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Car shopping? Study rates best, worst automaker dealers



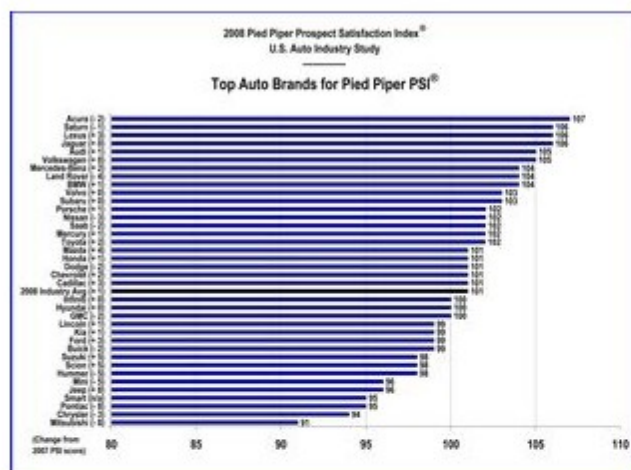
Posted July 3 2008 11:20 AM by [Andrew Strieber](#)

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It's typically the worst part of getting a new car -- you've done your research, gone on test drives, picked the color you want, but now you actually have to buy the thing. From haggling and waiting while your dealer "talks to the manager" to nonsense charges for rust proofing or undercoating, the transaction process can be enough to make you consider hanging on to your beater for a few more years. But when it comes to getting new wheels, not all brands offer such an unpleasant shopping experience -- and according to a new study, overall the industry's treatment of buyers is actually starting to *improve*.



In a 2008 study, the consulting company Pied Piper sent anonymous shoppers to 1677 dealerships representing every major automaker and had them go through the car-buying process. Using a unique scoring system called PSI (for Prospect Satisfaction Index), of the 37 brands evaluated, 24 showed either improved performance or maintained their score from 2007, while on the other hand, eight of the ten bottom-ranked automakers actually did *worse* compared with last year. Citing the possibility that the slowing economy has made dealers more careful, Pied Piper also found that in general salespeople did a better job of explaining financing options, handling wait times, and taking special orders for cars. In addition they

were more likely to suggest that buyers try out different brands -- though this is likely a result of automakers grouping multiple nameplates in single dealerships, as workers at stand-alone showrooms recommended other brands less than five percent of the time. The 2008 study also found that in general, improving the dealer experience also resulted in greater sales success.

So if you're looking for a new ride but don't want a hassle, what should you buy? According to Pied Piper, the best overall dealership experience can currently be found at your local Acura store, followed by Saturn, Lexus, Jaguar, and Audi dealers, respectively. If you're in the market for a Pontiac, Chrysler, or Mitsubishi, you might want to reconsider, as these brands round out of the bottom of the study's satisfaction index. Jeep, Suzuki, and Scion boasted the biggest gains over last year, though all three still ranked below the industry average. By contrast the year's biggest losers were Mitsubishi and Pontiac, which lost eight points from 2007, followed by Hummer and Mini with five-point declines.

According to Pied Piper president Fran O'Hagan, "today's typical auto shopping experience is far different from the experience even five years ago, and many dealerships are changing the way they sell cars as a result." With sales currently in decline industry wide, many automakers are resorting to zero percent financing and unusual incentives to try and bring customers into their showrooms. However as Pied Piper's study shows, in many cases simply making buying a car enjoyable can be the best sales tool of all.

Source: [Pied Piper](#)