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IIHS issues recommendations on used vehicles for teens after research finds many aren't driving the safest ones



ARLINGTON, Va. — Many teenagers are driving vehicles that don't offer good crash protection and lack important safety technology, new research by the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety shows. To help guide parents toward safer choices, IIHS has compiled its first-ever list of recommended used vehicles for teens.

IIHS is known for its ratings of new vehicles, but for many families, a [2014 TOP SAFETY PICK or TOP SAFETY PICK+](#) isn't in the budget. In a national phone survey conducted for IIHS of parents of teen drivers, 83 percent of those who bought a vehicle for their teenagers said they bought it used.

With that reality in mind, the Institute has compiled a list of affordable used vehicles that meet important safety criteria for teen drivers ([see below](#)). There are two tiers of recommended vehicles with options at various price points, ranging from less than \$5,000 to nearly \$20,000, so parents can buy the most safety for their money, whatever their budget.

"A teenager's first car is more than just a financial decision," says IIHS President Adrian Lund. "These lists of recommended used vehicles can help consumers factor in safety, in addition to affordability."

Among the 500 parents surveyed, 43 percent said the vehicle their child drives was purchased around the time he or she began driving. Minicars or small cars were the most commonly purchased type of vehicle, with 28 percent buying from this category. A little more than half of newly purchased vehicles were from the 2006 model year or earlier. That's a problem because older vehicles are much less likely to have safety features such as electronic stability control (ESC) and side airbags.

Teenagers who drove a vehicle that the family already owned were even more likely to drive an older vehicle: Two-thirds of those parents said the vehicle was from 2006 or earlier.

A separate IIHS study shows that teenagers killed in crashes are more likely than adults to have been behind the wheel of small vehicles and older vehicles. Among fatally injured drivers ages 15-17 in 2008-12, 29 percent were in minicars or small cars, while 20 percent of fatally injured drivers ages 35-50 were. Eighty-two percent of the young teen drivers were in vehicles that were at least 6 years old, compared with 77 percent of those in the adult group.

The recommendations on teen vehicle choice are guided by four main principles:

- ▶ Young drivers should stay away from high horsepower. Vehicles with more powerful engines can tempt them to test

the limits.

- ▶ Bigger, heavier vehicles protect better in a crash. There are no minicars or small cars on the recommended list. Small SUVs are included because their weight is similar to that of a midsize car.
- ▶ ESC is a must. This feature, which helps a driver maintain control of the vehicle on curves and slippery roads, reduces risk on a level comparable to safety belts.
- ▶ Vehicles should have the best safety ratings possible. At a minimum, that means good ratings in the IIHS moderate overlap front test, acceptable ratings in the IIHS side crash test and four or five stars from the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA).

In the survey of parents, the mean purchase price for a teen's vehicle was about \$9,800, while the median was just \$5,300. There are many options on the recommended list for under \$10,000, but just three that cost less than \$5,300.

"Unfortunately, it's very difficult to get a safe vehicle for a teenager at the prices most people are paying," says Anne McCartt, IIHS senior vice president for research. "Our advice to parents would be to remember the risks teens take and consider paying a little more."

All the recommended used vehicles have standard ESC and provide good protection in moderate overlap front crashes. Those considered "best choices" for under \$20,000 also have good ratings for side crash protection, good head restraints and seats for rear crash protection, and good roof strength to protect occupants in rollover crashes. Vehicles considered "good choices" for under \$10,000 have good or acceptable side crash protection and head restraints rated better than poor. Prices on the best choices list start at \$7,300, while the cheapest good choice is \$4,000.

Vehicles rated by [NHTSA](#) were included in the recommended lists only if they earned four or five stars in the front and side tests under the agency's original testing regime or an overall rating of four or five stars under the newer, more stringent rating system that began with 2011 models. One vehicle, the Hyundai Santa Fe, was excluded from the list of best choices because its 2012 model had an overall rating of just three stars.

High-horsepower vehicles also were left off the list, but many of the recommended models have high-horsepower versions that should be avoided. The base engines of all the listed vehicles have adequate power for teens.

Parents who don't find a suitable vehicle from either list should seek out a midsize or larger car, an SUV, or a minivan with the most safety they can afford. Besides ESC, specific things to look for in a used vehicle are side airbags and low horsepower. In some cases, it may be possible to find an ESC-equipped vehicle for a model on which the technology was optional. Those models aren't included in the recommended lists because equipped vehicles can be difficult to locate. Keep in mind that SUVs and pickups are particularly risky when not equipped with ESC because they are the most prone to rollover crashes. Information about the availability of ESC and side airbags can be found [here](#).

BEST CHOICES:

Recommended used vehicles for teens starting under \$20,000

Vehicles on this list earn good ratings in the IIHS moderate overlap front, side, roof strength and head restraint tests. If rated by NHTSA, they earn 4 or 5 stars overall or 4 or 5 stars in the front and side tests under the old rating scheme. All come with standard ESC.

Prices, rounded to the nearest \$100, were taken from [Kelley Blue Book](#) on July 1, 2014, for the lowest trim level and earliest applicable model year based on the following criteria: vehicle in good condition, typical mileage and private party purchase in Arlington, Va.

LARGE CARS	MODEL YEARS	PRICE
Saab 9-5 sedan	2010 and later	\$17,500
Lincoln MKS	2009 and later	\$15,500
Buick Regal	2011 and later	\$13,500
Ford Taurus	2010 and later	\$13,500

Buick LaCrosse	2010 and later	\$12,900
Volvo S80	2007 and later	\$9,000
MIDSIZE CARS	MODEL YEARS	PRICE
Toyota Prius v	2012 and later	\$19,100
Mercedes-Benz C-Class sedan	2009 and later	\$16,000
Honda Accord sedan	2012 and later; coupe 2013-14	\$14,400
Audi A4	2009 and later	\$14,300
Toyota Camry	2012 and later	\$14,300
Buick Verano	2012 and later	\$14,100
Subaru Outback	2010 and later	\$14,000
Lincoln MKZ	2010 and later; built after April 2010	\$13,500
Kia Optima	2011 and later	\$13,300
Hyundai Sonata	2011 and later	\$12,100
Subaru Legacy	2010 and later	\$11,900
Dodge Avenger	2011 and later	\$11,600
Audi A3	2008 and later	\$11,300
Volkswagen CC	2009 and later	\$11,200
Chevrolet Malibu	2010 and later; built after November 2009	\$10,900
Chrysler 200 sedan	2011 and later	\$10,700
Mercury Milan	2010-11; built after April 2010	\$10,700
Ford Fusion	2010 and later; built after April 2010	\$10,200
Volkswagen Passat	2009 and later	\$10,000
Volvo C30	2008 and later	\$9,800
Volkswagen Jetta SportWagen	2009 and later	\$9,400
Volkswagen Jetta	2009 and later	\$8,200
SMALL SUVs	MODEL YEARS	PRICE
Honda CR-V	2012 and later	\$18,100
Kia Sportage	2011 and later	\$13,800
Hyundai Tucson	2010 and later	\$13,100
Subaru Forester	2009 and later	\$12,800
Mitsubishi Outlander Sport	2011 and later	\$12,000
Volkswagen Tiguan	2009 and later	\$10,200
Honda Element	2007 and later	\$8,900
MIDSIZE SUVs	MODEL YEARS	PRICE
Volvo XC60	2010 and later	\$18,000
Saab 9-4X	2011-12	\$17,800
Toyota Highlander	2008 and later	\$17,100
Toyota Venza	2009 and later	\$15,900
Ford Edge	2011 and later; built after February 2011	\$15,500
Ford Flex	2010 and later	\$15,100
GMC Terrain	2010 and later	\$14,900
Kia Sorento	2011 and later	\$14,500
Infiniti EX	2008 and later	\$14,400
Chevrolet Equinox	2010 and later	\$13,700
Dodge Journey	2010 and later	\$11,200

Subaru Tribeca/B9 Tribeca	2006 and later	\$8,500
Volvo XC90	2005 and later	\$7,300
LARGE SUVs	MODEL YEARS	PRICE
Buick Enclave	2011 and later	\$19,900
GMC Acadia	2011 and later	\$17,800
Chevrolet Traverse	2011 and later	\$16,600
MINIVANS	MODEL YEARS	PRICE
Chrysler Town & Country	2012 and later	\$18,100
Honda Odyssey	2011 and later	\$17,100
Toyota Sienna	2011 and later	\$16,400
Dodge Grand Caravan	2012 and later	\$15,200
Volkswagen Routan	2012	\$14,000

GOOD CHOICES:

Recommended used vehicles for teens starting under \$10,000

Vehicles on this list earn good ratings in the IIHS moderate overlap front test and good or acceptable ratings in the side test. If rated by NHTSA, they earn 4 or 5 stars overall or 4 or 5 stars in the front and side tests under the old rating scheme. They also have standard ESC and a better-than-poor rating for head restraints and seats.

Prices, rounded to the nearest \$100, were taken from [Kelley Blue Book](#) on July 1, 2014, for the lowest trim level and earliest applicable model year based on the following criteria: vehicle in good condition, typical mileage and private party purchase in Arlington, Va.

LARGE CARS	MODEL YEARS	PRICE
Acura RL	2005 and later	\$9,700
Mercury Sable	2009	\$9,700
Kia Amanti	2009	\$9,500
Ford Taurus	2009	\$9,100
Audi A6 sedan	2005 and later	\$8,300
Hyundai Azera	2006 and later	\$5,700
MIDSIZE CARS	MODEL YEARS	PRICE
Subaru Legacy	2009	\$9,900
BMW 3-series sedan	2006 and later	\$9,300
Mazda 6	2009 and later	\$8,900
Saturn Aura	2009	\$8,800
Acura TL	2004 and later	\$7,900
Volvo S40	2007 and later	\$7,700
Audi A3	2006-07	\$7,400
Mercedes-Benz C-Class sedan	2005-08	\$6,900
Suzuki Kizashi	2010 and later	\$6,600
Volvo S60	2007-09	\$6,500
Audi A4	2005-08; built after October 2004	\$6,200
Volkswagen Passat	2006-08	\$5,100
Saab 9-3	2005 and later	\$4,000
SMALL SUVs	MODEL YEARS	PRICE
Nissan Rogue	2008 and later	\$9,800

Ford Escape	2009 and later	\$8,700
Mazda Tribute	2009 and later	\$8,100
Mitsubishi Outlander	2007 and later	\$6,300
Suzuki Grand Vitara	2006 and later	\$5,600

MIDSIZE SUVs	MODEL YEARS	PRICE
Mazda CX-9	2007 and later	\$9,800
Ford Edge	2007-10	\$9,600
Hyundai Veracruz	2007 and later	\$9,600
Hyundai Santa Fe	2007-10	\$8,900
Honda Pilot	2006 and later	\$8,800
Saturn Vue	2008-09	\$7,700
Ford Taurus X	2008-09	\$7,500
Mazda CX-7	2007-11	\$7,200
Suzuki XL7	2008-09	\$6,200

MINIVANS	MODEL YEARS	PRICE
Volkswagen Routan	2009-11	\$8,600
Dodge Grand Caravan	2008-11	\$8,200
Chrysler Town & Country	2008-11	\$8,100
Honda Odyssey	2005-10	\$6,700
Hyundai Entourage	2007-08	\$6,300
Kia Sedona	2006 and later	\$4,600

Note: Some listed models include a "built after" date. This applies when a manufacturer makes changes to improve safety in the middle of a model year. Information about when a specific vehicle was manufactured can be found on the certification label typically affixed to the driver door or near it.

More information

Safety rides shotgun: the best used vehicles for teen drivers

Status Report, Vol. 49, No. 5

More on teenagers

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The **Highway Loss Data Institute** shares and supports this mission through scientific studies of insurance data representing the human and economic losses resulting from the ownership and operation of different types of vehicles and by publishing

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