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Updated teen vehicle list spotlights good buys with solid safety credentials

ARLINGTON, Va., and YONKERS, N.Y. — A new list of recommended used vehicles for teen drivers shows safety doesn't have to take a back seat even amid rising concerns about affordability.

The Insurance Institute for Highway Safety (IIHS) and Consumer Reports (CR) have identified 45 used vehicles starting under \$10,000 that offer good crash protection and are suitable for teen drivers. Another 29 vehicles that also have highly rated headlights and automatic emergency braking with pedestrian detection can be found for under \$20,000.

"We curate this annual list specifically for teens because driving holds extra risk for them," said IIHS Senior Research Scientist Rebecca Weast. "That said, the suggestions are suitable for drivers of any age looking to balance affordability with crash protection and crash avoidance."

"A teen's first car is a major milestone. Whether you're buying them a vehicle or deciding which family car they should begin driving, these lists help parents make those choices with confidence, and without compromising on safety," said Emily A. Thomas, associate director of auto safety at Consumer Reports.

For those who prefer a 2026 model, IIHS and CR have identified 22 vehicles with excellent crashworthiness and advanced safety features that are on the less expensive end of the new-car spectrum.

CR and IIHS have produced the annual list of teen vehicles jointly since 2020 to assist families looking for something that can help keep a new driver safe while staying within budget constraints. Many models on the list make good family vehicles too. That could be helpful for parents who plan to share a vehicle with their child or who are looking for one they can pass along to them in a few years.

What teens should avoid

As in past years, the list doesn't include anything with excessive horsepower relative to weight or anything marketed for performance. However, many seemingly benign vehicles come in high-horsepower versions, so even when shopping from the IIHS-CR list, families should make sure to stick to the base engine. Powerful vehicles can entice young drivers to take risks or lead them to speed inadvertently.

Minicars, as well as anything under 2,750 pounds, are also excluded. Although smaller models tend to be popular with young drivers, they can't protect their occupants adequately in crashes with bigger vehicles.

On the flip side, large SUVs and large pickups aren't a good choice for inexperienced drivers because they can be hard to handle and take longer to stop. They also pose more risk to others on the road, including pedestrians, bicyclists and people in smaller vehicles.

Making the cut

All used and new vehicles on the list have average or better scores (3 out of 5) from CR for braking and for emergency and routine handling. They also have usability scores of at least 2 out of 5 for controls and displays, meaning the models with the most confusing and distracting setups are excluded.

Listed vehicles also provide strong protection in a crash, based on IIHS testing. For used vehicles, this means a good rating in the driver-side small overlap front test, which was introduced in 2012. This test was one of the final evaluations in the original series of IIHS crashworthiness tests, which also looked at side crash protection, roof strength and head restraints.

In recent years, most of the original tests were phased out — and in some cases replaced with more challenging ones. The small overlap remains in the current IIHS test line-up, making it a good proxy for comparing overall crashworthiness of vehicles of different ages.

When it comes to features that help avoid a crash, all listed vehicles have standard electronic stability control, which has been mandatory since the 2012 model year.

Models in the top tier of used vehicles, designated as Best Choices, come with headlights that earn a good or acceptable rating from IIHS across all trim levels. They also have standard automatic emergency braking (AEB) with pedestrian detection that performs well in daytime IIHS track tests. In addition to reducing the risk of a pedestrian crash, AEB helps drivers avoid rear-ending another vehicle. The technology is useful for everyone but can be particularly helpful for young, inexperienced drivers, who may be prone to distraction.

New vehicle criteria

For families who can afford a new vehicle for a teen driver, IIHS and CR recommend getting the most state-of-the-art safety that money can buy.

The list of recommended new vehicles consists of winners of the 2026 IIHS *TOP SAFETY PICK* or *TOP SAFETY PICK+* award that also earn a CR Safety Verdict of Best.

The IIHS awards mean these vehicles have good ratings in the Institute's newer, more challenging crash tests and have standard good or acceptable headlights and standard high-performing AEB.

A CR Safety Verdict of Best means the vehicles also have standard highway-speed AEB, blind spot warning and rear cross traffic warning.

Finally, the recommended new vehicles earn good ratings from IIHS for seat belt reminders. Young drivers are less likely to buckle up than others, and loud, persistent reminders have been shown to boost belt use substantially.

Other considerations

While the IIHS-CR list focuses on safety and price, families may also want to consider a vehicle's reliability and the cost of insurance. The IIHS-affiliated Highway Loss Data Institute publishes [insurance losses by make and model](#), which can provide a sense of which vehicles could cost more to insure. It's a good idea to contact your insurance company to get a quote before buying. When it comes to vehicle reliability, CR maintains ratings for its members.

Electric vehicles, which are becoming more common on used car lots as leases expire, show up on this year's list a few times. While EVs are fundamentally no less safe than gas-powered vehicles, they can allow for rapid acceleration. Unlike gas engines, electric motors give drivers immediate access to all of the vehicle's power. Parents should keep that in mind if they are considering an EV for a teen driver.

USED VEHICLES FOR TEENS

All listed vehicles have a curb weight greater than 2,750 pounds and earn a good rating from IIHS in the driver-side small overlap front test. They also have average or better scores from CR for braking and for emergency and routine handling (scoring at least 3 out of 5) and CR usability scores for controls and displays of at least 2 out of 5.

Prices, obtained from Black Book in April 2026 and rounded to the nearest \$100, represent the median retail price for all trims of each model for the earliest applicable model year.

Some models have exceptions for vehicles produced before a certain date. Information about when a specific vehicle was built can be found on the certification label typically affixed to the driver door or near it.

Best Choices — starting under \$20,000

In addition to meeting the general requirements, Best Choices have standard automatic emergency braking systems that earn an advanced or superior rating from IIHS in the daytime pedestrian front crash prevention test or an acceptable or good rating in the combined pedestrian test. They also have headlights that earn a good or acceptable rating from IIHS.

SMALL CARS

Mazda 3 (hatchback: 2019-25; sedan: 2020-25)	\$13,200
Subaru Crosstrek Plug-in Hybrid (2019-23)	\$13,600

MIDSIZE CARS

Nissan Maxima (2020-23)	\$15,200
Subaru Legacy (2020-25)	\$16,500
Nissan Altima (2021-24)	\$17,000
Toyota Camry (2019-25; including hybrid)	\$17,300
Kia K5 (2021-24; built after November 2020)	\$17,500
Subaru Outback (2020-25; built after October 2019)	\$18,700
Hyundai Ioniq 6 (2023-25)	\$19,400

LARGE CAR

Genesis G80 (2019-20)	\$19,700
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SMALL SUVs

Mazda CX-5 (2018-25; built after March 2018)	\$13,100
Mazda CX-3 (2020-21)	\$13,600
Mazda CX-30 (2021-25; built after September 2020)	\$15,900
Subaru Forester (2019-25)	\$15,900
Chevrolet Trailblazer (2021-23)	\$16,700
Hyundai Ioniq 5 (2022-24)	\$16,700
Nissan Rogue (2021-23)	\$17,200
Subaru Solterra (2023-25)	\$17,700
Audi Q4 e-tron (2022-25)	\$18,100
Audi Q4 Sportback e-tron (2022-24)	\$18,100
Ford Bronco Sport (2021-25)	\$18,100
Volkswagen Tiguan (2022-24)	\$18,200
Kia EV6 (2022-24; built after August 2022)	\$18,700

Hyundai Tucson (2022-25; including hybrid)	\$19,100
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MIDSIZE SUVS

Mazda CX-9 (2020-23; built after December 2019)	\$16,200
Nissan Murano (2021-25)	\$18,000
Ford Explorer (2020-24)	\$18,400
Mitsubishi Outlander (2022-25; built after June 2021)	\$18,700
Acura RDX (2019-25)	\$19,600

Good Choices — starting under \$10,000

SMALL CARS

Mini Countryman (2012-24)	\$4,600
Nissan Sentra (2015-25)	\$4,700
Chevrolet Sonic (2015-19; built after February 2015)	\$5,300
Kia Soul (2015-25)	\$5,300
Hyundai Elantra (2017-25)	\$6,100
Mazda 3 hatchback or sedan (2014-18; built after October 2013)	\$6,900
Hyundai Elantra GT (2018–2020)	\$8,000
Subaru Impreza sedan or wagon (2014-25)	\$8,000
Honda Civic coupe or sedan (2014-25)	\$8,100
Kia Forte (2019-24)	\$8,900
Subaru Crosstrek (2016-25)	\$9,000

MIDSIZE CARS

Chevrolet Malibu (2014-25)	\$5,800
Volvo S60 (2012-25)	\$6,700
Hyundai Sonata (2016-25; built after October 2015; including 2017-25 hybrid)	\$6,900
Nissan Altima (2016-20)	\$6,900
Subaru Legacy (2015-19)	\$7,700
Acura TL (2012-14; built after April 2012)	\$8,200
Honda Accord sedan (2013-25; including 2014-25 hybrid)	\$8,300
Mazda 6 (2016-18)	\$8,400
Ford Fusion (2017-20)	\$9,000
Alfa Romeo Giulia (2017-25; built after May 2017)	\$9,100
Audi A3 (2015-25)	\$9,100
Nissan Maxima (2016-19)	\$9,300
Lincoln MKZ (2017-20)	\$9,500
Audi A6 (2016-19; built after January 2015)	\$9,900

LARGE CARS

Volvo S80 (2012-15)	\$5,600
Acura RLX (2014-20)	\$9,700

SMALL SUVS

Chevrolet Equinox (2014-24)	\$5,700
Fiat 500X (2016-18; built after July 2015)	\$5,700
Nissan Rogue (2014-20)	\$5,900
Hyundai Tucson (2016-21)	\$7,100
Audi Q3 (2015-25)	\$7,200
Jeep Compass (2017-22; built after December 2016)	\$7,600
Kia Niro Hybrid (2017-22)	\$7,800
Mazda CX-5 (2014-17; built after October 2013)	\$8,400
BMW X1 (2016-25)	\$8,600
Kia Sportage (2017-25)	\$8,600
Mazda CX-3 (2016-19)	\$9,000
Nissan Rogue Sport (2017)	\$9,100

MIDSIZE SUVS

Volvo XC90 (2013-24)	\$6,000
GMC Terrain (2014-20)	\$6,400
Volvo XC60 (2013-21)	\$6,400
Nissan Murano (2015-20)	\$8,100
Kia Sorento (2016-18)	\$8,200
Audi Q5 (2015-25; built after January 2015)	\$9,800

NEW VEHICLES FOR TEENS (2026 MODELS)

Listed vehicles are winners of the 2026 IIHS *TOP SAFETY PICK* or *TOP SAFETY PICK+* award and earn the CR Safety Verdict designation of Best. They also have good seat belt reminder ratings from IIHS. All have starting prices under \$45,000.

SMALL CARS

Mazda 3 hatchback or sedan
Toyota Prius

MIDSIZE CARS

Hyundai Sonata (including hybrid)
Toyota Camry

SMALL SUVS

Hyundai Ioniq 5
Hyundai Kona
Hyundai Tucson (including hybrid)
Mazda CX-30
Mazda CX-50 (including hybrid)

MIDSIZE SUVS

Ford Explorer
Honda Passport
Hyundai Palisade (built after November 2025; including hybrid)
Hyundai Santa Fe (including hybrid)
Kia Sorento (built after September 2025; including hybrid)
Mazda CX-70
Mazda CX-70 PHEV
Mazda CX-90
Nissan Murano
Nissan Pathfinder
Subaru Ascent
Volkswagen Atlas
Volkswagen Atlas Cross Sport

For more information, go to [iihs.org](https://www.iihs.org)

The Insurance Institute for Highway Safety (IIHS) is an independent, nonprofit scientific and educational organization dedicated to reducing deaths, injuries and property damage from motor vehicle crashes through research and evaluation and through education of consumers, policymakers and safety professionals. IIHS is wholly supported by auto insurers.

For more information from CR, go to [consumerreports.org](https://www.consumerreports.org)

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