

The Issue: AUTOMOBILE MONITORING DEVICES

Should automobiles be equipped with monitoring devices? Automobile monitoring devices allow parents to check up on teenage drivers. The devices provide information about location, speed, and driving habits. Some parents and insurance companies favor monitoring teenage drivers with automobile devices in hopes of reducing risky driving behaviors and accidents. Critics contend that using the devices sends teenagers the message that their parents do not trust them. They argue that use of the devices may also violate the privacy rights of young drivers.

You will read articles about the issue and take a position for or against parents using automobile monitoring devices to check up on their teens. Your school's parent-teacher organization is promoting the use of automobile monitoring devices. Using information from *both* articles, you must write a letter to the president of the parent-teacher organization either supporting or opposing parents using the devices to monitor their teens' driving habits.

Source One

This article appeared in *The Washington Post* on March 2, 2005. It presents the opinions of both parents and teenagers about automobile monitoring devices.

Parents Hand out Keys and a Monitoring Device

BY ELIZABETH WILLIAMSON

When Ben Ellison, 15, gets his driver's license next month, he dreams of driving a midnight blue, low-riding Honda with monster horsepower, a performance exhaust system and, inside, blue neon rods that glow with each bass beat from the stereo.

Instead, he'll drive a Mazda, with a computer chip that spies on every ride.

"If I wasn't into tuning my car, I think maybe this wouldn't have happened," Ben said last week, swinging his Mazda 626 onto a highway in Easton, Md., on a practice drive as he—and the monitor—noted his speed.

"It's pretty cool technology and all," he said, glancing at the matchbook-size device plugged into the steering column near the knees of his cargo pants. "But after a while, this is going to be so annoying."

Figuring their children are better off annoyed than dead, parents have opened a new front in the battle to lower teenagers' accident rates. Using technology employed by truck fleets to monitor drivers, families are spending as much as \$2,500 for microcomputers and "black boxes" that feed speed and braking data into a home computer; cockpit video cameras; Global Positioning System devices that track teenagers through their cell phones; and lower-tech surveillance, such as the Tell-My-Mom.com bumper sticker.

"No one's done a study yet that shows these new methods work," said Ronald Knipling, a research scientist at the Virginia Tech Transportation Institute who has led a research forum on electronic monitoring. "But it's a very promising idea."

Ben voiced the reaction of many teens. "My friends," he said, turning his car toward home, "think it's whack."

Before his practice drive last week, Ben sat in the living room of his family's waterfront house on the Eastern Shore hearing, one more time, why CarChip is a good idea.

"It's not that I'm worried about your skills . . . I'm worried about your judgment, which comes as you get older," said his stepfather, Phil Bowman, who bought the \$140 device. "It's a way to prove your ability to be out there on your own."

Bowman, originally from Bethesda, said that when he was young, he got so many speeding tickets that his license was suspended.

"But I don't want to be judged by your mistakes," Ben replied.

Ben's mother, Susan Schauer, said that when she can't be in the passenger seat, "you know there's a device that's paying attention."

"I feel old enough to start gaining some privacy," Ben said.

"I don't think how you drive is private," his stepfather responded.

They'll remove the CarChip, they've agreed, when Ben is 18.

The family's conversation is at the heart of monitoring systems' effectiveness, said Susan Ferguson, senior vice president for research at the Arlington-based Insurance Institute for Highway Safety.

"When people know they're being monitored, they can change their behavior," she said. "Assuming we had a study that said, 'Whoa, this can make a difference in crash rates,' we still have to ask: Are the parents willing to be more involved?"

Experience with the new systems and new research point to old-fashioned parental communication as the best way to instill good driving habits. In a National Institute of Child Health and Human Development study released last week, parents of 16-year-olds reviewed newsletters and a video with facts about risky practices, then drew up written agreements spelling out consequences for engaging in each bad habit. The limits, researchers found, stayed in place up to a year, the riskiest time for young drivers.

"Teens whose parents had restrictions on their initial driving experience reported engaging in less risky driving later on," said Bruce Simons-Morton, a research chief at the institute and the study's lead author. "There is a use for electronic monitoring devices. But there's a tendency for parents to be a little more passive than they should be."

Joanne Devens agrees. Harder than watching a video of the accident her daughter Stephanie had, she said, was establishing consequences for Stephanie's careless driving.

Devens, of Mankato, Minn., had a camera installed in Stephanie's Saturn last year as part of a 26-week trial involving a dozen Minnesota high school students, organized by the Mayo Clinic. Mounted near the rearview mirror, it filmed Stephanie, then 16, without her seat belt, chatting on the phone, joking with passengers, fiddling with the radio.

It wasn't long before the camera captured the car flying off a curve into a snowy ditch. "She was dialing her cell phone," Joanne Devens said. She saw her daughter's terrified face and heard "this blood-chilling scream," Devens said. "Thankfully, she didn't get hurt."

Was she punished?

"Yes and no . . . I kind of gave in," she said.

Though the camera was designed to monitor truck drivers, parents have begun ordering the \$1,400 device, inspiring its manufacturer to plan a consumer version, said Rusty Weiss, director of product management for DriveCam Video Systems of San Diego.

During the trial, students' near misses, swerves and hard braking that trigger the camera dropped from 24 a week to nearly zero, he said. Seat-belt use rose from one-third of students to nearly all.

The camera has helped reduce truckers' accident rates as much as 70 percent, but, Weiss said, "there has to be somebody judging the performance."

Devens has begun to curtail her daughter's driving privileges for carrying other teens in the car and not wearing a seat belt. But she acknowledged she could do more. "I think parents have to be stronger than I was and have more consequences," she said.

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Source Two

The following article appeared in *The Wall Street Journal* on February 23, 2005. It describes various automobile monitoring devices and the reactions of parents and teenagers to the devices.

A Back-Seat Driver for Your Teen's Car

BY MICHELLE HIGGINS

It used to be that teenagers had to worry about their little brother or sister snitching on them. Now, big brother is watching, too.

A new class of monitoring devices is hitting the market that lets parents keep close tabs on how their kids are behaving behind the wheel—whether they're driving recklessly, whether they're wearing seat belts, whether they are really just going to the library like they promised. Based on technology long used by trucking companies to track driver behavior, the gadgets, which typically are installed under the dashboard, can track a vehicle's acceleration, braking and distance traveled.

Some of the new devices are interactive, capable of notifying parents if their child speeds or drives beyond a predefined boundary—like to a boyfriend's house, or Tijuana. Depending on the product, the alerts come via e-mail, phone or logging onto a Web site.

Alltrack USA, an online retailer that offers a product it calls Real-Time Tracking, even sells a \$40 add-on that lets parents immediately tell their kid to knock it off. From their computer, they can flash a light on the dashboard or blow the car's horn at the driver. It also allows parents to prevent a car from being restarted once it's parked somewhere.

Gadgets like these can range in price from \$140 or so for a basic system without instant tracking, to more than \$400 plus monthly fees for options that use global-positioning satellite technology. In about a month, for instance, Road Safety International Inc., maker of the RS-1000 Teen Driving System, plans to add an optional GPS receiver that will push up the total cost of that product to about \$480 from about

\$280 now. Currently, its device records the car's speed and other data that parents can only retrieve later.

Like nannycams and other observational equipment, the teen trackers raise tough issues for parents. On the one hand, motor-vehicle crashes are the top cause of death among teens. On the other, of course, is the value of treating a young adult as someone worthy of trust.

When Jeff Auerbach put a tracking device in the car used by his 16-year-old son, Andrew, the two of them went shopping for it together. "What I didn't want it to be was sort of a 'gotcha' spy program," says Mr. Auerbach, a patent attorney in Rockville, Md. His hope was that since Andrew knew someone could be checking up on him, he'd be inclined to drive safely all the time.

Andrew says he was a little upset at first. "It's not the greatest feeling" knowing that someone might be watching, he says. But he also says it provided a helpful excuse once when a friend urged him to see how fast his car would go. "It was very, very easy to just say 'no, it's got a tracker system.'"

Similar technology is also being used by car-alarm makers to help prevent theft and recover stolen vehicles. For example, Directed Electronics Inc.'s Viper GPS Tracking System—a device designed to add tracking capabilities to the company's car alarms, but which also has teen-tracking capabilities—can, among other things, alert the car's owner if the alarm is activated.

Insurance companies are also starting to get interested in technology like this. Progressive Insurance, Mayfield Village, Ohio, is running a 5,000-car pilot program in Minnesota using a device that records speed and

other data. Participants, in return for letting the insurer track their driving patterns, can qualify for insurance discounts of up to 25%.

The most basic devices (the ones without GPS or e-mail capabilities) simply plug into the computer that most cars these days have. It records a couple days' worth of data, such as when your teen (or anyone else who uses the vehicle, for that matter) started the car, how far it went and at what speeds. To see the data, a user must unplug the device from the car and hook it up to a PC.

More-powerful versions, which either offer instant e-mail or real-time access via a Web page, never have to be removed from the car. But since some of them use cellular-phone networks to transmit the data, they may require monthly fees of up to nearly \$70 in some cases.

There are dozens of products available with an array of brand names, but many of the devices are actually very similar, and are in fact manufactured by just a handful of companies including AirIQ Inc., Advanced Tracking Technologies and Discrete Wireless in Atlanta. For example, CSI Wireless Inc., based in Alberta, Calgary, makes the hardware and provides the software to Directed Electronics, a vehicle-security and remote-start company based in Vista, Calif., for its five GPS tracking products. Each of those products is sold under four different brands: Viper, Clifford, Python, and Automate.

Inger Falco of Northport, N.Y., found that even a basic model solved her son's problem with reckless driving. After he got in "more than one" accident, she says, she put a SmartDriver recording device in his car without telling him, and quickly saw that he was speeding, and also traveling on highways he was told not to take.

"Of course, he said that's very sneaky of you," she recalls. "But he got over it very quickly. It was either have this in your car, or don't drive."

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