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GARAGE BRIEFS

Acura tops survey of dealer service

By Martin Zimmerman, Times Staff Writer ;From Reuters
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Honda Motor Co.'s luxury Acura division topped a consumer satisfaction survey intended to measure how well U.S. car shoppers felt they were treated in dealer showrooms, whether or not they bought a vehicle on the spot.

The study, released this week by Pacific Grove, Calif.-based sales consultancy Pied Piper, showed Ford Motor Co.'s Land Rover in second place and General Motors Corp.'s Saturn in third.

Consumers have long complained that car dealers can be pushy, neglectful or less than transparent when explaining vehicle features and financing options.

"The dealerships that scored well all give customers a reason to be interested other than the deal," said Fran O'Hagan, study author and president of Pied Piper. "Acura dealers were very consistent in all categories."

European import and luxury brands fared very well in the study: Volkswagen, GM's Saab, Audi and BMW were all in the top 10. The study was based on a survey of shoppers leaving 1,592 auto dealerships and reports from paid researchers posing as car shoppers.

Hagan said research showed that as many as 30% of U.S. vehicle shoppers did not buy on the same day they visited a showroom, making satisfaction with the shopping experience key for automakers in a declining U.S. sales market.

The study ranked 12 brands below the industry average, including three mass-market offerings from the Detroit-based automakers: GM's Chevrolet, Ford and Chrysler.

Toyota Corp., Hyundai Motor Co. and Honda were ranked at the industry average in the first-of-its kind study.

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