



NEWS RELEASE

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Boosters improve: Most new seats provide good belt fit; Two Safety 1st models are not recommended as boosters

ARLINGTON, Va. — Fifteen of 17 booster seats introduced in 2012 earn the top rating of BEST BET from the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety, evidence that more than ever, manufacturers are designing seats to provide good safety belt fit for booster-age children.

The improvements mean that BEST BET boosters now outnumber seats in any of the three other categories for the first time since the Institute released its inaugural booster ratings in 2008. Boosters are supposed to improve how adult lap and shoulder belts fit children so the belts can properly restrain them in crashes. BEST BET boosters correctly position belts on a typical 4-to-8-year-old child in almost any car, minivan or SUV.

“Booster manufacturers have risen to the Institute’s challenge to improve seat design, giving parents more choices than ever when shopping for a booster that will provide a good, safe fit for their children,” says Anne McCartt, Institute senior vice president for research.

In all, there are 47 BEST BET boosters for 2012. The new rankings include the latest models, plus older top-rated designs still on the market. Five seats are a GOOD BET, meaning they provide acceptable belt fit in most vehicles. The 37 boosters in the Check Fit category may provide good fit for some children in some vehicles, but not as many as a BEST BET or GOOD BET. As with any booster, parents should make sure the lap belt lies flat across their child’s upper thighs and the shoulder belt crosses snugly over the middle of the shoulder. If not, try a different seat.

Two boosters are not recommended because they don’t provide proper belt fit, and consumers are advised to avoid them. The Safety 1st All-in-One and Safety 1st Alpha Omega Elite, both made by Dorel Juvenile Group Inc., are older designs first evaluated in 2009. These models are 3-in-1s that can be used as rear-facing and forward-facing child restraints with a built-in harness. They can be converted to boosters by removing the harness and using lap and shoulder belts to restrain a child. Although these seats should work well as child restraints, they aren’t the best option for boosters because they leave the lap belt too high on the abdomen and the shoulder belt too far out on the shoulder. Four other boosters on last year’s not recommended list have been discontinued by Evenflo Company Inc.

BEST BET	
(New models for 2012 are in bold)	Harmony Carpooler
Britax Frontier 85	Harmony Cruz Youth Booster
Britax Frontier 85 SICT	Harmony Dreamtime Booster (backless mode)
Britax Parkway SGL (highback mode)	Harmony Dreamtime Booster (highback mode)
BubbleBum	Harmony Olympian
Chicco KeyFit Strada (highback mode)	Harmony V6 Highback Booster (backless mode)
Clek Oobr (highback mode)	Harmony V6 Highback Booster (highback mode)
Cosco Pronto (highback mode)	Harmony Youth Booster Seat
Diono Monterey (highback mode)	Kiddy Cruiserfix Pro
Diono RadianR100	Kiddy World Plus
Diono RadianR120	Kids Embrace Dale Earnhardt Jr.
Diono RadianRXT	Maxi-Cosi Rodi XR (highback mode)
Eddie Bauer Auto Booster (highback mode)	Recaro ProBOOSTER
Evenflo Big Kid Amp	Recaro ProSPORT
Evenflo Big Kid Amp High Back (backless mode)	Recaro Vivo
Evenflo Big Kid Sport (backless mode)	Safety 1st Boost Air Protect (highback mode)
Evenflo Maestro	Safety 1st S1 Rumi Air/Essential Air
Evenflo Secure Kid LX/DLX	The First Years Pathway B570
Evenflo Symphony 65 e3	
Ferrari Dreamway SP (highback mode)	GOOD BET
Graco Argos 70 (highback mode)	Britax Parkway SG (highback mode)
Graco Backless TurboBooster	Combi Kobuk Air-Thru (backless mode)
Graco Nautilus (highback mode)	Combi Kobuk Air-Thru (highback mode)
Graco TurboBooster (backless mode)	Evenflo Symphony 65
Graco TurboBooster (highback mode)	Maxi-Cosi Rodi (highback mode)
Graco TurboBooster COLORZ	
Graco TurboBooster Elite (backless mode)	Not recommended
Graco TurboBooster Elite (highback mode)	Safety 1st All-in-One
Graco TurboBooster Safety Surround (backless mode)	Safety 1st Alpha Omega Elite
Graco TurboBooster Safety Surround (highback mode)	
	<i>Go to iihs.org to see the list of Check Fit boosters</i>

“Dorel should redesign the All-in-One and Alpha Omega Elite to improve booster function,” McCartt says. “Parents who own these seats should use them with the built-in harness as long as possible, up to Dorel’s recommended height and weight limits.”

There are better options for consumers who prefer the versatility of a 3-in-1. Four BEST BETs are 3-in-1s. These include the Evenflo Symphony 65 e3 and three models from Diono LLC — the RadianR100, RadianR120 and RadianRXT. Another choice is the Evenflo Symphony 65, which is a GOOD BET.

Why fit matters

Federal regulations don't address how a booster should position safety belts. Manufacturers crash test boosters, but these simulations don't tell parents how boosters will fit their children in their vehicles. The Institute launched its ratings program after research showed most boosters weren't doing a good job of fitting safety belts correctly and consistently in a variety of vehicles.

Using a belt-positioning booster is important for kids who have outgrown harness-equipped child restraints and aren't big enough for adult belts. Children ages 4-8 in boosters are 45 percent less likely to sustain injuries in crashes than kids restrained by belts alone. Children who are using improperly fitted belts are at risk of a host of crash injuries known as "seat belt syndrome." These include spine injuries and internal organ injuries. Boosters help by elevating a child into position and guiding the belts for better protection.

No crash tests are conducted as part of the evaluations. The Institute's ratings focus on belt fit. They don't assess how boosters might perform in a crash because safety belts do the main job of protecting children, not boosters. Some manufacturers say their boosters provide enhanced protection in a side crash, but the Institute hasn't evaluated these claims.

To assess belt fit, Institute engineers use a test dummy representing an average-size 6-year-old child. They measure how lap and shoulder belts fit the dummy in each booster under four conditions representing the range of belt configurations in real-world vehicles.

The Institute evaluates models new to the market each year. Ratings of boosters with designs that carry over into the next model year remain on the list until the seats are discontinued. In all, the latest ratings cover 91 boosters.

Dual-use boosters

Boosters come in two main styles: highback and backless. Highbacks have guides to route lap and shoulder belts and can offer some head support. Backless models have lap belt guides but may need a plastic clip to properly position shoulder belts in many vehicles. Some highbacks, called dual-use, can be converted to backless seats. These get two ratings, one for each mode, because belt fit can differ by mode. Consumers should pay attention to each rating and consider how they will use the seats in their vehicles.

Six of the 24 dual-use boosters included in the 2012 ratings earn BEST BET or GOOD BET in both modes. These include two from Harmony Juvenile Products, the Dreamtime and V6 Highback Booster; one from Combi USA Inc., the Kobuk Air-Thru; and three by Graco Children's Products Inc., the TurboBooster, TurboBooster Elite and TurboBooster Safety Surround.

"Parents often tell us they want a dual-use booster that's a BEST BET no matter how they use it," McCartt says. "Having more to pick from really simplifies things."

This year's top-rated boosters come in a variety of styles and a range of price points. BEST BETs retail for as little as \$19 to as much as \$300. Among the new BEST BET models, the backless Graco TurboBooster COLORZ sells for about \$26, the highback TurboBooster retails for about \$50 and the backless Harmony Carpooler starts at about \$35.

McCart points out that manufacturers sometimes use similar names for different seats, or even the same names for new models, so consumers should consult the Institute's website at iihs.org for model numbers, manufacture dates and photographs when they shop for a new booster seat.

She advises parents not to be in a hurry to switch to a booster. Kids should ride in harness-equipped child restraints in rear seats as long as possible, up to the height and weight limits of the seats. Many typically accommodate children up to about 65 pounds — and some go higher. When children outgrow child restraints, they should use boosters until adult belts fit properly, usually when a child reaches 4 feet 9 inches and 80 pounds.

For more information, go to www.iihs.org

The Insurance Institute for Highway Safety is an independent, nonprofit, scientific and educational organization dedicated to reducing the losses — deaths, injuries and property damage — from crashes on the nation's roads. The Institute is wholly supported by auto insurers.