

Muscle Cars and Driver Fatality Statistics

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According to recent data from the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety (IIHS), American muscle cars known for their robust horsepower and iconic hot rod aesthetics pose significant dangers on the road, not only to their own drivers but also to other road users. The IIHS has been periodically calculating driver death rates since 1989, and this year, for the first time, they've extended their analysis to evaluate the best and worst vehicle models concerning the number of fatalities among other drivers involved in accidents with these vehicles.

The findings shed light on the risks associated with different vehicle types. Notably, six out of the 21 vehicles with the highest driver death rates for the 2020 model year belong to the Chevrolet Camaro, Dodge Challenger, Dodge Charger, and Ford Mustang families, while eight others come from the small car or minicar categories. Conversely, 18 out of 23 vehicles with the lowest driver death rates are minivans or SUVs, and 12 of them are luxury vehicles.

When considering the number of fatalities of other drivers in accidents with these vehicles, the dynamics change, highlighting the potential dangers of large vehicles to other road users. Some Dodge muscle cars, known for their high driver death rates, also perform poorly in terms of other-driver fatalities, suggesting aggressive driving behavior with these vehicles.



Highest vs Lowest Rates

Among the 20 vehicles with the highest other-driver death rates, seven are large or very large pickups and four more are midsize SUVs, which are not represented among the worst performers in terms of protecting their own drivers. Notably, seven of the vehicles with the highest other-driver death rates are also among the worst driver-death rates. This group includes the Dodge Challenger two-wheel-drive, Dodge Charger two-wheel-drive, Dodge Charger HEMI two-wheel-drive, Kia Forte, Kia Optima, Kia Rio sedan, and Nissan Altima.

In contrast, the list of vehicles with the lowest other-driver death rates includes two small, two midsize, and one large car, along with six small and ten midsize SUVs, as well as ten luxury models.

The IIHS statistics only consider driver deaths since all vehicles on the road have drivers, but not all have passengers or the same number of passengers. The data is derived from the federal Fatality Analysis Reporting System, while registration data comes from IHS Markit. These latest statistics are based on fatalities that occurred between 2018 and 2021 for vehicles from the 2020 model year, as well as earlier models with similar designs and features.

Driver death rates and safety ratings serve as complementary tools for evaluating vehicle safety, as they address different aspects of risk. IIHS safety ratings are helpful for comparing vehicles of the same size category but not for comparing small and large cars or cars and SUVs. In contrast, driver death rates can be compared across different vehicle classes, although they also take into account driver age and gender.

Unsettling Numbers

A comparison of the best and worst performers reveals that factors like crash avoidance systems and advanced safety features, often standard on luxury vehicles, can significantly influence these outcomes. Luxury cars with lower driver and other-driver death rates often offer similar or even greater horsepower than some of the muscle cars with higher fatality rates. The distinction may lie in the image and perception of these vehicles, with luxury cars emphasizing ease and comfort while muscle cars evoke associations with high performance and racing.

Zooming out to observe broader trends, the average driver death rate for all 2020 and equivalent models increased to 38 deaths per million registered vehicle years, compared to 36 for 2017 models. This rise coincides with a larger number of U.S. traffic fatalities over the studied period. Minicars had the highest driver death rates, averaging 153 deaths per million registered vehicle years, while very large luxury cars had the lowest rates, averaging only four deaths. Conversely, very large pickups had the highest other-driver death rates, averaging 121 deaths, while small sports cars had the fewest other-driver deaths, averaging only 11 per million registered vehicle years.

Recap

The variations in driver and other-driver death rates underline the importance of considering both vehicle design and driver behavior when assessing road safety. Ultimately, these statistics provide valuable insights into the dangers associated with different vehicle types and driving styles, helping drivers make more informed choices when selecting their next automobile.

This other article may offer you more insights on road safety: [Motorcyclist Safety A Call to Action](#)