

*ASK THE VEHICLE SAFETY LAWYER - Young Drivers*

***My child is now old enough to start driving. What is the safest vehicle for a brand new driver to start out in realizing I have limited finances?***

This is the most frequently asked question I receive. If finances weren't an issue, I'd suggest that you buy a Volvo XC 90, a Mercedes Benz S 500, or a BMW 750. However, I know the vast majority of parents aren't in a position to spend this kind of money on a vehicle for their child. However, I believe these tips can help you find a safe vehicle.

First, don't buy any vehicle with an 8 cylinder engine. Most beginning driver's have no business driving a vehicle that can accelerate quickly.

Second, don't allow your child to ever allow anyone to sit in the rear seat. When you get more than two children under age 18 in a vehicle, you are asking for problems.

Third, stay away from any vehicle that has oversized tires, roll bars, lift kits and front grill guards. Also, stay away from 4-wheel drive vehicles or any vehicle where the doors can be removed.

Fourth, stay away from vehicles that have a lot of glass. Here is why. The more glass on a vehicle, the less metal. The less metal, the less structural integrity.

Fifth, stay away from sports utility vehicles. (the Volvo XC 90 is an SUV but it has every safety feature known to mankind on it).

Sixth, make certain that the vehicle has not been involved in a previous accident. Don't rely on internet services. Take to a body shop and have a qualified technician look for paint overspray and for mismatched paint coloring. Lift the vehicle up in the air and look at the rails to see if they have been straightened, welded or reinforced. Take the carpet out in the trunk and look at the trunk structure for previous impact damage. If a vehicle has been involved in a previous accident, you have no way to if the hidden safety features inside your vehicle have worked previously and can't work again.

Seventh, buy a vehicle that has as many airbags as possible but make certain that a qualified mechanic verifies that all the airbag components are working properly.

Eighth, don't buy a vehicle that has jump seats that face sideways. These seats can't protect anyone in the event of an accident.

Ninth, call up your local Medical Examiner and ask if he/she can show your child an autopsy of a young person who was drinking and driving and was involved in a motor vehicle accident. Seeing a peer laying on a slab for all the world to see is an awakening for all to see.

Tenth, enroll your child in a high performance driving course like Team Texas that is at Texas Motor Speedway. Driving courses teach the basics. Beginning drivers need to know how to get themselves out of driving problems, not make bad situations even worse.

Eleventh, don't allow your child to modify the vehicle in any way once it is purchased. No fancy wheels, no oversized tires, no lift kits, no lowering packages, no inlaid wood steering wheels. This can void the warranty. Also, it may prevent you or your child from pursuing an action against the vehicle manufacturer if any safety system ever fails.

Twelfth, don't allow oversized speakers or woofers to be placed inside the vehicle or the trunk. In an accident, a 15 lb. object can become a 500 lb. object. Also, a speaker or woofer can become a projectile that renders a safety system totally ineffective when it crashes into your head.

Thirteenth, if the Texas legislature won't allow cell phone usage in vehicles, then the vehicle needs to have Bluetooth technology so that a cell phone can be used only with hands-free capability so that your child has both hands to drive.

Fourteenth, make your child pay for something on the vehicle such as gas, maintenance, insurance. This way they will learn to appreciate that a vehicle is a valuable possession.

Lastly, your child needs to be told and needs to understand that no matter what kind of vehicle he/she drives, a vehicle is a several thousand pound lethal weapon.