



Many times I get parents asking for vehicle recommendations for their teen driver. Often people ask me after they have already purchased or handed something down in the hopes that I will validate their choice.

Many times they are disappointed in what I have to say.

This article isn't meant to offend anyone's current choice. It is simply the most basic recommendation based on safety, statistics and common sense.

It is my hope that it will enlighten those who have yet to get something and encourage those who have already bought something to re-think their choice.

Let's put some things in perspective. The role of the parent is not to buy the coolest, trendiest, vehicle simply because your child wants it. Your job is to provide a safe, reliable platform that your teen driver will use to master their driving skill.

Teens are ten times more likely to be in a crash within their first year of driving than more experienced drivers.

Purchasing a new car for a beginning teen driver is almost guaranteed to result in massive depreciation when they crash it.

The combination of an inexperienced teen driver and an inappropriate vehicle is a recipe for tragedy. But what is an inappropriate vehicle for a teen driver? It's pretty simple really, this is a list of worst vehicle choices and why they are bad:

**SUV** – SUV's suffer from many problems. They have a very high center of gravity and even with modern roll stability control are prone to rollover.

Rollovers in SUVs are caused by driver error, or in other cases they are caused when another vehicle "T-bones" the SUV. It's high center of gravity combined with the low hood of the car can flip the SUV over on it's side with relative ease. The other problem is that

SUVs usually have off-road tires with tall sidewalls. In the event of a blowout, this will cause the vehicle to veer sharply on the side of the blown tire. This situation can cause even the most seasoned drivers to over-correct and exacerbate the situation.

Additionally, SUVs take longer to stop from the same speed as a car and have a wider turning radius. They simply can't maneuver as well as a car. If you read the warning labels on the driver's side sun visor you will see that even the manufacturer lists the dangers and limitations of SUV handling.

**Pickup Trucks** – These basically fall into the same category as SUVs with the exception that all pickups are rear wheel drive with most being four-wheel drive. Their empty bed means there is little weight over the rear wheels.

In reduced traction situations like rain or snow they tend to suffer from power oversteer where the rear wheels lose grip because they don't have enough traction. Additionally sudden swerves in any weather can cause the rear of the truck to oversteer because of the lack of rear traction.

**Sports cars** – There is simply no reason for any teen to have a sports car of any type. Their higher horsepower and overall "personality" mean they will be driven faster and harder by a driver with less experience.

The end result is almost always tragic.

**Convertibles** – Convertibles suffer from an inherent problem with structural rigidity. Their lack of a solid roof causes dramatic reductions in the car's ability to withstand crash forces in all

directions.

In the event of a rollover, the wire frame and fabric top simply cannot hold the weight of the vehicle and has a tendency to crush the occupants.

The best choice for your teen driver is something older that has already depreciated, is a larger car, and has a decent reputation for safety. This would include cars like the: Ford Taurus, Mercury Sable, Volvos, Mercedes-Benz and most any vehicle with a 4 or 5 star crash rating.

In my job as a law enforcement officer I have seen many, many teens driving cars that they had no business being in. Mom or dad bought them the latest and greatest sports car because they wanted to show their son or daughter how much they loved them. I call it "killing your children with love."

The reality is that being in a vehicle crash is the highest cause of death for all teens aged 16-19. Why would any parent purchase a vehicle that will enable a teen to drive faster or have less control, thereby increasing their chances for this kind of tragedy?

When they have mastered the necessary driving skills, proven sound judgment, displayed responsibility behind the wheel and passed three years of continuous on-road driving then and only then should a change in vehicle be considered.