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## GM-brand dealers tops for service

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BUSINESS REPORTER

General Motors' brand dealerships are now providing the best service among mass-market automakers to drivers in their early years of ownership, a comprehensive annual report says.

J.D. Power and Associates said Wednesday its study shows retailers under six GM brands – including three that will disappear – posted most of the highest scores for service to customers with new vehicles in the first three years of operation in the United States, Canada and several other countries.

Hummer, Saturn, Buick and Chevrolet dealerships led the rankings while Pontiac and GMC held the sixth and seventh positions for levels of service initiation, quality, advice, and facility.

Struggling GM is winding down the Hummer and Saturn subsidiaries after failing to sell them and is eliminating Pontiac to concentrate on four brands under a survival plan.

The only brand to break GM's dominance at the top of the study's rankings is BMW's Mini branch.

Among luxury brands, Toyota's Lexus, GM's Cadillac, Jaguar, Honda's Acura and BMW generated the highest scores.

J.D. Power, a major international consumer research firm, based the results on responses from almost 115,000 owners and lessees of 2005 to 2009 model-year vehicles between October and December last year.

Ford, Hyundai, Volkswagen and Honda dealerships also generated above industry average satisfaction scores in the study.

But Kia, Chrysler, Subaru, Dodge, Nissan, Jeep, Mazda, Suzuki and Toyota dealerships posted below-average scores.

At the same time, J.D. Power noted Volkswagen and Kia made the biggest improvement in dealer service during the past year. Retailers for Toyota, which is reeling from a series of recent recalls, also made progress.

Over the past five years of the study, Volkswagen, Chevrolet, Ford and Kia are among the brands that have made the most improvement.

J.D. Power also said overall dealership service improved in the latest study, which marks the 10th consecutive year of progress.

The research firm noticed gains particularly in thoroughness of work performance, time to complete work, flexibility in accommodating customer schedules and better explanations.

"These improvements may be due to not only an increased focus on customer satisfaction from dealers but also are possibly a result of lower volumes of service traffic that dealers are now experiencing," said Jon Osborn, J.D. Power's research director.

The study found that lower auto sales in the past two years and beyond will probably lead to a decline in service volumes of about 20 per cent from 2009 to 2013.

"Over time, many vehicle owners gradually defect to non-dealer service facilities for repair and maintenance needs, particularly when the warranty period ends," said Osborn. "With service customer retention becoming more crucial than ever during the next few years, dealerships must focus on not only providing superior levels of customer service, but also

on enhancing convenience for owners and providing pricing that is more competitive with non-dealer facilities."