

Rollovers Reduce SUV Safety

SUV Safety

Safety
Problems

The Best and
Worst

What's Re—
Done



Safety experts have concerns about sport utility vehicles rolling over. But some, like the Ford Explorer pictured above, are considered safer than others. (Ford)



ABCNEWS' Jack
Smith on the
dangers of sport

utility vehicles
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By Mark Baumgartner
ABCNEWS.com

Dec. 12 — Light trucks have become the fastest-growing segment of the U.S. auto industry in large part because Americans believe they are safer in bigger vehicles.

But as the spotlight turns ever brighter on this class of vehicles—which includes light trucks, minivans and sport utilities—serious safety shortcomings are emerging.

For example, sport utility vehicles are four times more likely to roll over in fatal crashes than cars, according to a study by two auto safety consultants. And while the bigger, heavier SUVs offer some protection to their occupants in crashes with smaller passenger cars, higher death rates in rollovers offset lower death rates in other types of crashes.

That means, the consultants said, that you're just as likely to die in an SUV crash as you are in a passenger car crash.

Seeing the Big Picture

Athan Malliaris and Kenneth Digges, both former employees of the National Highway Traffic Safety

Web Site

Highway Loss Data
Institute

Administration (NHTSA), presented their study this week at a conference on the safety of light trucks, sponsored by the Society of Automotive Engineers.

That sport utility vehicles are more prone to rolling over and are less maneuverable in urban traffic is well-documented. But the auto industry and the government **are** coming to grips with a widening scope to the problems.

“The message loud and clear—from the insurance industry and the university researchers—is that we have to address rollover problems in a more vigorous way,” said R. David Pittle, a vice president with Consumers Union, publisher of *Consumer Reports*, who attended the conference.

“You would have been stunned to hear (auto industry) people say that the reason they build SUVs is because people want these vehicles, they feel safer in them. Well, if I’m in an SUV, your child has got to be in an SUV. We’ve got to start seeing the big picture or pretty soon we’ll all be driving around in tanks.”

Barry Felrice of the American Automobile Manufacturers Association defended light trucks, arguing that other data, such as figures from insurance companies, show that SUVs **are** safer. “The real-world data are clear: You are less likely to be injured or killed in an SUV than you are in a passenger car.”

Safety Problems with SUVs

- Rollovers** Rollover accidents account for about one-quarter of the 42,000 deaths in automobile accidents each year in the United States.
- Brakes** Federal safety standards are more lenient for light trucks than for cars when it comes to such measures as stopping distances.
- Maneuverability** Designed for off-road use, SUVs are heavier and ride higher off the ground, making them more difficult to control.
- Driver Deaths** SUVs are four times as likely as cars to roll over in an accident.

Best and Worst

- Rollovers**
 - Best:** Ford Explorer, Jeep Cherokee
 - Worst:** Suzuki Samurai, Isuzu Trooper, Acura SLX
- Maneuverability** **Best:** Honda CRV (1996), Toyota RAV4 (1996)
(not all models tested)
 - Worst:**

Ford Bronco II, Suzuki Samurai, Isuzu Trooper (1995-1996)

Driver Deaths **Better Than Average:**
 Jeep Grand Cherokee 4x4, Ford Explorer 4x4, Chevrolet Blazer 4x4

Worse Than Average:
 Nissan Pathfinder, Geo Tracker, Jeep Wrangler

Source: Highway Loss Data Institute and Consumers Union

What's Being Done

Rollovers Manufacturers of SUVs identified by Consumers Union as prone to rollover are suing the organization over reliability of the tests.


Brakes Federal regulations will require all but the biggest SUVs to meet car standards in 2002.

Maneuverability Government requires manufacturers to provide informational labels to SUV buyers, explaining that the vehicles are designed for off-road use and may not handle as well in other situations.

Driver Deaths Manufacturers respond to safety concerns with design changes.

Note: Statistics measure driver deaths per 10,000 registered vehicle years for 1991-95 model sport utility vehicles

Manufacturers substantially redesign their passenger vehicles periodically, and, in these cases, results for earlier models with the same name may not predict results for the newer designs.



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