



DECIDING ON WHAT CAR IS SAFE TO DRIVE

Once a driver has passed the practical driving test, deciding on the appropriate vehicle to buy is an important decision. Provisional drivers under the age of 25 must not drive a high-powered vehicle until they gain a full driver's licence. High-powered vehicles have a Gross Vehicle Mass of less than 4500 kgs and are defined as: -

- vehicles with engines of eight or more cylinders
- vehicles with turbocharged or supercharged engines (excluding diesel powered vehicles)
- vehicles that have been modified to increase engine performance (simply put if the vehicle is modified to increase performance then it is not allowed).
- nominated high performance vehicles. (this list can be located at: - http://www.myllicence.sa.gov.au/data/assets/pdf_file/0005/48785/high_performance_list.pdf)

Don't base your decision on vehicle selection purely on economic reasons, with a cheap vehicle being selected with no consideration regarding its safety rating. Research shows you are five times more likely to survive a serious crash when driving a safer car. Consider the ten points of choosing a safe vehicle:-

1. Look for a vehicle with a safety rating of 4 stars or more. Many dealerships are displaying the safety ratings of 4 and 5 star rated cars with the stickers and swing tags. Look out for these stickers and tags when making your purchase decision.
2. In many cases, reasonably priced vehicles score more stars than some of the more expensive models. So check the vehicle's star rating and the safety features that you can expect in most 4 and 5 star rated vehicles.
3. For a car to get a 5 star rating, it must have Electronic Stability Control (ESC). Different manufacturers have different names for ESC - for example Dynamic Stability Control (DSC) and Electronic Stabilization Program (ESP). ESC is a computer-based system that helps drivers maintain control of their vehicles, particularly in adverse conditions such as wet weather. It continuously monitors a vehicle's speed, steering wheel angle, direction of travel and cornering acceleration, automatically applying individual brakes if there is a risk of skidding or overturning.
4. Crumple zones protect the occupants by absorbing the energy generated on impact during a crash. Specially designed crumple zones give way, whilst maintaining the structural integrity of the cabin to protect the driver and passengers.
5. Most new cars now have driver and passenger airbags. However it is important to realize that these alone are not an adequate safety measure in a serious crash. There are many 2 and 3 star rated vehicles on the road that have airbags but are lacking in some of the other safety features.

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6. To protect passengers in side impact crashes, we recommend cars that are fitted with side and curtain airbags. Curtain airbags usually drop down from the top of the side window, creating a cushion between the occupant and the side of the car and protecting the head and shoulders. Side airbags usually activate from the seat or door panel, protecting the torso.
7. The cabin of the car is designed like a cell, making it impossible for the engine to breach the compartment in a front-on crash. This also ensures that the steering column, dashboard, roof pillars and floor panels are not excessively pushed inwards onto the driver and front-seat passenger. Ideally, all doors should still open and close after a serious crash.
8. The oldest and still the most effective vehicle safety feature is a seat belt. Increasingly car manufacturers are installing three-point lap-sash seatbelts in the middle of the back seat, instead of the single lap belt which is not as effective in a serious crash. Check that the car has a seat belt warning chime to alert the driver when seat belts have not been fastened.
9. Seatbelts should be fitted to all seats in the car, not just front seats, to prevent serious whiplash in a crash. Whiplash is a leading cause of injury in minor crashes and can cause significant spinal, neck and head injury in more serious cases.
10. Ensuring the vehicle is roadworthy and that all devices discussed here work correctly is important. A proper regime of servicing the vehicle is important to consider before buying the vehicle and to maintain once it is purchased.

There are other considerations apart from safety – shop around for a competitive finance rate if financing; check the personal property security register to ensure it is not encumbered; make sure warranty is in writing as should be any contract that you sign; and consider the appropriate insurance to place on the vehicle.

You can find further information at the following web pages:-

<http://www.mylicence.sa.gov.au/>

http://www.raa.com.au/download.aspx?SecID=294&file=documents/document_4109.pdf



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