

Car Insurance For Younger Drivers

Pound of flesh?

Insurance for younger drivers is astronomically high – even if their chosen car is a 10-year old 1.0-litre shopping trolley. Is there anything that can be done to lower the premiums or will they have to put up and shut up? Neil Hopkins looks into it...

When I was in my final year of A-levels, most people had passed their driving tests and very quickly 6 cars were written off. One was rolled into a ditch, one driven onto a soft verge and spun into a telegraph pole; one leapt off the road, hit a hedge, somersaulted and rolled four times landing on its roof. Another was wiped out by a driver overshooting a 30mph junction at 60mph (which wasn't the fault of my 17-year old classmate) and the others were simply driven into other vehicles. Accidents such as these are the reason, so insurance companies tell us, that premiums for young drivers are so incredibly high. Pottering to and from the school in my vintage VW Beetle, I resented paying through the nose for someone else's stupidity.

You can, almost, understand the insurance company's point. However, it is also worth remembering that a 26-year old who has been driving for two days will have a lower insurance premium than a 21 year old who passed his test first time when he was 17. But wait – I nearly forgot, all under 25s are baseball cap wearing, monosyllabic anti-authoritarians whose notion of a speed limit is how many pills they can pop in one night, aren't they?

So, what are the options? Should there be more than one car in your household, you could put the youngest driver on one of the policies as a named driver. This will increase your premium substantially and also will not amass them any no claims discount. The other option of course is to get a small, cheap, undesirable car that will hopefully be low on the insurance group. Once the car is in your possession, keep it in a garage and ensure that it has a decent alarm system as this should erode the premium slightly.

Small, cheap, undesirable? Not many teenagers would gladly go for that. And of course, if you are thinking of buying something like this for your son or daughter, there is also the safety aspect to consider. Your child might be the best driver on the planet, safe, conscientious, law-abiding and generally spot on – but not everyone else on the road is. Older cars won't have all of the safety bells and whistles of newer vehicles and, should the worst occur, your child stands a greater chance of injury. In addition, older vehicles won't have ABS or the sheer power to get you out of situations. Organisations such as Learn And Live do sterling work campaigning for extra safety and tests for young drivers, but even they feel that items such as ABS encourage speeding, since the driver is confident in the knowledge that the extra power can be scrubbed off. However, what about the situations that no-one can prepare for – the car pulling out blindly in front of you, the children suddenly running out between two parked cars with less than 2 feet to spare? Without ABS, the younger driver could collide with the hazard – through no fault of their own. And who will be the first person to be blamed? All those under 25 raise your hands...

One thing that won't help is knowingly inflaming your insurance policy. Modifications, stereos, non-stock alloy wheels and the like will all add about pounds to your premium and should be carefully thought out before you splash out on the kit.

There are certain things that you can do to make your premium more affordable. The golden rule is always shop around, play the companies off against each other and sooner or later you'll come up with a nearly acceptable quote. In addition, don't smoke, get married, and own your home, and, if possible, take the Pass Plus exam – it can knock as much as 10% from your premium. If these are impractical, then simply fit an alarm, grin and bear it. It will get better – one day and thousands of pounds away...

