

AUTOMOTIVE

Porsche tops customer service rankings, but EV care falters: J.D. Power

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Porsche ranks highest in satisfaction with dealers service in latest J.D. Power report. Image credit: Porsche

By KATIE TAMOLA

Considering 2020 was a year full of restrictions and uncertainty, drivers especially valued dealerships maintaining excellent customer service options.

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With dealerships prioritizing consumers' needs and maintaining flexibility, many dealerships made the best of a challenging situation, leading overall consumer satisfaction to increase from the previous year. According to the [J.D. Power 2021 Customer Service Index \(CSI\) Study](#), Porsche ranks highest in satisfaction with dealer service, while battery-electric vehicle owners are less satisfied with their service and among luxury car brands.

"Service advisors will need intensive training on understanding the vehicles themselves and the motivations and uniqueness of electric vehicle customers," said Chris Sutton, vice president of automotive retail at J.D. Power. "Of course, technicians will require intensive technical training.

"Following this step, they should really promote this advantage as many consumers right now are concerned about the ability of retailers to service these vehicles," he said. "In addition to training, this includes hiring advisors that can connect with these electric vehicle customers."

The 2021 U.S. Customer Service Index Study is based on responses from 62,519 verified registered owners and lessees of 2018 to 2020 model-year vehicles. It evaluates five different areas that compose the vehicle-owner experience.

Putting the customer first

Despite the pandemic, dealer service visits were only down six percent from the previous year.

The study reports that overall satisfaction also increased to an 847, on a 1,000-point scale, from 837 a year ago. Overall satisfaction increased for a sixth year in a row.



Consumers valued excellent customer service, remote pay options and other flexibilities during the pandemic. Image credit: Lexus

This study measures satisfaction with service at a franchised dealer or independent service facility for consumers seeking maintenance or repair work on owned or leased vehicles that are one- to three- years old.

It also provides a numerical index ranking of the highest-performing automotive brands sold in the US. The ranking is based on the combined scores of five disparate measures, in order of importance, that encompass the vehicle-owner experience: service quality at 29 percent, service facility at 19 percent, service initiation at 18 percent, service advisor at 18 percent and vehicle pick-up at 16 percent.

Consumers seemed to love the ability to pay remotely or online, with satisfaction scores improving 44 points among premium auto customers who had the ability to do so. With such success, many dealers are considering keeping remote and online payment options even after the pandemic.

Compared to the year prior, satisfaction among customers who used express service increased 10 points during the pandemic.

The J.D. Power 2021 Electric Vehicle Experience (EVX) Ownership Study found that battery-electric vehicle owners are less satisfied with service. Although the report found that only 54 percent of battery-electric vehicle (BEV) owners indicate that they had taken their vehicle in for service in the past 12 months, their overall service satisfaction is 69 points lower than the average customer and 76 points lower for service quality.



2021 Lexus IS sport sedan. Image credit: Lexus

BEV owners are also less satisfied with maintenance than repairs and are 2.5 times more likely to not receive the service they requested completed correctly the first time. The report states that electric vehicles are in their early stages and dealers are still seemingly getting their bearings and learning about how to best meet these consumers' needs.

German automaker Porsche ranks highest in satisfaction among premium car brands with a score of 899 and Toyota Corp.'s Lexus ranks second with a score of 895. U.S. automaker Cadillac earned a score of 883.

Customer service is key

Brands putting effort into customer service and experience is continuing to prove beneficial for both parties involved.

Automakers and retailers were held by market researcher Forrester as the luxury sectors delivering good customer experiences, which consists of consistently meeting customers' needs, hitting the right emotional notes and even

having the goodwill among customers to forgive mistakes. Lexus was the only luxury brand to rank on Forrester's new Customer Experience report's top list, coming in at No. 7 with a score of 78.6 ([see story](#)).

Brands are being urged to prioritize excellent customer service and safety procedures to ensure continued sales and consumer loyalty. During a webinar on Feb. 10, an executive from Forrester discussed how improvements in customer experience encourage consumers to purchase more from competent brands ([see story](#)).

This was especially key amid the pandemic and extended lockdowns.

"Dealerships made the most out of a disruptively bad situation," J.D. Power's Mr. Sutton said. "Completing work right the first time, as well as focusing on customers' needs, play significant roles in satisfaction and dealers are nailing these key performance indicators nearly 100 percent of the time.

"It's notable, too, that while service was less frequent in 2020, customers responded very well to convenience services such as vehicle pick-up and drop-off at their home," he said.

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