

The UK's most reliable cars

We reveal the new cars you can trust and the dealers you can depend on

Our 2006 car reliability survey shows that you don't always get what you pay for. Small, cheap cars are more reliable than larger, expensive models.

And some franchised dealers who repair 'prestige' cars need to up their game, too.

Of course, any source of trouble is disappointing on a brand new car. That's why our detailed survey records faults, niggles and repairs as well as actual breakdowns.

Here we give reliability scores for new cars up to two years old, based on owners' experiences in the last 12 months. But while you'd expect a fault-free drive in such new cars, many have teething problems.

Not one Honda Jazz broke down, out of more than 400 in our survey

Reliability scores explained

In January, our car survey went out to 80,000 *Which?* members. Thanks to your responses, we collected data on 32,550 cars. Here we're focusing just on cars up to two years old, but you can see more results in next month's *Which? Car*.

Our reliability scores are a blend of breakdowns (50 per cent), faults (25 per cent) and niggles (25 per cent) recorded within the last 12 months. As breakdowns are particularly inconvenient, we

give them more weight. A 'fault' means something had to be replaced – for example, a failed heater fan. 'Niggles' are annoying problems, such as squeaky cabin trim, that don't put the car off the road.

On average, 5 per cent of all new cars broke down, 27 per cent had faults and 19 per cent had niggles. Sample sizes are shown in brackets.

KEY TO RESULTS

■ **GOOD**
■ **AVERAGE**
■ **POOR**



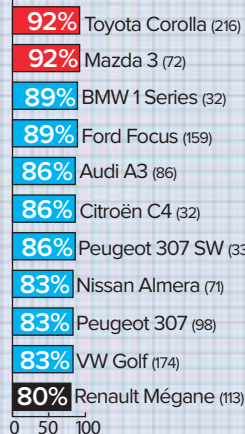
MEDIUM CARS

THE WINNERS AND LOSERS

Winners Japanese brands top the class here – Toyota's Corolla is popular among *Which?* members and it's not hard to see why. The Mazda 3 is close behind (relegated to second place due to a handful more breakdowns, faults and niggles). They're the only two medium cars to rate as 'good' for reliability.

Losers Volkswagen again fails to live up to its reliable reputation, with the latest Golf rated as only 'average'. But by far the most troublesome medium car is Renault's Mégane: more than one in ten broke down in the last 12 months and two in five owners reported faults and repairs.

It's interesting to note that the new Ford Focus manages an 'average' rating that places it in between pricier Audi and BMW models. Its score also virtually matches that of the old Focus.

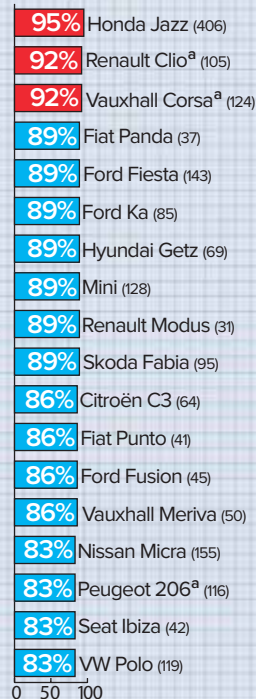


SUPERMINIS

THE WINNERS AND LOSERS

Winners Out of our sample of 406 Honda Jazzes there was not a single breakdown and only a handful of faults and niggles. Renault's Clio bucks the brand's poor reputation for reliability, but this version is now sold only in a limited range (called Clio Campus) since the arrival of the new Clio.

Losers At the bottom of the pile lie the Nissan Micra, Peugeot 206, Seat Ibiza and VW Polo. The Ibiza and Polo share engines and major components, but then so does the Skoda Fabia, which scores better.



^a This is the outgoing version of this model



**BEST
LARGE CAR**
HONDA
ACCORD

**BEST
OFF-ROADER**
HONDA
CR-V

**BEST
MPV**
TOYOTA
VERSO

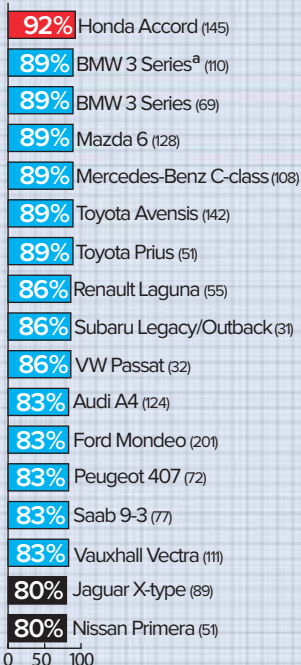
**BEST
LUXURY CAR**
AUDI A6

LARGE CARS

THE WINNERS AND LOSERS

Winners Yet another triumph for Honda – its Accord occupies top spot and is the only large car to achieve a ‘good’ reliability rating. BMW’s 3 Series is consistent – the new version’s score matches the outgoing model (still available as a coupé or convertible).

Losers Jaguar’s X-type is based on the Ford Mondeo, yet seems to be less reliable than its cheaper cousin. Meanwhile, the Primera’s poor show surprised us, as we’ve come to expect good reliability from Nissan. It seems this version can’t live up to its predecessors.



^a This is the outgoing version of this model

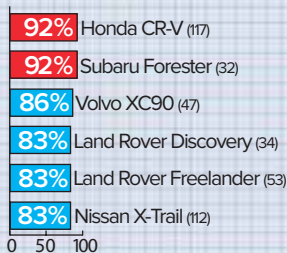
OFF-ROADERS

THE WINNERS AND LOSERS

Winners Another case where the Japanese manufacturers score well. Honda pips Subaru by virtue of fewer breakdowns. Both are considerably ahead of the rest in terms of reliability – so you can buy with confidence.

Losers There’s another poor showing for Nissan – its popular X-Trail isn’t as dependable as it should be. More than one in three owners reported faults and 18 per cent found niggles in their cars. And while only four per cent of X-Trail actually broke down, the other figures do little to inspire confidence, especially when you compare it with the Honda CR-V, for which only around one in ten owners reported a fault.

Land Rovers aren’t renowned for their reliability and the (soon-to-be-replaced) Freelander and new Discovery don’t buck the trend. Almost half of the Discoveries in our survey needed repairs in the last 12 months and 41 per cent had niggles. The Freelander has fewer niggles (23 per cent), but the fault count is still too high at 40 per cent – buy with care.



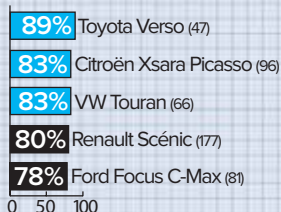
MPVs

THE WINNERS AND LOSERS

Winners Not one MPV scored highly enough for our ‘good’ rating, which is perhaps a product of the hard life these vehicles can lead. However, Toyota’s Verso (formerly Corolla Verso) is best among the ‘average’ MPVs and looks like the safest bet.

Once again there’s little to choose between the ‘premium’ offering from VW and the cheap and cheerful Citroën Xsara Picasso – so you don’t necessarily get what you pay for. However, this is a period of flux for the MPV category – the second-placed Citroën Xsara Picasso is due for replacement soon.

Losers The mechanicals from the Renault Mégane are also used in the Scénic, so it’s no surprise to find both cars’ reliability rating is ‘poor’. It’s a different story for Ford’s Focus C-Max, though. Despite sharing some key parts with the standard Focus, the C-Max’s reliability is much worse.



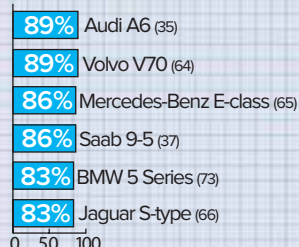
LUXURY CARS

THE WINNERS AND LOSERS

Winners Another category where no car managed a ‘good’ rating – perhaps as a result of the high gadget count in today’s luxury cars, which arguably increases the chances of things going wrong. Best of an average bunch is the Audi A6, which pips Volvo’s V70, with no breakdowns. Let’s hope it marks an upturn in Audi’s overall reliability record, which hasn’t been good in recent years.

Losers BMW’s 5 Series and the Jaguar S-type disappoint but both are still ‘average’ overall. S-type owners suffered few breakdowns but were let down by faults and niggles. The 5 Series was average on all three counts.

Even the Mercedes-Benz E-class has its fair share of trouble, with 32 per cent of owners needing repairs in the last 12 months and 28 per cent finding niggles – disappointing for a luxury car costing more than £27,000.



The worst of both worlds is an unreliable car with an unhelpful dealer

BEST AND WORST DEALERS

When your car does go wrong, you want the dealer to fix it with the minimum of fuss. Perhaps not surprisingly, the brands performing well for model reliability are also doing well when it comes to customer satisfaction with their franchised dealers – as the league table, opposite, shows.

Alfa and Jaguar on the slide

Of course, the worst of both worlds is an unreliable car with an unhelpful dealer. The Italian marques Fiat and Alfa Romeo have traditionally been among the worst offenders in this respect, yet Fiat seems to be slowly improving its service and repair process (up 9 percentage points from its 2002 score). But there's still work to do – it remains below the average score of 55 per cent for 2006.

Since Fiat owns Alfa Romeo, it might seem sensible to expect a similar improvement for Alfa Romeo – yet this is not the case. Satisfaction with servicing and repairs at Alfa Romeo dealers is down 4 per cent from 2002. Both Fiat and Alfa Romeo scored 35 per cent in 2002, but now Alfa sits 13 points behind Fiat, at 31 per cent.

A previous high scorer was Jaguar but its score has dropped alarmingly since 2002. From a Lexus-rivalling 75 per cent, its dealer satisfaction now sits at 59 per cent – lower than budget brands Hyundai, Kia and Skoda. Jaguar is also the only brand to register a 16 per cent drop since 2002.

American brands Chrysler and Jeep leave a lot to be desired for service and repair satisfaction. Jeep's score has dropped ten points from a 44 per cent total in 2002, while Chrysler's results have spiralled downwards from a relatively healthy 51 per cent in 2002 to just 31 per cent this year.

Lexus sets the standard

Lexus is a familiar high performer in our customer survey – at least two-thirds of owners are consistently very satisfied with dealer servicing and repairs. Lexus' owner Toyota also has a steady track record, despite the brand's more affordable nature – satisfaction levels haven't dropped below 60 per cent in the past five years and have shown a significant increase of 5 per cent in the past year alone.

Honda also deserves a mention for making a good service even better. Its 2002 satisfaction score of 61 per cent has risen consistently year on year to 70 per cent, placing Honda third overall this year.

ALFA ROMEO'S WAITING, TALKING ITALIAN

Andy Bradshaw 45, health and safety manager

Andy and his wife, Helen, bought their Alfa Romeo 147 in March 2004 and have had several reliability problems, such as a faulty sat-nav system and a snapped cam-belt.

'As far as reliability goes, this has probably been the worst car we've owned – which is a shame, as I absolutely adore owning and driving it,' Helen told us.

The couple are less than happy with their Alfa Romeo dealer, Arnold Clark of Ayr. 'The car came with sat-nav, which was faulty,' said Andy. 'It was still under warranty, but the dealer told us that in-car entertainment wasn't covered – this was, in fact, not true. They replaced the unit twice before realising it was a faulty aerial!'

'Even then we had to call in trading standards before the dealer would reset the new sat-nav unit so that it spoke and responded to English, not Italian. Finally, the cam-belt snapped four days before the warranty ran out, which left us without the car for three weeks.'

'If Alfa could sort out its dealers, it would be on to a winning formula,' Helen reckons. 'But we're now using an independent garage for servicing and repairs.'



HONDA DEALER REAPS REWARDS

Frank Key 70, retired fire safety officer

Frank bought his Honda Jazz 1.4 SE from Gordon Lamb Honda in Chesterfield back in October 2004. So far it's been completely fault-free, although Frank did tell us about one self-inflicted breakdown when he took the Jazz on a family holiday to Disneyworld.

'My grandson left the reading light on in the airport car park and it drained the battery. Luckily, he owned up to it, because otherwise I would have been left wondering what had made the battery go flat. The car park staff were able to jump-start the car, and I've had absolutely no problems with it since then.'

MEMBER BENEFIT

Members' helpline
01992 822800/0845 307 4000

For one-to-one phone support on queries about Which?, advice on consumer issues, and on-the-spot Best Buy information, contact our members' helpline.

Mon-Fri 8.30am-8pm; Sat and bank holidays 9am-1pm. Please give your Which? membership number and daytime phone number. Calls may be monitored or recorded for training. All correspondence to: **Which? Ltd, PO Box 44 Hertford X SG14 1SH** You can also fax **020 7770 7485** or email **which@which.co.uk**



FOR HELPFUL SERVICE

So far Frank's Jazz has needed only one service at Gordon Lamb, but he's been very happy with the dealership's helpful attitude: 'I live within walking distance of my Honda dealer so I dropped the car off and walked home. It did offer to give me a lift back if I needed it but I said I could do with the exercise!'

'I've got no complaints with the dealer, although I did feel the purchase price was quite high. I could have gone to an independent but I feel I've made the right choice as the dealer is so convenient for me,' says Frank. 'I've got another service due in October and I'll definitely be going back to Gordon Lamb then.'

MEMBER BENEFIT

Which? Car
2006/2007

Read the full results of our survey in *Which? Car*, free next month. It's packed with independent reviews and buying advice, so don't step foot in the showroom without it.

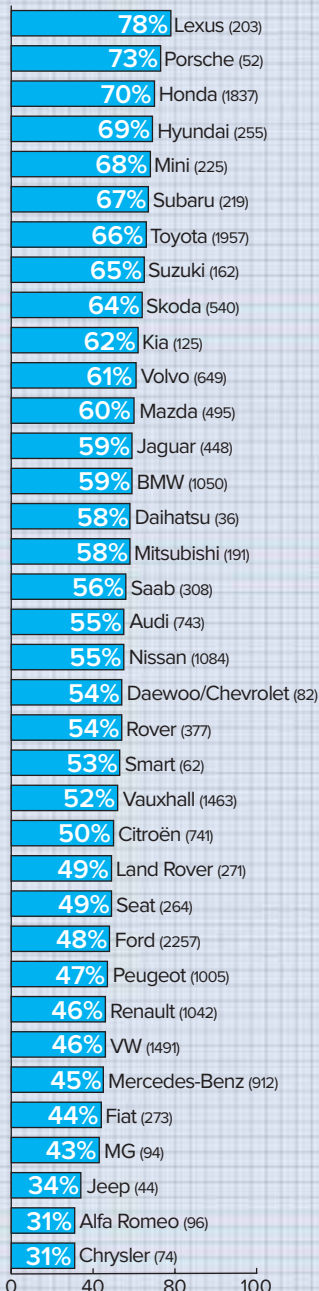


You rate the dealers: servicing and repairs

The message from our survey is clear: buy a Lexus for the best after-sales care.

The average satisfaction score across all franchised dealers is 55 per cent.

Percentage of very satisfied customers



Checklist

Reliable motoring

The following tips should help your car stay as reliable as possible.

- Check tyre pressure and fluid levels weekly (including engine oil).
- Maintain service intervals. This not only keeps the engine in tip-top condition, it also allows your garage to spot any other problems you might not have noticed.
- Drive sympathetically. Smooth use of the steering, throttle and brake will prolong the life of your car (and your passengers).
- Avoid undue strain on the car by not towing a weight which exceeds the manufacturer's specification, or overloading the car.

Complaining to your dealer

If your dealer isn't being helpful, you need to put your case forcefully but in an organised fashion.

- Make sure the dealer is fully aware of your complaint – in writing as well as verbally. Copy your letter to the manufacturer's customer service division.
- Keep all receipts and a written record of all dealer activity.
- If you are unsure about the advice offered by your dealer, try contacting a different franchise to see if the advice is consistent.
- If the dealer's response to your complaint is unsatisfactory, try pursuing it with the Retail and Motor Industry Federation (RMIF). Most dealers are RMIF members (check www.rmif.co.uk to see whether yours participates). You could also try the Society of Motor Manufacturers and Traders (www.smmr.co.uk). However, its advice is to contact the RMIF, while the RMIF's advice for cars still under manufacturer warranty is to contact the SMMT. You will probably get further by going to a citizens advice bureau or your local trading standards office.