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ACURA TL, VW PASSAT, IMPALA SCORE HIGH

KENN PETERS AUTO NOTEBOOK

The Volkswagen Passat V-6 has done well in Consumer Reports' testing in the past, so it's no surprise that in its current road tests the Passat scored second best, behind the Acura TL.

Both cars achieved an excellent rating from the magazine, far ahead of the Chevrolet Impala. But the Impala scored a "very good" and ended up being the only car in the family sedan category to earn Consumer Reports' recommendation.

The magazine said the Impala has had above average reliability, which is expected to continue with the 2006 model.

The Impala was freshened as opposed to the other cars in the group that have been significantly redesigned. It's the redesign that prevents CR from predicting reliability.

Besides the Chevy, Acura and Volkswagen, the other cars in the test included the VW Passat, with a turbo four-cylinder engine; two Dodge Chargers, one with a V-8 motor and one with a V-6; the Ford Fusion and its twin the Mercury Milan; and the Hyundai Sonata.

Summit closes Ford deal

Tom Kristoff, of Summit Pontiac Buick GMC, in Elbridge, said he and his partners have closed on their purchase of the former Pirro Ford.

They hired a 27-year veteran of the auto business as sales manager.

John Lunkenheimer worked at the Ford store for 22 years before leaving five years ago, but now has returned, Kristoff said.

Hold that burger and fries

Sooner or later, almost everybody has eaten while driving. You know, a fast snack between stops or a quick drive-through burger and fries while doing errands on your lunch hour.

And it's a safe bet that most people have never given a second thought to their car's interior while munching those greasy fries and burgers.

This so-called dashboard dining can have a detrimental effect on the value of your car, according to a survey conducted by Kelley Blue Book Marketing Research and Taco Bell Corp.

According to the survey results, nearly 60 percent of all vehicle owners eat or allow someone to eat in their vehicles.

"Our research highlights a huge misperception among consumers: that the interior condition of a car has less importance than the exterior appearance in terms of residual value," said Jack R. Nerad, executive editorial director and market analyst for Kelley Blue Book, in a prepared statement.

"Messy interiors could potentially cost owners thousands of dollars when it comes time to turn in or sell their vehicles."

Other highlights of the study:

34 percent: The percentage who say burgers and fries are the messiest food eaten in the car.

90 percent: Those who say the exterior is the most important attribute to long-term value of a car.

5 percent: Interior is the most important part of the car.

When given a choice of 13 attributes to rank in importance with regard to eventual resale value, stained seats and carpets ranked as number 10 and 11.

Kenn Peters' Auto Notebook appears every Sunday in The Post-Standard. Contact Kenn Peters at 470-2244 or kpeters@syracuse.com

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