Best Fun Cars for College Students

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Author Note

Deric Schettler is a senior at Southeast of Saline High School who is enrolled in one dual credit college course including English Composition 1. This research was conducted for two purposes: to determine the best automobile for the college student who is interested in cars for personal use and to assist others in their search for a fun, practical, trouble free vehicle for college use.

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Abstract

This paper first explores four evaluative consumer articles about best used cars for college students and seeks to find commonalities among the recommendations. Second, the author explores the qualities of the various vehicles that the author has chosen to evaluate. Third, the author seeks opinions of a car salesman as to which of the options is a good fun car for college. Finally, he recommends a specific car that he believes is the best choice for students looking for a reliable and fun college car.

Introduction

Although authors Wojno and Kruppo (2015) would argue that a college student doesn't need a car because of the added costs, one could also argue for the need of one. This need could be shown through the fact that based on the average taxi fare of about $.25 per eighth mile (US Taxicab Average, 2016), students without a car could spend thousands in transportation costs if they cannot get rides with their friends or if public transportation is not available in their area. This does not even include the hardship that one would have to go through to secure a ride home if they went to school in another city.

It is for this reason that a car is entirely needed for a student who is attending a university that is not located in a densely populated city. Not only should this car be reliable and safe, but it should also be fun to drive. Because of this, students and their parents should look at options that allow students to have a car that will both last long and t that they can enjoy too. So, this brings up the question, what is the best reliable but fun car for college?

Literature Review

There are many different media outlets that review, rate and compare cars. Some of those sources are *Motor Trend, Edmunds*, and *Car and Driver.*

The first of these resources, *Motor Trend* (MT), has a list that divides college cars into different levels of price ranges. These ranges go from $5,000 all the way up to $50,000. Each one of these different price ranges is then divided into subcategories. These subcategories are "sporty," "practical," and "honorable mentions." Along with their price range, the author of the article also sets requirements. Recommended cars had to be less than 10 years old, have less than 100,000 miles on the odometer and be relatively inexpensive to insure.

Within the $10,000 price range, both the Subaru Impreza WRX and the Mazdaspeed 3 were given praise. While the Subaru Impreza WRX was mentioned as the sporty option of category, the Mazdaspeed3 was listed as an honorable mention under both the "sporty" and "practical" divisions. (Udy, 2011)

MT's rating system may seem entirely subjective since they evaluate the "cool factor," but the rating team is still conscious of reliability. They do not make a sole recommendation but instead simply provide readers with an idea of good cars that would be in their price range.

The next of my sources is *Edmunds.com. Edmunds* is a website that allows users to view the features, value, consumer reviews, and an official review of a specific car. Instead of using a subjective rating system, Edmunds instead shows a classic five-star rating system based on its consumer reviews. Because the rating is based solely on consumer reviews and the official review is not counted in the rating system, Edmunds itself does not actually provide a recommendation on a car in this portion of their website, but instead only leads the reader to make his own decisions.

While *Edmunds* does not provide a recommendation in the consumer review and research portions of their websites, it does provide recommendations in other parts of its website. One of the articles that does this is "11 Best Cars for College Students." In this article, the author chooses 11 different vehicles by looking at things such as their cost of ownership, modern electronic features, and good crash safety ratings (Riswick, 2015).

Car and Driver is another source that uses driving tests to determine how good a car is. In these tests, the authors evaluate the comfort of the seats and the handling of the car, along with the power of the engine and the things that the multiple authors liked and did not like about the specific

car. This subjective system of determining the quality of a car allows the readers to determine which car would be best for their personal needs.

Discussion

There are many possible choices for a fun college car, and because of this deciding on one can be a very hard decision. Although there are many obvious choices for a cheap performance car, they have been left out as a result of their often poor reliability. Instead, the cars included in the evaluation are all cars that have ample storage capacity, overall good reliability, and enough power to warrant a given car as being "fun."

In order to find one of these fun college cars, a good strategy is to choose the car that one want and then search online classifieds such as Craigslist and Nextech. Both of these classifieds websites allow one to search for the car you want by the model name. In addition to a general search, the websites allow for slightly more specific criteria such as the type of transmission, the number of miles, and the year of the car.

Because cars are often popular with young adults, one needs to watch the advertisements very carefully and look for any sign that an advertised car may have been abused by its previous owner or owners as this can reduce reliability. These warning signs include things such as modifications, phrases in the ad like "very fast," and abnormal tire wear. While some of these may be easily overlooked, with a close look, one can usually pick out the obvious signs.

In order to begin searching for a college car on these websites, one must first decide exactly what particular car he wants. This can mean versatile hatchbacks such as the 2010 Mazdaspeed 3, sedans such as the 2006 Subaru Impreza WRX, and coupes such as the 2004 Mustang GT. Each of these body styles provide costs and benefits for consumers.

The first of these cars, the Mazdaspeed is the most versatile of the group. This is due to its hatchback bodystyle which allows for a large cargo space while still remaining fun due to its 264 brake horsepower (BHP) engine powering the front wheels through as six-speed gearbox. Another thing that makes it very appealing to college students is the fact that most insurance companies simply recognize the Mazdaspeed version of the 3 to be simply a trim of the base car. This ensures that insurance will be relatively cheap for young adults (Udy, 2011). One of the biggest drawbacks of this particular car is its need for premium fuel mixed with moderate fuel economy. These factors combined will cause the owner extra expenses in the long run.

The next car in this list is the Subaru Impreza WRX provides practicality while retaining its sporty looks. In sedan form (the most popular of the body styles), the WRX provides four doors with roomy back seats and a large trunk space which allows it to be very practical for college students. While the power figure comes in slightly lower than that of the Mazdaspeed, coming in at 230 BHP, it makes up for it by providing a powertrain that is able to apply it to the ground more effectively. This is carried out by a five-speed gearbox that is connected to the iconic Subaru symmetrical all wheel drive system. This system allows for the Subaru to navigate snow and other harsh weather conditions easily. In addition to the added safety provided by this drivetrain, the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety (IIHS) rated the Subaru the best rating of “good” for every

crash situation that it was tested in. According to car salesman Scott Sitton, “The subaru is probably the best car on this list as far as an all around car. They are super fun to drive, good on fuel, and they are very reliable” (S. Sitton, personal communication, December 7, 2016). The main drawback to this particular car is the fact that insurance is relatively high for the price. This is mostly because of the fact that these particular cars are very popular among young people who often wreck and get traffic violations. Because of this negative reputation, many insurance companies tend to insure them for a very high price.

The final car chosen for this evaluation is the 2004 Ford Mustang GT. With this car being a two door coupe, it does not offer the same storage capacity that the other two choices do. Also, with it being a coupe, insurance will be higher because it is classified as a sports car. Some other costs that come along with this particular choice are things such as a cramped backseat, poor gas mileage, and rear wheel drive that does not provide good traction in serious weather conditions. While this may not be the most practical car for college, it can be said to redeem itself based on its “fun” factor.” This is because of its torquey V8 engine that produces 275 BHP which is then transferred to the rear wheels through a five-speed transmission. One of the other main benefits of this choice is the reliability of it as these cars have been known to surpass well over 200,000 miles when maintained properly according to the official review on Car and Driver.

While each of these cars has its costs and benefits, each of them could be considered as a good, fun college car. Two of the three options can be described as this because of their mix of horsepower and practicality, while the other option, the Mustang, can be chosen because of its

superior reliability and horsepower ratings. Below is a table of criteria that was used in determining which cars should be used for this evaluation.

	Combined MPG	Horsepower/ Torque	Safety Rating	Reliability	Price	Drive
2006 Subaru WRX	20 MPG	230HP/235ft-lb	Very Good	Very Good	$9,500	AWD
2010 Mazdaspeed 3	21 MPG	263HP/280ft-lb	Good	Good	$10,000	FWD
2004 Mustang GT	18 MPG	275HP/302ft-lb	Good	Very Good	$8,000	RWD

Conclusions

Although Edmunds and Motor Trend judged their cars based on slightly different criteria, they were both came to the same conclusion. This conclusion was that the Mazdaspeed 3 and the Subaru Impreza WRX were both at the top of their class when it came to fun college cars. The only one left that didn't land on both of these lists was the 2004 Mustang GT, but I decided to include it anyway because of its high horsepower engine, good reliability, and abundance on the used car market.

Any of these cars would be great choices for a student looking to have a little fun at university, but I believe that only one can be said to be the ultimate fun college car. The car that I

think is deserving of this title is the Subaru Impreza WRX. I think this because it combines the four door and high storage capacity of the hatchback, and it has plenty of power, that because of its all wheel drive system can be driven in hazardous weather conditions without having to worry about losing control. While I believe this is the right car for me, potential buyers must take all of these options into consideration before buying their own car in order to find the right car for their driving style.

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