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Car Buyers Reveal Quality, Innovation and Love Produce Sales Strategic Vision's 2009 Total Quality Index®

San Diego – Volkswagen of America and Ford Motor Corporation were announced today as full-line corporate leaders in Strategic Vision Inc.'s (SVI) Total Quality Index® (TQI). Across their various brands, both corporations are consistently producing vehicles judged high in perceived quality and emotional delight, resulting in models that customers can love. Volkswagen of America also had the greatest number of TQI leaders across the segments being measured than any other brand: Rabbit, Jetta, CC, New Beetle, Tiguan and Audi A4. Ford has Focus as the leader in the popular Small Car segment.

The Total Quality Index® asks buyers to rate all aspects of the ownership experience from buying and owning to performance and driving – much more than simply counting problems. Results from studies that measure the number of problems or the overall satisfaction of a vehicle do not measure the customers' commitment to, advocacy for or loyalty to their vehicles accurately. "In today's difficult market, the difference between products that generate consideration, build brands and increase sales versus those that do not is often how much delight and love the product generates with its customers," says Dr. Darrel Edwards, Chairman of Strategic Vision.

In a recently published survey conducted by another research company that only counted problems, MINI was rated the worst quality brand. However, our most recent research study which examines the entire ownership experience and MINI owners' perceptions of quality, from styling to performance including what went wrong and what created delight; MINI is the highest rated brand in Total Quality in its price category. Therefore, it is not a surprise that MINI was one of the two brands to increase sales during last year's start of the US and automotive recession. "When you have a product worthy of love, customers will come," states Alexander Edwards, President of SVI.

The past twelve months have been rough for domestic manufacturers as constant negative news is delivered, bankruptcies are filed, and the mantra, "Why won't Detroit build quality vehicles that people want to buy?" is stated again and again. However, it is important to note that four of the top ten-selling vehicles in the first quarter of this year were domestics. Ford, General Motors and Chrysler have all scored well with customers in Total Quality and in sales.

General Motors had four segment leaders: Pontiac G8, GMC Envoy, Yukon XL and the Chevrolet Corvette (which was the highest rated Total Quality Index of any vehicles this year). Customers report that these vehicles deliver what they want from each segment. These leaders have delightful interiors, performance and styling providing to customers an added sense of security, confidence, fun and excitement. It is also important to note that Saturn and Pontiac brands performed well in TQI across most of their models, with both brands tied for having the highest TQI scores in their price segment.

TQI – add one

The Chrysler Group has increased in Total Quality from last year with the Dodge Ram leading the way with the highest Total Quality score of any truck in the history of the 15 year study. This is also the first time the Ram has achieved this honor since 1999 when it lost its title for the first time to competition. Customers specifically noted that the Ram has the best added storage capability along with the best truck interior ever rated by customers. “For truck buyers, the Dodge Ram has reclaimed its perceived leadership in innovation, a corporate hallmark,” states Alexander Edwards. “We have tracked innovation as a critical dimension in success since 1979 and have shown that it has been the single most powerful factor in success across categories, especially among automobiles.”

American Honda Motors, Nissan Motor Corporation and Toyota Motor Sales each led in two segments with strong positions in many others. The Nissan Maxima tied with the G8 in the Large Car segment while the Infiniti FX and EX, both competing in the Near-Luxury Utility segment tied with each other. The FX and EX both delivered strong performance and exterior styling that led to a greater perception of quality leading to an enhanced sense of prestige and individuality for their owners.

For American Honda Motors, the Honda Ridgeline and Odyssey lead their segments with delightful capability and overall flexibility in each of the models. Both models show innovation that produces leadership. Odyssey became a leader among minivans when it offered the most innovative product in its segment years ago. Ridgeline burst onto the scene as Truck of the Year with innovation unmatched by competition in its segment. Although Ridgeline’s price has kept sales below that of competitors, those who buy it often report that they are delighted with almost every aspect. The innovation and delight delivered by each of these leaders lead owners to state that their next vehicle will be a Honda.

Toyota Motor Sales led with the all-new Toyota Venza and Toyota 4Runner. Both vehicles, as do most Toyota and Lexus products, delivered high levels of trust associated with the Toyota brand name and the brand’s attention to interior details. Customers reported that both of these vehicles showed increased thoughtfulness in their design. Few things-gone-wrong combined with higher expected durability and reliability provided a foundation for Toyota’s leadership position in these segments. With the added thoughtfulness and utility of the products, Toyota’s customers were truly delighted.

Having few problems (solid initial quality) can provide foundational assurance to customers, increasing brand trust and expected durability and reliability. As seen in similar studies, SVI found that the number of problems per vehicle found in the Lexus brand is statistically the lowest of all brands. Lexus’ goal should be to focus on enhanced products and communications to show customers that they are focused on delivering more than basic satisfaction as they build on their foundation.

Finally, in the Luxury categories the BMW X3 tied with the Infiniti FX and EX on Total Quality. The Mercedes S-Class has again defined luxury in its class, leading for the fourth time in the past six years. The Land Rover Range Rover is the leader in the Luxury utility segment. Many other Land Rover / Jaguar models also scored very well with models like the Range Rover Sport, Jaguar XF and Jaguar XJ scoring just below top positions in their segments.

TQI – add one

Buyers rated the following vehicles tops in their segments:

Small Car	Ford Focus Sedan	877
Small Multi-Function (MFV)	Volkswagen Rabbit	889
Medium Car	Volkswagen Jetta*	891
Large Car	Nissan Maxima / Pontiac G8	900 / 899
Near-Luxury Car	Volkswagen CC / Audi A-4 Sedan	923 / 922
Luxury Car	Mercedes S-Class*	934
Small Specialty Coupe	Volkswagen New Beetle	924
Premium Coupe	Chevrolet Corvette	938
Minivan	Honda Odyssey*	865
Entry Utility	Volkswagen Tiguan	914
Medium Crossover	Toyota Venza	925
Medium SUV	GMC Envoy / Toyota 4Runner*	859 / 858
Large SUV	GMC Yukon XL	899
Near-Luxury SUV	Infiniti FX / Infiniti EX / BMW X3	906 / 904 / 904
Luxury SUV	Land Rover Range Rover	920
Standard Pickup	Honda Ridgeline*	874
Large Pickup	Dodge Ram	899

** 2008 Total Quality Award® winner*

“We know Total Quality is strengthened by delighting customers and getting them to love you. We stand ready to include love in all the work that we do since measuring love is the next step in discriminating between winning and losing in today’s competitive environment,” states Dr. Edwards. “Since 1999, our exploratory studies have shown that the power of love wins customers, creates advocacy, strengthens commitment, and builds loyalty. It is critical how we measure quality, delight and love if we are going to be able to help companies deliver.”

The Total Quality Index® was calculated from 20,101 buyers who bought 2008 & 2009 models in September to December of 2008. Strategic Vision has presented Total Quality Awards® annually since 1995. Since its foundation in 1972 and incorporation in 1989, Strategic Vision has studied consumer and constituent decision-making for a wide variety of clients, including most auto manufacturers, Coca-Cola, American Airlines, Procter and Gamble, the White House, 10 Downing Street, and many advertising agencies. Its unique expertise is identifying consumers’ motivational hierarchies, including the values, emotions, and images that shape perceptions and behavior. The firm’s in-depth Discovery Interviews and ValueCentered Surveys provide comprehensive, integrated and actionable outcomes, linking behavior to attributes to consequences to values and emotions to images. For more information please visit www.strategicvision.com.