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# Electric-Car Companies Are Less Responsive to Customer Questions: Survey

The expectation is that EV makers are more nimble, but a customer-experience study of premium auto brands suggests otherwise. Tesla's responsiveness has slid, while Lucid and Rivian scored low.



BY JOHN VOELCKER JUL 20, 2022







- These are challenging times for customers looking to buy any kind of vehicle but, a newly released study shows, particularly difficult if you're shopping with an EV startup.
- The [Pied Piper research firm studied customers](#) of 25 premium auto brands, using "mystery shoppers" to evaluate the shopping experience, checking things such as response to website inquiries and the quality of the in-person shopping experience.
- The resulting Prospect Satisfaction Index found Lucid, Polestar, Rivian, and Tesla were less responsive to shoppers than established brands such as Cadillac and Infiniti, even though EV customers may need more questions answered than people shopping for traditional gas-powered vehicles.

Electric-vehicle advocates and early adopters have long maintained the experience of learning about EVs, shopping for them, and buying them is better at those few brands that sell directly to buyers—Tesla foremost, now also Lucid and Rivian—than at conventional third-party franchised dealers of the sort used by Toyota, GM, Honda, Ford, and other established carmakers.

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Now a study from the research firm Pied Piper appears to turn that







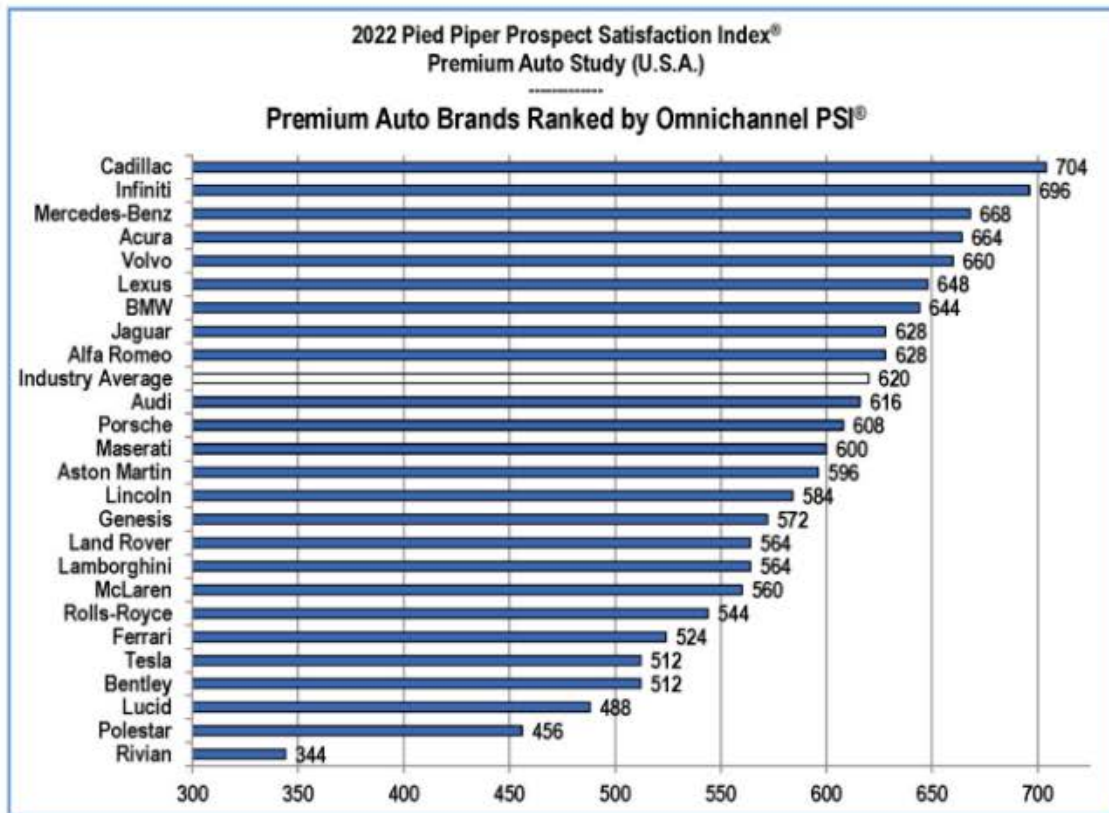
## Cheapest EVs for 2022



## 25 Bestselling Cars and Trucks of 2022 (So Far)

conventional wisdom on its head. Conducted from July 2021 to June 2022, it compared the helpfulness and responsiveness of sales staff from established brands against those at independent locations

operated by EV startups. Covering 25 premium brands, it spanned more than 1000 measurements of the in-person sales experience and 1650 measurements of responsiveness to customer inquiries on the company's website. The five top-ranked brands were Cadillac, Infiniti, Mercedes-Benz, Acura, and Volvo, while four of the five lowest scorers were EV companies: Tesla, Lucid, Polestar, and Rivian.



The Prospect Satisfaction Index (PSI) study has been issued annually since 2007. It uses mystery shoppers who rate locations against "customer helpfulness and sales best practices," which, the company notes, "measure and report how effectively retailers help their shoppers become buyers."

### Change in Tesla Customer Experience 2019 - 2022

	2019	2021	2022
Overall PSI In-Person Score	118	101	96
Did the salesperson ask how the vehicle will be used/how it will fit into the customers household?	70%	68%	49%
Did the salesperson ask if the vehicle will be garaged; to discuss garage recharging options (such as possibly adding a 220 volt plug)?	67%	64%	51%
Did the salesperson discuss national charging networks and/or options to charge quickly when travelling (example: recharge battery 80% in 15 minutes) as a reason to buy?	72%	70%	54%
Did the salesperson offer to let you test drive a vehicle? (*N/A* if the desired vehicle was not present)	64%	74%	67%
Did the salesperson make you aware that there were different lease or financing options available? (Does not have to be specific terms, just general availability.)	61%	68%	63%
Was the desired vehicle present at the dealership for you to see?	97%	91%	34%





The audience for the study is both carmakers and national dealer groups, but Pied Piper funds the study itself. "Our business is helping [automakers] improve their sales," CEO Fran O'Hagan told *Car and Driver*, "by calculating sales best practices and then measuring and reporting dealer by dealer whether those best practices are followed."

Owners and advocates note, correctly, that the process of deciding to buy an electric car involves more research and education than replacing a five-year-old compact crossover with a new compact crossover. Questions on how EVs are charged and what their real-world range may be under a variety of use cases, plus concerns over battery life, are among the most common queries.

#### 20 QUESTIONS



**Can I Ask a Really Stupid Question About EVs?**



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For that reason, this study can be viewed as handicapping EV-only makers, since a majority of their buyers will be new to EVs and require more time and more handholding. A first-time buyer may require more visits to the Chevrolet dealer to choose a Bolt EV over a

Trax, but that extra time is rolled into the far larger pool of more conventional sales of vehicles without plugs—which require none of that education.

For the first time, this year's survey included seven exotic brands, including Ferrari and Rolls-Royce, and three new EV brands (Lucid, Polestar, and Rivian) along with Tesla. The exotics' scores were variable at best: high on some measures, low on others. But the EV-only brands as a group scored lower on responsiveness and steps toward closing a sale, and Tesla's ratings slid.





# Wakeup Call for Startups

Still, many of the study's findings suggest EV-only makers simply aren't as responsive to inquiries as dealerships. For instance, more than 50 percent of the time, the best of the 25 premium brands responded to customer web inquiries in 30 minutes or less. Polestar, Rivian, and Tesla (as well as Ferrari) did so less than 10 percent of the time. EV brands also scored lower on use of texts, phone calls, and immediate responses to shoppers' use of website chat features.

As for visits to the brands' locations—the study calls them "dealerships" throughout—there too EV brands suffered against the standardized processes of third-party franchised dealerships for established makers. (Because Rivian has no retail outlets, the study notes its in-person measurement was "carried out instead by customers contacting the brand by phone call, to give the brand an opportunity to interact in a [similar] manner.")

Tesla, the highest-volume EV maker, had rated above average or leading in earlier Pied Piper studies in 2019, 2021, and 2022. But its ratings have now slipped below the average. Tesla's "sales methodology has transformed more into order-taking than customer assistance," the company concludes. "Tesla's model today appears to be, 'If you want what we sell, and require no assistance, it's easy to order,' " commented O'Hagan.

"With an online focus and few retail locations, these new EV brands have a great opportunity to excel with phone, chat, and email interactions with their customers," O'Hagan said. "However, we found that when their customers reach out for help or with questions, they are usually met with brand reps who answer only simple, scripted questions without being proactively helpful." He called it a "missed opportunity" to turn inquiries into potential customers.

