

How to make your car's safety features work for you

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This undated photo provided by General Motors shows the 2019 Chevrolet Traverse. The latest driver safety aids are available on the Traverse, but only on certain trim levels and configurations. (General Motors via AP)

Drivers are used to traditional passive safety features, such as airbags and seat belts, that help limit injury in case of an accident. But vehicle safety is changing dramatically. The latest vehicles have safety features that can help prevent an accident in the first place. A potential problem,

however, is that drivers aren't fully ready for them.

According to a 2018 report by the AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety , a significant number of [drivers](#) with new vehicles don't know what these new advanced driver [safety](#) systems can do. Others do not trust them or assume they provide greater security than they actually do. If your car has some of these advanced safety systems, or you're planning on buying a new car soon, here's what you need to know.

ADVANCED SAFETY FEATURES HELP PREVENT CRASHES

The most common advanced driver safety aids include forward collision warning with automatic emergency braking; lane departure warning or lane keeping assist; blind-spot monitoring; and rear cross-traffic alert and/or rear automatic braking. In general, these systems use a variety of sensors to identify and warn the driver about possibly hazardous situations. If the driver doesn't take action, the [vehicle](#) can also potentially mitigate or avoid an accident by applying its own corrective braking and steering.

The Insurance Institute for Highway Safety has studied these technologies by comparing rates of police-recorded crashes and insurance claims for vehicles with and without the [features](#). For example, the rate of front-to-rear crashes involving a vehicle with a forward collision warning system and automatic braking is 50 percent lower than when a car without such a system is involved.

HOW TO SHOP FOR A CAR WITH THESE FEATURES

The rapid change in safety technology is difficult for car shoppers to assimilate. Few people pay attention to new features in the car market until it's time to buy a new car. Automakers try to explain and hype their own systems, but the various branded names such as Safety Sense P, Co-

Pilot360 and SafetyTec can just sound like a lot of mumbo jumbo to the uninitiated.

Additionally, the availability of these features can vary greatly. Certain models might offer them, but only as options and only on certain trim levels. Take the popular Chevrolet Traverse crossover SUV, for example. Blind-spot monitoring is either not available, optional or standard depending on which trim level and powertrain you select. Want forward collision warning, automatic braking and lane departure warning? They aren't available at all until you pony up for the Traverse's most expensive trim levels.

Walking into a dealership and just picking a vehicle off the lot is a recipe for confusion and not getting what you want. A better way is to do your research beforehand. For a new vehicle you're interested in, look up on the internet what the automaker calls its [safety features](#) and examine the features associated with the vehicle's trim levels. You can also ask a knowledgeable salesperson.

LEARN HOW YOUR CAR'S FEATURES OPERATE

You've bought a car that has these advanced safety features. Now what? For example, what if your car starts beeping at you? Did you cross a lane marker? Approach a car ahead too quickly? Not use your turn signal? If you don't recognize the warning signal, it might be too late to react. Many respondents in the AAA survey noted they weren't sure how these features operated in their vehicles until after they owned them. Useful explanations from the dealership salesperson at the time of purchase can be hit or miss.

The solution is to familiarize yourself with the operation of your car as much as possible. Reading the owner's manual and watching online videos from the manufacturer are good steps to take. Another resource is

MyCarDoesWhat, a site sponsored by the National Safety Council and the University of Iowa. And, in general, just remember that these systems exist to support your driving, not take it over fully. The autonomous car isn't here yet.

EDMUNDS SAYS: Advanced safety features are becoming available on more new cars each year. Smart car shoppers should do their research to make the most of them.

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