

Keeping teen drivers safe behind the wheel

Written by Holyoke Enterprise

For many kids and parents, the term “back to school” conjures trips to the mall for school supplies and new clothes, and an end to summer vacations. For many teens heading off to high school and college, it may mean their first set of keys and, finally, their own car.

Regardless of how excited your child is about driving, the idea of putting a teen behind the wheel and the cost associated with doing so can be daunting for any parent. However, teaching teens to drive safely and putting them in safe and affordable vehicles can help calm parental nerves.

For starters, teen drivers should learn to pay attention in the front seat. Distracted driving is the leading cause of accidents among teens, as many are preoccupied with cell phones, texting and fiddling with MP3 players.

According to a new survey of young drivers conducted by the National Organizations for Youth Safety and the Allstate Foundation, an alarming 83 percent of teens admit they talk on cell phones while driving and 68 percent confess to texting behind the wheel.

Teaching teens to drive safely is only part of the solution. The cars young drivers drive can be just as important as how they drive them.

Many parents peruse Craig’s List or other Web sites for used vehicles for their sons and daughters, with mixed results. While inexpensive vehicles can be found through these channels, many of these vehicles come with checkered pasts and without warranties or safety certifications.

Certified pre owned vehicles—used vehicles that pass a rigorous screening process administered by the auto manufacturer—offer the best of both worlds.

Most automobile manufacturers offer certified pre owned programs that provide varying levels of assurance and vehicle inspections. For instance, Toyota’s Certified Used Vehicle (TCUV)

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program ensures a particularly rigorous process when it comes to safety. As previously-owned Toyota vehicles are turned in at dealerships, Toyota inspects them to determine which have potential to become a TCUV. These vehicles then undergo a minimum 160-point manufacturer inspection process that scrutinizes safety features, maintenance and upkeep, and makes any necessary repairs and updates. Those that pass are given the TCUV label and find their way back onto a Toyota certified dealer lot.

A certified pre-owned vehicle will not only receive inspection by a certified mechanic, but may also receive a CARFAX report for possible past accidents in which the vehicle may have been involved and a check of the automaker's recall and repair program database to ensure it has received manufacturer recommended modifications.

Of course, when it comes to buying a car for teens, price is almost always a consideration. Here, too, certified pre-owned vehicles shine. Automakers like Toyota and its TCUV program provide the perks of buying a new vehicle—including new-car financing rates and a factory backed warranty—benefits the average used car doesn't offer. And shopping for certified pre owned vehicles is as easy as hitting the Web, as most offer Web sites like TCUV's site at www.toyotacertified.com

No one wants to see their little ones grow up and take to the road, but at least you can send them off safely without breaking the bank.