

New baby, new car?

Top 10 must-have safety features

Your family is growing and you can't make do with either the two-wheeler or the two-seater any more. If you're buying a new car for the family, look out for these features and know how to use them for optimal safety, suggest our experts...

Words Priti Salian

Visual Mother & Baby Picture Library

1 SAFETY BELTS
Vehicles with seat belts in all positions are a specification one should look into. "It is perhaps the most important safety feature that a car can offer and must be used by all occupants," says Jeya Padmanaban, President and Founder, J P Research, (an automotive safety consulting firm in California), who has been performing statistical analyses of motor vehicle accident data to address vehicle safety and occupant injury experience for over 20 years.

2 GOOD ALL ROUND VISIBILITY FOR DRIVERS
This is a must. There are a few cars in which driver view is restricted by the windshield pillar, especially during turning. Test driving can help you check visibility problems.

3 GOOD SERVICES
While it may not seem important, it is absolutely essential to find Original Equipment Manufacturers (OEMs), who provide additional service features such as on-road emergency service facilities, GPS, etc. "These service features can give peace of mind in the event of a breakdown, tyre burst, unfamiliar locations, etc," says Jeya.

4 CHILD SEAT BELTS AND REAR SEAT BELTS
It is important to have children seated and belted in the rear, and child seats must be used, especially for infants and toddlers. You must also check for pre-installed rigid anchor points to mount a child seat.

5 CHILD-LOCK DOORS AND POWER WINDOWS WITH DRIVER OVER-RIDE BUTTONS
"This is a very important feature and a must for a family with kids," says KK Gandhi, Executive Director (Technical), Society of Indian Automobile Manufacturers (SIAM), and most parents would agree with this too. Child-lock doors prevent children from opening doors from inside, which could be dangerous, especially if done while the car is in motion. "Power windows with driver over-ride buttons give full control of the power windows to the driver and is essential for child safety," Jeya points out.

6 FIRE-RESISTANT INTERIOR MATERIALS
Using flame-retardant materials for the ceiling, seats and carpets makes your car safer in case of fire and offers a safer environment for your child.

7 AIRBAGS
Airbags are Supplemental Restraint Systems (you will see SRS inscribed on steering wheels and instrument panels of cars equipped with airbags). This means that airbags are not effective on their own, but only when the occupant is using a seat belt. Hence, one must always remember to buckle up in an airbag-equipped vehicle. Airbags are designed and calibrated to not deploy in minor crashes, but only deploy in crashes severe enough to warrant their use.

8 ANTI-LOCK BRAKING SYSTEM (ABS)
This is a braking system meant for prevention of wheel lock-up and skidding, that is, it prevents skids under adverse conditions.

9 ELECTRONIC STABILITY CONTROL (ESC)
This is an added safety feature that provides better driver control during slippery road conditions or sudden steering maneuvers such as avoiding an object in the middle of the road.

10 ACTIVE HEAD RESTRAINTS
These are helpful when the car is struck from the rear. They protect the driver's head during a crash and prevent whiplash injuries.

