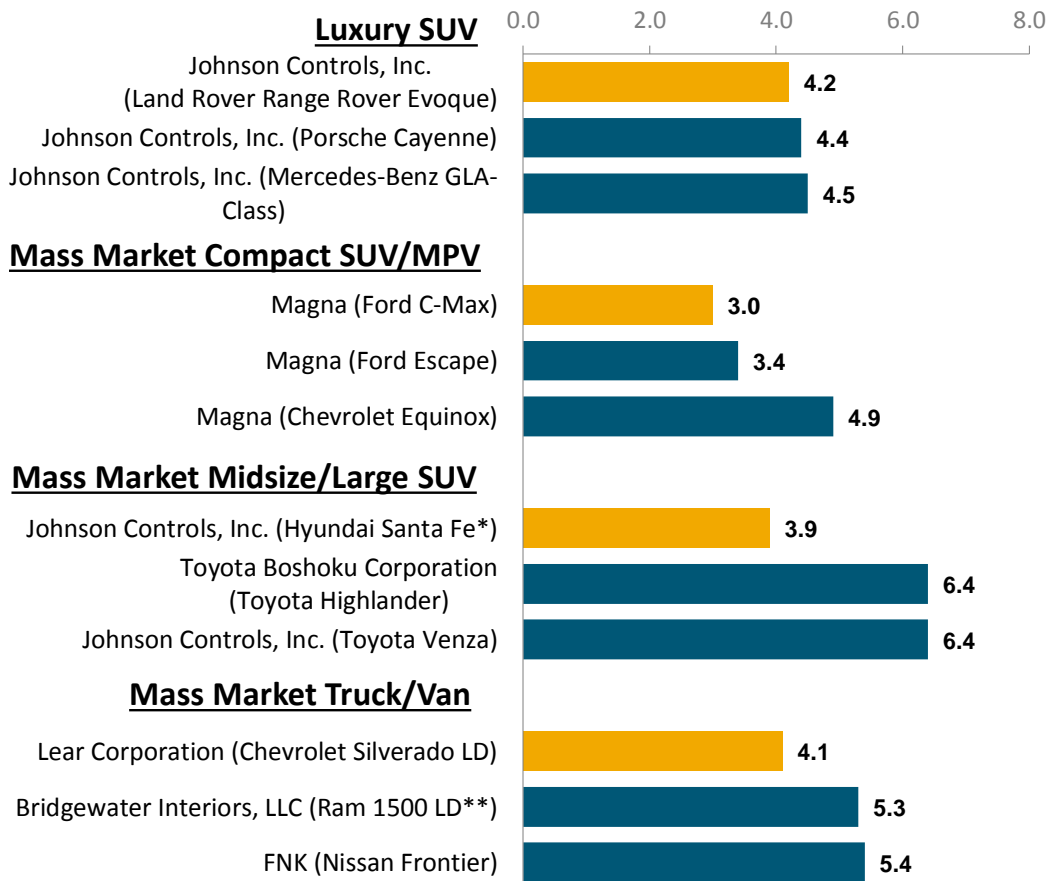
Source: J.D. Power 2015 Seat Quality and Satisfaction StudySM

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*NOTES: * Johnson Controls, Inc.'s ranking in the mass market midsize/large SUV segment is for its seats supplied for the Hyundai Santa Fe assembled at the West Point, GA plant.*

*** Bridgewater Interiors, LLC's ranking in the mass market truck/van segment is for its seats supplied for the Ram 1500 LD assembled at the Warren, MI plant.*

Source: J.D. Power 2015 Seat Quality and Satisfaction StudySM

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