

SUVs' roll risk called greatest

Many new vehicles have a 1 in 5 chance of flipping in an accident, analysis finds

By Gary Stoller
USA TODAY

Fifty-five year 2000 vehicles would roll over in at least 20% of accidents that they're involved in, according to an analysis performed for USA TODAY.

The analysis is not based on road tests, but rather on a mathematical formula that factors in vehicle weight, height and width as well as rollover reports.

Of the 55 vehicles most prone to roll over, about 80% are sport-utility vehicles, says Joe Kimmel, an industrial economist who devised a mathematical formula to calculate the rollover propensity of 189 year 2000-model vehicles.

At least three SUVs, the Chevrolet Tracker, the Suzuki Vitara and the Toyota RAV4, might roll over even more frequently — in two of every five accidents, he predicts.

Auto manufacturers dispute the



- ▶ Makers dispute roll ratings, 1B
- ▶ Models most at risk, 3B

predictions and say that a mathematical formula cannot accurately determine the likelihood of a rollover. The manufacturers say that too many factors — including driver performance, weather, terrain and tire size — are not taken into account by Kimmel's "K Index" or another mathematically based rating system for consumers that the federal government has proposed.

However, other experts have praised Kimmel's work. Among them: the Center for Auto Safety, a former mathematician for the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration and a consultant who has worked for NHTSA.

Congress will soon consider the rollover issue. Last month, the Senate Appropriations Committee decided not to provide funding for the consumer rating system and said it wanted the National Academy of Sciences to do a study.

Kimmel's K Index predicts the SUV least likely to roll over is the Ford Excursion, which might roll over in 13% of its accidents.

Most cars have a far lower rollover likelihood than the Excursion, Kimmel says. His index shows that the least likely cars to roll over are a Bentley and a Rolls Royce. They could turn over in about one of 100 accidents, he says.