

are you a dangerous driver?

We partnered with the **American Automobile Association** for a survey about what you're *really* doing behind the wheel. BY veronica byrd

In 2005 alone, **6,000** teens and young adults ages 15–20 **died** in car crashes—the number-one cause of teen deaths in the US. Here's what you need to know to protect yourself.



bang-up job
Mischa Barton caused a fender bender in L.A. in February while driving her pal Nicole Richie's Mercedes SUV.

Watch where you're going, Mischa!

10,000 crashes happen every year because the driver is distracted.

YOUR SCARY HABIT: BEING DISTRACTED!



driving with FRIENDS

backseat driver
The gossip can wait, Jessica: Keep your eyes on the road!



talking on the CELL

hello back
How can Jess pay attention to traffic with her cell—and her pooch?!



driving and TEXTING

well-connected
Hope Jessica was parked for her at-the-wheel text break.

58% of teens said they drive with friends in the vehicle!

51% of teens talk on their cell phones while driving!

46% of teens text on their cell phones while driving!

SAFER BET: Don't pile pals into your car, and set ground rules, like no asking you to change a CD as you are driving. If you *have* to make a call or send a text, use a hands-free device, or pull into a parking lot.

"A SMALL DISTRACTION KILLED MY FRIENDS"

I was driving friends to a school dance when one of them asked for gum. I reached to get it and took my eyes off the road for a second. I was going 70 mph and my SUV drifted into the next lane. When I looked up, I panicked and overcorrected, and the car spun out of control. Two of my friends were thrown from the car—and died. It shook me to my core. You don't think glancing away will lead to something so devastating, but it can. —ASHLEY, 19, ALISO VIEJO, CA



happier times
Ashley (above, right) and her friends before the accident.

YOUR SCARY HABIT: DRINKING!



detour ahead
Paris Hilton was charged with alcohol-related reckless driving in September 2006.

11% of teens admitted to driving while under the influence of alcohol or drugs.

SAFER BET: You know it's illegal for you to drink and do drugs, but if you or your ride have been partying, call a taxi or find a sober friend.

16,800 car crashes a year are caused by drinking and driving.

"I KILLED MY BEST FRIEND AFTER A NIGHT OF DRINKING"

In February 2006, I was hanging out with my best friend, Laura, 18, at a club, where we danced and drank. As I drove her back to her dorm, I was so out of it, I didn't realize I was losing control of the car. Suddenly I ran off the road and slammed into a tree. Laura died at the scene. I was devastated—and was later charged with DUI manslaughter. Now I may spend 10 to 15 years in prison. One bad decision changed my life. I'm so sorry. I wish it had been me instead of Laura. —JESSICA, 20, ST. PETERSBURG, FL



bad ending
Laura (left) was killed after partying with her friend Jessica (right).

YOUR SCARY HABIT: SPEEDING!



end of the road
Drew Barrymore got pulled over for speeding in L.A.

40% of teens say they have exceeded the speed limit by 10 mph or more.

12,000 traffic accidents each year involve speeding.

SAFER BET: Leave 15 minutes earlier than you normally would so you won't feel pressured to floor it because you're running late.

SAFE HABIT!

WEAR A SEAT BELT

It takes only a few seconds to fasten your seat belt—and it could save your life. Just think: **67%** of teens killed in car accidents last year weren't wearing their seat belts—while **15,000** people in crashes are still alive thanks to having one on.



"MY SEAT BELT SAVED MY LIFE"

I was driving home from work after it had rained. I was going the speed limit, but it was so slippery, my car slid off the side of the road. I panicked and jerked the wheel, and my Volkswagen Bug flipped over several times and landed in a ditch. But because I was wearing my seat belt, I had only a cut on my stomach and a bruised leg. I'm so grateful. —BRITTANY, 17, BAMBERG, SC

BARTON: X17ONLINE.COM (2); SIMPSON (FROM LEFT): X17ONLINE.COM (2); FLYNET/MC/JEREMY; STATISTICS ARE BASED ON AN AAA/SEVENTEEN SURVEY OF 16- AND 17-YEAR-OLD LICENSED OR PERMITTED DRIVERS, CONDUCTED IN MAY 2007.

HILTON: (MAIN) X17ONLINE.COM; (INSET) COURTESY OF FOX. BARRYMORE: X17ONLINE.COM (2).