

CR's exclusive reliability data can point you to the brands and models you can depend on and those you should steer clear of

By Jon Linkov  
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Automakers are dropping more turbocharged engines under the hoods of their latest models as they try to boost fuel efficiency without sacrificing engine performance.

Smaller turbocharged engines appeal to consumers and auto companies because they offer the promise of more power but with the fuel efficiency of a smaller engine. Automakers also like them because they see turbos as a way to help meet government fuel-economy standards.

That might sound like a win-win situation, except not all automakers are making high-quality turbo engines, according to data from our annual [Auto Reliability Survey](#),



should be aware of potentially problematic turbos when shopping for a new car.

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“Small turbo engines can save gas while delivering the power people want, but only if the engines are reliable,” says Jake Fisher, director of auto testing for Consumer Reports. “Sometimes the added complexity means trouble arises down the road.”

Our survey data show that many turbo engines are highly effective and reliable. But some CR members reported problems with certain turbocharged engines when compared with nonturbo engines, including problems with the turbochargers and engine computers. A few members also told us they needed engine replacements.

Turbos work by forcing air into an engine on demand, which burns more gas and creates more power but only when it’s needed, potentially saving fuel. They’re also increasingly paired to high-tech transmissions with eight, nine, or even 10 gears, which also can help fuel efficiency.

Many new engines with these problems are likely to be under warranty, but there’s still a hassle factor when a car doesn’t work like it should. There’s also time lost to repairs.

Some owners in our survey reported various problems with the 3.0-liter turbo V6 engine in the [Lincoln MKZ](#) sedan and

speed transmission to save gas and improve performance. Some members also told us that the transmission had problems.

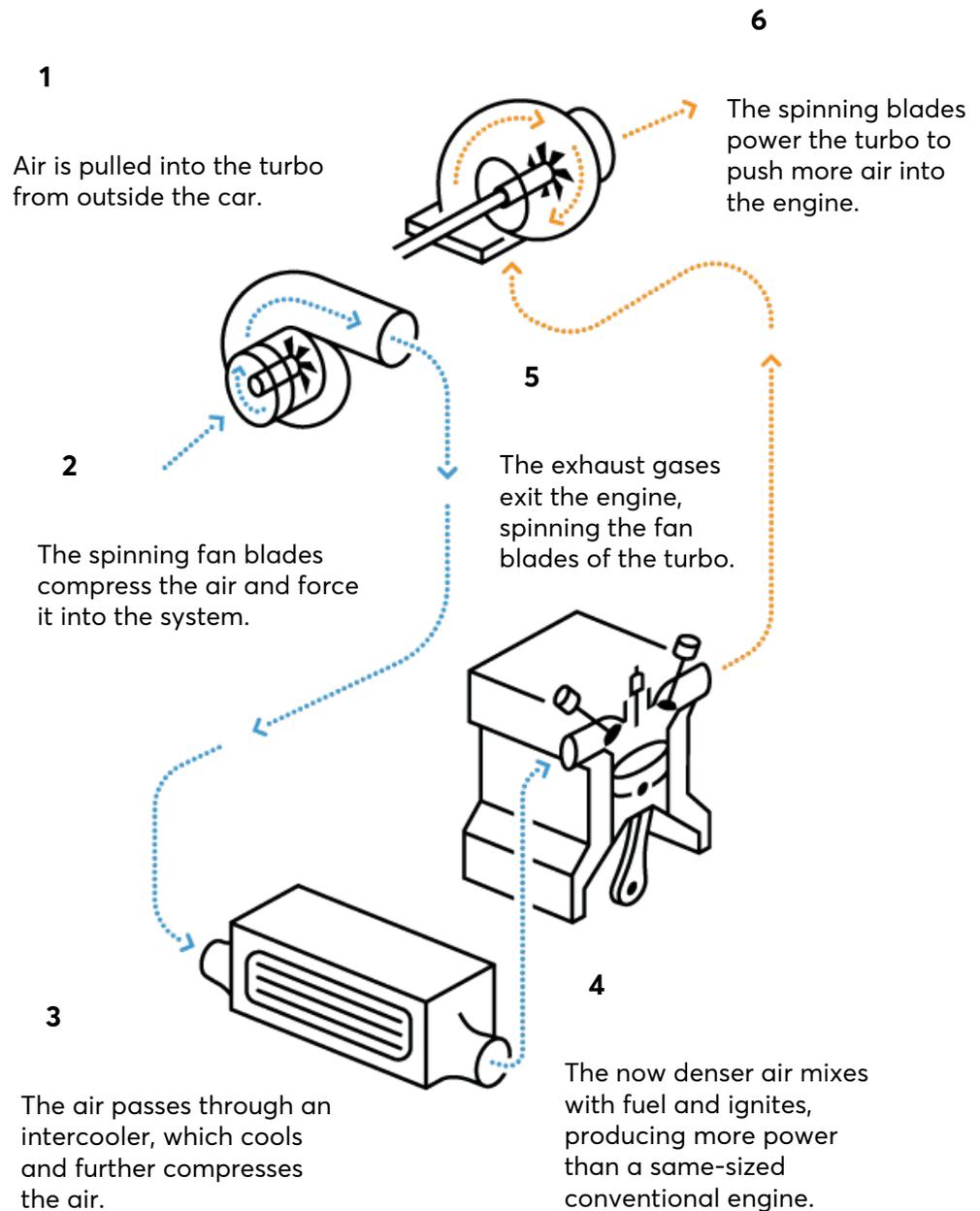
There hasn't been a common thread to explain the problems, but new engine technologies can falter in their first few years. "Truth is, when automakers introduce such new technology, it can take several model years to get it working correctly," Fisher says. He adds that cars made by automakers with more experience building turbos tend to have fewer problems. "Audi has been building turbo engines since the 1980s, and our survey data show its 2.0-liter turbo engines have been reliable."

Of the automakers with problems mentioned here, only Hyundai provided comment to CR. In an email, the automaker said it's "aware of the issues reported by Consumer Reports' [members]. Hyundai recommends that any customer that has any concerns with their vehicle bring it into a dealership for evaluation."

Shoppers in the market for a new car should check CR's reliability predictions before buying.

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Engines make power by burning a mixture of fuel and air. Turbochargers work by forcing more air into the engine when the driver wants more power. That lets the engine burn more fuel and generate more power. The turbo is essentially a fast-spinning fan driven by exhaust gases. The technology allows a smaller engine to generate the power of a bigger engine but only when it's needed, without the big engine's greater fuel consumption. The downside is that some turbocharged engines hesitate before the turbo spools up and delivers a surge of power.

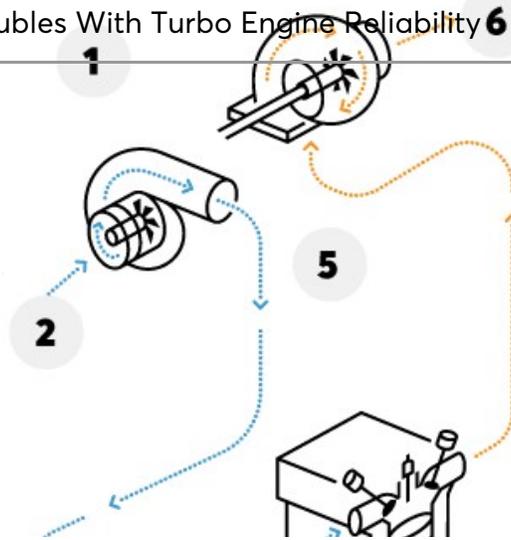




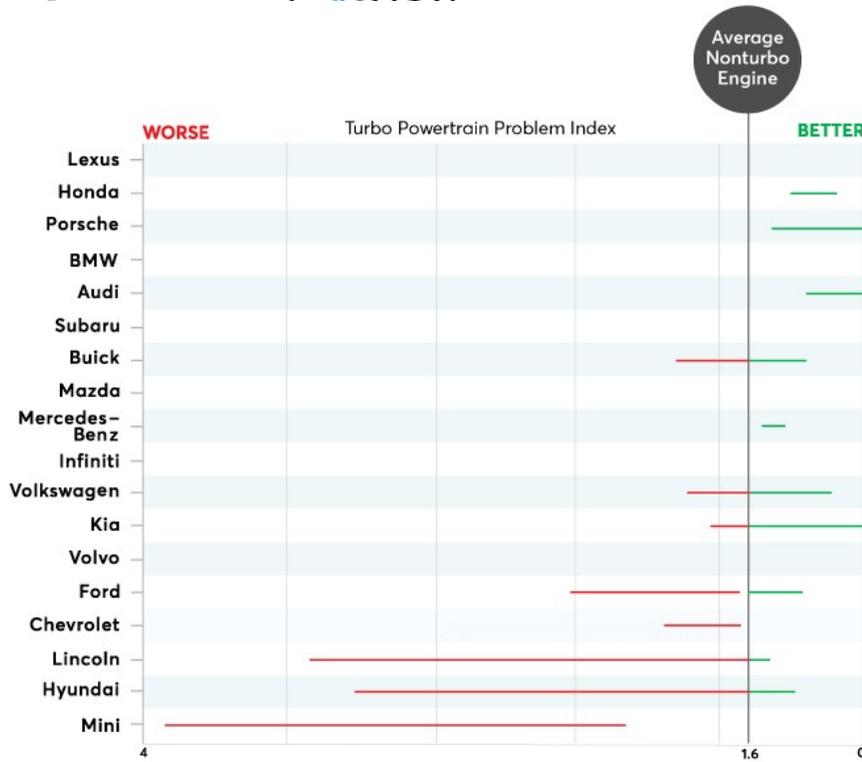
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offer turbo engines as an alternative, along with other options from CR reliability data on turbos and transmissions. Car companies are aware of these problems and which you



more power than a same-sized conventional engine.

- The spinning blades power the turbo to push more air into the engine.
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ex is for each engine and transmission combination within a brand. It is based on data



Troubles With Turbo Engine Reliability  
from the 2016, 2017, and 2018 model years from CR's most recent annual Auto Reliability Survey. The vertical line is the



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average value of all nonturbo vehicles in CR's survey. Each brand is ranked by how much its turbocharged powertrains deviated from the overall average. Multiple dots in the line indicate other turbocharged engines offered by the automaker.

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**Editor's Note:** This article also appeared in the December 2018 issue of Consumer Reports magazine.