

Canberra Times
Letters Section

Andrew's Leigh article on 4WD safety last Friday will only continue to "fuel" the demand for 4WD vehicles in Australia.

Mr Leigh points rather alarmingly to the increase in fatalities that occur when a 4WD crashes into a normal sedan. Not surprisingly it seems one is much safer in the larger vehicle.

The problem with this evidence is that rather than turn us against 4WD vehicles it does the opposite. Looking only at this statistic, I am more likely to go out and buy a 4WD to protect myself and my family when on the dangerous roads of Canberra.

But it is important to highlight some other research that might make us all think twice about getting a 4WD. While it is true that in two-passenger collisions 4WD drivers fare better, the story is different when you look at single vehicle accidents.

In fact, the US Department of Transportation has ominously warned that 4WD vehicles give the illusion of safety. In recent years, the greatest increase in fatalities in has been in 4WD vehicles. Most of these deaths occur when flipping over the 4WD when driving fast or swerving around corners. Over the last 15 years, the death rate for these types of accidents has quadrupled for 4WD vehicles, whereas it has actually decreased for normal cars.

Perhaps it's because the 4WDs just keep getting bigger and more unstable? Or perhaps it is because 4WD drivers think they are invincible? Regardless, when you buy a 4WD you are not doing anything more to protect your family, you are only making it more likely that they will get hurt if you roll the vehicle.

A 4WD might make us less afraid of others on the roads, but in the end a normal car is better at protecting us from danger we face to ourselves.

Jean Hayden