Introduction

Over the past few years, cars have become noticeably larger than they were before. Cars such as SUVs and pickup trucks have become popular among drivers for their roomy interiors and ability to haul a larger amount of people and materials for projects. While the space that these cars provide is undeniable, there are safety concerns when it comes to their size, the drivers' viewability and the recklessness of their drivers.

Size

The most visually obvious issue with SUVs is their sheer size. Over the years, cars in general have grown in size. For example, a classic mini car was around 1.41 meters wide, 3.05 meters long and 1.35 meters tall. In comparison, the Mercedes Benz GLS 2020 is 1.96 meters wide, 5.21 meters long and 1.82 meters tall. While the increase in size is a positive for those riding in the car, providing them with more leg room and room for more people. The effects that it has on those outside of the car is a glaring issue. In the year 2000, the smaller size of cars provided cyclists with a lot of room to move safely between cars without putting themselves or the vehicles at risk. Measurements provided by Transportation Alternatives using an average sized 28 inch single lane road with two parking lanes showed that with the most popular car at the time (the Toyota Camory), cyclists had about 18 inches of space on either side between them and cars in both lanes. When comparing this same road to an SUV (specifically the 2021 Ford F-150), the cyclists had only 4 inches of space on either side of them between both cars. This increase in size and decrease in space for cyclists is hazardous to anyone looking to ride a bike in areas with cars. Pedestrians who aren't cyclists are also at risk of the size of these vehicles. When being hit by a normal sized car, the impact will be on the person's knees and/or legs, causing them to fall on top of the car. However, according to the article titled *Reducing the harms of even larger cars,* when getting struck by an SUV, "the pedestrian is more likely to be struck on the pelvis and then flung forward into the road, increasing the chance that the SUV rolls over them". This is even worse when it comes to pedestrians who happen to be children, as the impact from an SUV would strike them much higher, oftentimes resulting in them being struck in the head. A case of this type of injury happening was documented in May of 2021, where a pedestrian was struck as a SUV made a left turn. This accident resulted in the pedestrian having broken bones and a brain injury. According to Transportation alternatives, "The average driver in a Land Rover Defender cannot see a 4 year old child standing directly in front", the Land Rover Defender being a popular type of SUV. The risk is made even worse due to the limited visibility that drivers of SUVs have when driving.

Risks during pedestrian accidents

Getting hit by any car is already dangerous, but studies show that pedestrians being hit by SUVs are more at risk for serious injuries or even death. This doubled with the fact that drivers already struggle to even see pedestrians creates a great risk. According to an article by IIHS, “Pedestrian crash deaths have increased nearly every year since hitting a low point in 2009, rising 59 percent to top 6,500 fatalities in 2020”. The article suspects that this is due to an increase in vehicle sizes over the past decade. Research conducted by IIHS has also shown that “the odds that a crash that killed a crossing pedestrian involved a left turn by the vehicle versus no turn were about twice as high for SUVs, nearly 3 times as high for vans and minivans and nearly 4 times as high for pickups as they were for cars”. The statistics for crashes involving right turns at intersections are similar, with the chances being “89 percent higher for pickups and 63 percent higher for SUVs than for cars”. In locations outside of intersections, both SUVs and pickup trucks were 51 and 25 percent more likely to be involved in fatal accidents with pedestrians than cars. Studies conducted on the areas near intersections showed that “pickups were 42 percent more likely and SUVs were 23 percent more likely than cars to hit pedestrians when turning left” with right turns having similar statistics. After reviewing how limited the visibility is from these larger vehicles, it's highly likely that these accidents were due to the fact that the driver couldn’t see the crossing pedestrians.

Visibility

People often think that when being higher up, they’ll be able to see more than they would if they were lower to the ground. While this may be the case for balconies and towers, that's not how it works when it comes to cars. In SUVs, drivers sit higher up than those driving other cars where some of their view is blocked by the hood of the car as well as the sides of the vehicle. The thickness of the A frames that connect to the roof of the car also block the driver's view, this on top of the elevation makes it hard to view things or people around the car. Even though the drivers will still be able to see other cars on the road, they are at greater risk of hitting pedestrians. A study conducted by KMBC news wanted to test the visibility from an SUV, 18 children were placed in front of one of the common types of SUVs. When the car driver sat behind the wheel he said “I can’t see any of them”. Being able to see pedestrians is obviously important to drivers, and while drivers may be able to spot taller pedestrians, it's clear that children or anyone short is at a great risk of being struck by one of these larger vehicles.

Conclusion

After going over research, statistics and news articles of the dangers of larger cars such as SUVs and pickup trucks, it's clear that although they may be appealing to

many drivers due to their size and space, they provide too much of a risk. Even if there are positives to the larger size of an SUV, the rates at which they have ended lives cannot be ignored. Their size on top of the limited visibility make them dangerous to have on the roads without proper regulations. While vehicles like semi trucks are also very large and powerful, they serve a different purpose and are not used casually like SUVs and pickups. Perhaps with new regulations and permits for these vehicles, they can be made safer and used less (especially in residential areas).

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