

Instant

How innovative are today's cars? What innovations would we most like to see in our next car?

With George Blankenship of Tesla Motors as the cover-story interview for our annual "innovation" edition, we thought that a survey about cars and innovation would be cool. So, we lined up every nameplate we could think of—30 all told—and asked readers to indicate whether they evoked "surprise & delight," "satisfaction" or "boredom."

Of the 30 car brands, only Audi, Mini and Porsche topped 50 percent on the "surprise & delight" scale—and just barely. Volkswagen, Hyundai, BMW, Fiat and Tesla also scored relatively high on "surprise & delight." Toyota and Honda were the only two that scored above 50 percent on "satisfaction," while clear majorities branded Chevrolet and Lincoln with "boredom" (although Chrysler and Dodge came close, at 47%).

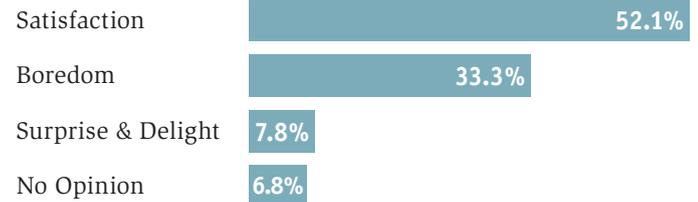
Most of the rest saw a majority of opinion in some combination of "satisfaction" and "boredom," or perhaps most damning of all, "no opinion."

In other words, our survey results are not exactly a ringing endorsement of the auto industry's innovations these days. To the extent that some cars elicited "surprise & delight," accompanying comments suggested that this was usually more on the basis of style than substance. The word "innovative" surfaced only a handful of times, and only for BMW and Tesla.

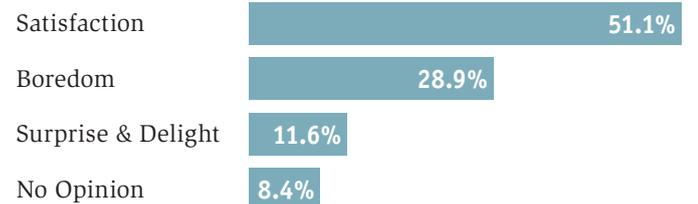
Some interesting patterns emerged in the reader comments. For example, Cadillac, Jaguar, Nissan and Mazda were criticized as having lost their way. Cadillac, Mercedes, Lincoln and Subaru were tagged as cars for "old people." Chevy and Ford were mourned as fallen American icons. Mini was cited as "cute," the Fiat 500 as "ugly," and the Smart car as "scary."

Both Audi and Hyundai were lauded as "good looking." Kia, Volkswagen, Chrysler and Fiat were praised for having good ads. Hyundai won kudos as a good value, while Audi and Land Rover were dinged as "overpriced." Volvo, Honda and Toyota were viewed as "reliable but dull," while Volkswagen was seen as "fun but unreliable."

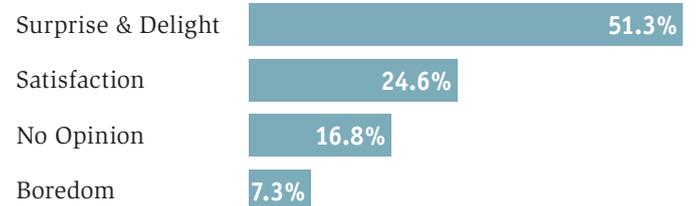
Toyota



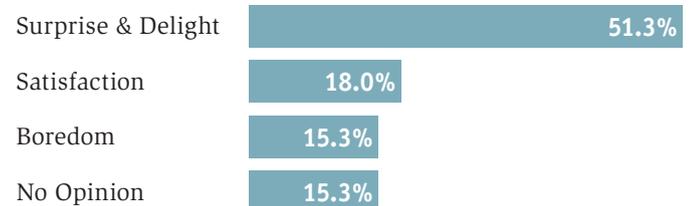
Honda



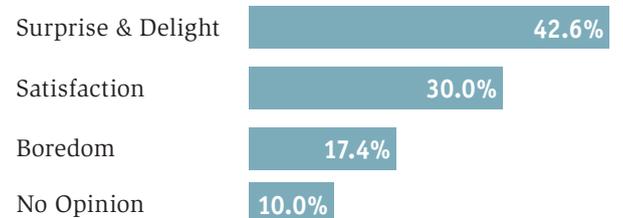
Audi



Porsche

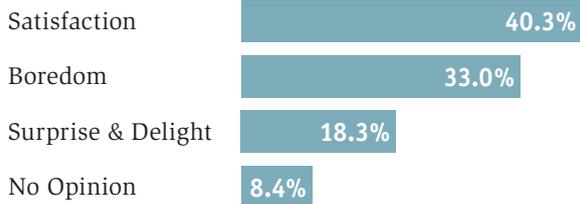


BMW

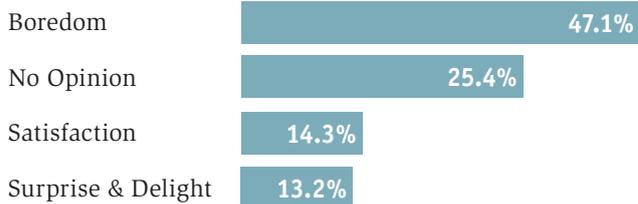


Carma

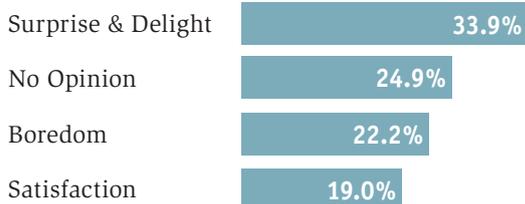
Ford



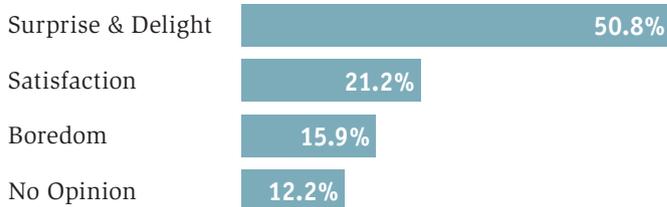
Chrysler



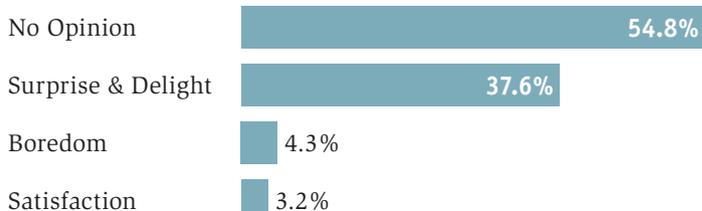
Hyundai



Mini



Tesla



Mustang, Prius, Volt and Corvette each received plaudits, but their allure did not seem to cast much of a halo over their respective makers: Ford, Toyota and Chevrolet.

In some cases, a reverse halo was evident: Infiniti was knocked as an overpriced Nissan; Acura as a thinly disguised Honda, and Porsche and Audi as re-skinned Volkswagens. Porsche was also criticized for compromising its sportscar heritage with its SUV and four-door sedan.

Many reader comments could fairly be characterized as cranky, although some of the barbs were leavened with a sense of humor. Toyota: "The car equivalent of kissing your sister." GMC: "I'm not an old guy who hauls things." Kia: "Is this a fruit or a car?" Honda: "If they were yawn powered they would never need re-fueling." Mini: "Love them. Afraid I'll die in one." Fiat: "The car looks like a snack." Smart: "A wheelchair built for two." Tesla: "Are you giving them away? Sign me up."

Speaking of Tesla, to know the car, for some, is to love it: "The best of what's left of this country's ingenuity meets capitalism meets purpose meets insanity," said one respondent.

We also asked readers to name the car they currently drive and the one they wished they did. It seems that while most of us are driving Toyotas, Hondas or Volkswagens, we would rather be in Porsches, BMWs or Audis.

In terms of which innovations readers would most like to see in their next car, many responses concerned better mileage or alternative energy. Others zeroed in on better versions of already-available gizmos. Driverless technologies received some mentions, as did "wings and landing gear."

However, several craved fewer bells and whistles. As one reader put it: "Less stuff. More substance. I would gladly trade away features for better quality materials."

Or, as another said: "I was happy with heated seats." ■

For full survey results, visit:

http://hubmagazine.com/survey/car_talk