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## Study: Mercedes dealers treat shoppers best, Lincoln does not

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By Fred Meier, USA  
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CAPTION

By Mercedes-Benz, Wieck

Mercedes-Benz dealers treated customers best and Lincoln stores were the worst in the luxury category, but overall satisfaction with car dealers fell in new "secret shopper" study.

Dealer management consultant Pied Piper's annual shopper satisfaction study sent 3,524 anonymous paid "shoppers" into dealerships to rate the experience on everything from features explained in a way specific to their needs to finishing the sale.

It was a third year on top among luxury brands for M-B. It was followed by Jaguar and Lexus, tied for second. Lincoln declined this year to below overall industry average and more proletarian brands. Ford's score also declined.

While luxury stores typically score higher than mainstream dealers, and did again this year, Toyota and Ram tied for sixth place with Cadillac and Land Rover. And despite the overall decline, Mini, Infiniti, Buick, Jeep and Scion dealers improved their performance.

The company said the score for Ram, the truck brand split off from Dodge and scored separately for the first time, is notable because it shows the impact product can have how salespeople perform. Many salespeople still sell both Ram and Dodge in the same store, but Ram scores were significantly higher.

Other factors in better performance: Top brands tended to be those with more exclusive dealerships and higher sales per dealer. Also dealers with better overall scores tended to be ones that scored high for response to internet inquiries.

Brands that scored the poorest were those with fewest sales per dealer, making good sales people hard to keep: Mitsubishi and Suzuki finished last.

One factor in the industry decline was fewer salespeople. "Not all auto brands have struggled during this recession," said Fran O'Hagan, CEO of Pied Piper, "but reduction in dealership staffing has been common. Over the past year the quantity of car buyers has rebounded, leading to higher sales spread among fewer salespeople, but also leading to deterioration in customer treatment."