



Buying a safe car is one of the most important purchases you'll make and choosing the right one can be difficult. Whether you plan to buy a new or used car, make safety a priority so that you and your family are protected.

You want your car to look great, but that doesn't mean you have to sacrifice safety or buy the most expensive model. The TAC has put together this guide to help you make an informed decision about the cars you are considering.

What information is available?

Cars are given a one to five star rating (five being the highest), based on results from the [Australasian New Car Assessment Program](#) (ANCAP) or [Used Car Safety Ratings](#) (UCSR) report. **ANCAP** ratings are based on data from tests performed in a crash lab and **UCSR** are based on data from real world crashes. Both ratings are available on howsafeisyourcar.com.au, as well as safety feature specifications.



Whether you are looking for a new or used car, consider the safety features that are

available and look for cars that have the best safety performance – the more stars the better!

When choosing your next car you can use the [Comparison List](#) function on howsafeisyourcar.com.au to compare the car's safety features and star rating with other cars in the same class.

Why is it important to consider safety?

In a crash situation, different cars offer varying levels of occupant protection. Car manufacturers can include different combinations of features which impact on the

safety of your car. These safety features are generally grouped into three categories:

- **Crash avoidance** – features that help you to avoid being in a crash like [electronic stability control](#) (ESC), [anti-lock braking systems](#) (ABS) and [traction control](#).
- **Crash protection** – features that help to protect you in a crash like [seat belts](#), [curtain airbags](#) and crumple zones.
- **Driver comfort** – features that add to the safety of your car by making driving easier and more comfortable, such as seat height adjustment.

Driver and passenger protection depends on your car's structure, its driver and passenger restraints and related protection devices working together as an integrated system.

Essential safety features include:

- A strong cabin that can withstand severe impacts.
- Crumple zones outside the cabin to absorb the forces exerted in a car crash.
- Effective restraints for drivers and passengers to

reduce the likelihood of injury from interior features of the car, to prevent ejection from the car and to reduce the potential for soft tissue injuries such as whiplash.

Other things to consider.

Small, medium and large cars.

Larger sized cars generally provide better protection in a crash than smaller cars, passenger vans and commercial vehicles. Broadly, car size groups are classified as:

- Light cars: generally less than 1,100kg and an engine capacity of 1.5 litres or less.
- Small cars: generally 1,100-1,350kg.
- Medium cars: generally 1,350-1,550kg.
- Large cars: generally more than 1,550kg.

A minimum weight of around 1,350kg is recommended.

Regardless of the size of the car that you choose, make sure you consider the safety features that are available and look for cars that have the highest star ratings in their category.

New versus used.

Some new cars are not necessarily safer than older models and many used cars rate well in terms of safety. If you are looking for a used car, look out for cars that are fitted with key safety technologies such as curtain airbags and electronic stability control. If you are looking for a new car, consider cars with these features as standard or option up if possible.

Young drivers are more likely to buy older used cars but they also have a much greater risk of crashing than more experienced drivers, particularly in the first 12 months of solo driving. This makes the selection of their first car even more important. If you are helping your child to

purchase a car, ensure that safety is a priority.

Second hand doesn't have to mean unsafe because fortunately, there are a range of second hand cars that are affordable and provide good levels of protection.

Search howsafeisyourcar.com.au for safe used cars, or refer to the [first car buyers list](#) for some ideas.

4WDs.

4WDs are currently very popular, and while they may be seen as safer alternatives to smaller cars, it is important to be aware that they might handle differently to a passenger car. The higher seating position provides better vision for the driver, but the higher centre of gravity in relation to the wheel base can affect car handling in certain circumstances.

4WDs are more likely to be involved in roll over crashes, which are a major cause of spinal injury. Typically these crashes involve a single 4WD leaving the road on a straight section or curve and rolling over.

If you are considering a 4WD, look for safety features that can help you to avoid a rollover such as [electronic stability control](#) (ESC) and to help protect you in the event of a rollover such as [curtain airbags](#), side airbags, strong roof support pillars and other valuable crash avoidance and crash [protection features](#) in your 4WD.

Colour.

You might think black is chic, but a white car could save your life! A Monash University Accident Research Centre study demonstrated that white cars had the lowest crash risk in all types of light conditions (night/overcast/bright sun), while black cars were more likely to be involved in a crash, particularly in daylight hours. <http://www.monash.edu.au/muarc/reports/muarc263.html>

Opt for white or lighter colour cars to improve your visibility on the road.



small



medium



large



sports



luxury



passenger



4wd



commercial



Use this checklist as a guide when shopping around for your next car and add your own features to the list to reflect your personal preferences or travel needs.

What is the safety rating?

How well does the car perform in terms of the [Australasian New Car Assessment Program](#) (ANCAP) or the [Used Car Safety Ratings](#) (UCSR)?

While ANCAP and UCSR are not comparable, the more stars in either rating system the better!

ANCAP rating ★★★★★



ANCAP

Crash testing for safety

- Whichever system you use, aim for a four-star rating or above.
- Buy the safest car in the category (small/medium/large etc) that you can afford.

Intended use.

- Does the car meet your intended use?
- Off-road use
- Long distance travel
- General family motoring
- Child restraints
- Towing a caravan/trailer
- Sufficient storage space to secure items within the car and boot
- Everyday commuting

Safety Features.

- Does the car have all the safety features you want within the designated price range?

Crash protection.

- Seat belt pretensioners
- Load limiter seat belts
- Dual front airbags
- Curtain airbags and side impact protection
- Side airbags
- Knee airbags
- An anti-whiplash system
- Adjustable head restraints
- Cargo barrier
- Crumple zones

Crash avoidance.

- Anti-lock braking system (ABS)
- Electronic stability control (ESC)
- Emergency brake assist (EBA)
- Traction control
- Cruise control
- Active cruise control
- Reverse camera and/or sensors
- Automated daytime running lights
- White or another highly visible colour
- Intelligent speed adaptation (ISA) system

Driver comfort.

- Adjustable seating position
- Adjustable steering wheel
- Adjustable seatbelt height



- Electric adjustable mirrors
- Sufficient head and leg room
- Good all round visibility with no obstructions/
blind spots from the driver seat
- Easy to use of instruments/controls
eg cruise control, wipers
- Comfortable seating and lumbar
(lower back) support
- Power steering

Driveability.

During the inspection and test drive, did the car operate to your satisfaction? Consider this in terms of:

- Steering
- Braking
- Road handling (e.g. cornering, riding over bumps)
- Overtaking
- Reversing
- Ease of parking
- Blind spot issues
- Cooling and heating
- Turning circle

Features to avoid.

Consider other drivers and road users (pedestrians/cyclists) when you buy your car and avoid features that can cause unnecessary injury in the event of a crash.

- Bull bars
- Large 4WDs

Child safety.

Does the car suit your needs for child restraints/seats?

Remember, correctly fitted and properly adjusted child restraints provide protection for your children. Child restraint regulations require children aged up to 7 years to be seated in approved child restraints.

So when choosing your next car, consider the following:

- Lap/sash seat belts (3 point seat belts) in the
centre rear seat position
- Centre rear anchorage point (hook) for a child seat
- Are the seat belts long enough to thread
through the restraint when in its most
extended (reclined) position?
- If buying a hatch back, is there a clear path
between the back seat and the rear anchorage
point so that the parcel shelf doesn't interfere
with adjustment of the tether strap?
- Using a child restraint in people movers can
reduce the seating capacity. Is the number of people
you can carry reduced by fitting a child restraint?
- People movers do not always have anchorage
points for all seats. Where are the anchorage
points located?

So, you've done your research, you've shortlisted your cars and you've considered all the safety features when test driving your car. Now all you have to do is negotiate your price.



Paige: 31
2007 Hyundai Santa Fe Elite

The buyers guide was very useful. There were several cars we were deciding between and given we wanted a family car it was important to make the

right safety decision.

Using the comparison list made the decision easy. We were able to see at a glance how each car we liked stacked up against the others safety wise.

Fiona & Glyn: 30 – 40
Kia Sorrento



We used the buyers guide to compare cars and find one which was 5 star ANCAP rated and met the needs of our family. We eliminated cars from our list that did not meet the 5 star standards.

We also used the site to find out about fitting child seats safely.

Sam: 27
Mazda 3

The buyer's guide explained what the different safety features are and how they could protect me in a crash. This helped me to decide which safety features were important when choosing my car.



Jodi: 46
2006 VE Commodore Sedan

We used the buyers guide to narrow down the list of car makes and models that met our requirements which were a minimum 4 star safety rating, large car or station wagon.



Bruce: 33
Ford Territory

It showed me which safety features to look for and why. ESC and curtain airbags were the features I was looking for.



With my wife and kids always in the car, I had to make sure they were as safe as possible.

Hayley: 27
Volkswagen Golf 2010 TDi

I first just searched the site for the top rated safety cars in the small cars category narrowing it down to a Ford Focus, a Mazda 3 and the Golf.



The main thing that swayed to the Golf was the near perfect score for the side impact crash. I really liked the the side, curtain and drivers knee airbags as standard and the ESC safety features.



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