

Editorial: How Forbes Spiked smart Safety Slam

By Robert Farago
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The Insurance Institute for Highway Safety (IIHS) recently performed a series of crash tests to garner widespread MSM coverage to justify their enormous operating budget to the insurance companies that pay for the “don’t tell anyone we’re not from the government” organization’s existence—I mean demonstrate the heretofore unimaginable fact that small/lightweight cars get the snot kicked out of them when they collide front-to-front with medium size cars, despite the fact that the small cars involved received the IIHS’ best possible frontal crash ratings. All this came as no surprise to Mike Dulberger, founder of InformedForLife.org.

Mr. Dulberger is an engineer with an OCD vehicle safety thing. He reckons the IIHS and National Highway Transportation Safety Administration (NHTSA) safety ratings are “confusing, conflicting and incomplete.” Amongst other criticisms, Dulberger slates the two heavyweights for failing to adequately consider the contribution of a given vehicle’s mass to its overall safety. So Dulberger developed his own analysis—SCORE (Statistical Combination Of Risk Elements)—to rectify this and other shortcomings.

As you might expect, the small/lightweight cars crash tested by the IIHS fared badly under Dulberger’s SCORE system. Of the three small vehicles tested, the Smart Fortwo held special significance for Mr. Dulberger. Sherman, set the wayback machine for October 2008 . . .

On that fateful date, Dulberger was asked to share his SCORE analysis with *Forbes* (magazine), as part of their annual “2009 Most Dangerous Vehicles” article. Dulberger duly fingered the Smart (that doesn’t sound right) as a bit of a . . . well . . . you know.

“Not only does the smart have a high risk due to its low weight (1800 lb),’ Dulberger asserts, “it also has the lowest NHTSA frontal rating (three stars, passenger side) of any 2009 vehicle. And because of its top heavy design, the smart has almost twice the rollover risk of the average passenger car.”

In fact, the Smart received one of Informedforlife.org’s lowest ever SCOREs: 130. According to Dulberger, the number represents more than twice his system’s “acceptable” fatality risk. All this he told *Forbes*.

Unfortunately (for the consumer), *Forbes* forgot to publish Dulberger’s smart conclusions. He believes the sin of omission was the direct result of objections raised by Smart USA’s President, David Schembri.

Before *Forbes* ran its piece, Schembri somehow got a hold of Dulberger’s phone number and gave him an earful. The Smart guy declared flat out that his car was safe. After all, the IIHS had rated it “GOOD.” Schembri told Dulberger any assertion to the contrary was wrong, irresponsible and, how shall we put this? Actionable.

And so Dulberger's smart safety slam was spiked. This is what they published instead:

What's most important for buyers is finding cars that are safe but also suited to their individual needs. The 1,808-pound, \$11,990 Smart Fortwo, for example, is the smallest car on the road and received solid safety ratings for both crashes and rollovers—it didn't come close to making our list. But that doesn't make the car the safest or best for a large or tall person.

"The NHTSA data simply does not support that conclusion," Dulberger insists. "Three stars for passenger side frontal impact is the lowest rating by NHTSA for any vehicle, and three stars rollover is the lowest rating by NHTSA for any passenger car.

"It's hard to believe that this misrepresentation is a mistake given the fact that I pointed these same issues out to them. . . I guess *Forbes* believes that 'safety first' means testing a manufacturers reaction to its editorial content before publishing."

Or not, when everyone else goes first. And even in that case, well, it's hard to read this excerpt from *Forbes*' coverage of the recent IIHS smart debacle the same way, knowing Dulberger's tale.

In the crash test between the C-Class and Fortwo, for example, the Smart bounced off the C-Class and turned 450 degrees before landing and displacing the instrument panel and steering wheel through the cockpit. The C-Class had almost no intrusion of the front gears into the passenger area.

Granted, the IIHS tests are much more severe than government safety standards mandate, as small-car proponents often note. The Smart Fortwo meets all U.S. government crash-test standards, including a five-star side-crash rating, notes Dave Schembri, the president of Smart USA. It also earned the highest scores for front- and side-crash worthiness from the IIHS itself.

As for the pressure that Smart may or may not have been brought to bear on *Forbes*, that may or may not have involved advertising, what did you expect? The truth about cars?
