

15 Passenger Vans:

The Propensity to Rollover:15 Passenger Van Safety and Legal Resources

There are over 500,000 fifteen passenger vans are on the road in America. These large vans are widely used by churches and community organizations. Colleges also use them to drive sports teams to games. As such, many drivers of these vehicles are not familiar with the dangerous characteristics and propensities of these vans to rollover during emergency situations.

Ford Motor Co. builds and sells most 15 passenger vans on the highway in the U.S although Chrysler and General Motors build similar sized vehicles. The Ford models include the E350 and Club Wagon E350. Chrysler produced the Dodge Ram Wagon B350 and Ram Van/Wagon B3500. General Motors produced the Chevrolet Express 3500, the GMC Savana, and the Rally/Vandura G3500. The same basic inherent problems that make the Ford 15 passenger vans so dangerous are present in the Chrysler and GM versions.



Van Rollover Lawsuits

The injury law firm of The Law Offices of Berglund & Johnson represents families across the U.S. in vehicle rollover accident lawsuits against the van manufacturers. In these cases the vans have significant design defects and safety omissions that include allegations that the vans are:

1. Difficult to handle and prone to over-steering and loss of control;
2. Unstable when loaded, leading to deadly rollover crashes; and
3. Not crashworthy in that the roofs crush under foreseeable loads and the windows are not laminated and pop out during rollovers, resulting in deaths that should otherwise have been easily survivable.



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4. Designed with seatbelts that are defective and confusing thereby causing passengers to be effectively unbelted causing occupant ejection during rollover.

Rollover safety and Background of 15 Passenger Van Lawsuits

Recently, the larger 15 passenger vans have appeared in news stories for having a tendency to roll over, particularly in the case of inexperienced operators. The van body is taller than the cab and bed of the pickup that uses the same style frame and power-train resulting in the basic van having a higher center of gravity than a similarly loaded pickup from which it is derived. The suspension is also higher because of the extreme weight capacity of 15 passengers of between 150 lb (68 kg) and 200 lb (91 kg) each which may be over one ton of passengers alone. The seats in the passenger version raise the load, passengers, above the floor, further raising the center of gravity and often shifting it rearward. The bench seats allow passengers to slide if safety belts are not used. In the United States it is common for only the front seat passengers to use their safety belts, perhaps because belted passengers feel they can still lean and shift a large amount and/or passengers feel as though they are in a bus or other common carrier where seat belts are commonly not used. However, the NHTSA, cited below, has determined that belted passengers are about 4 times more likely to survive in rollover crashes.

Safety can be greatly improved by understanding the unique characteristics of 12- & 15-passenger vans and by following a special set of guidelines developed for drivers, according to the U.S. National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA). A summary of this information is discussed below. Among other things, this document advises that carrying 10 or fewer passengers (preferably towards the front of the van) greatly reduces the risk of rollover crashes, and suggests that repeated operation by the same drivers tends to increase their ability to handle these vehicles more safely over time. Car rental companies have also started adding stickers to warn renters about the difference in handling compared to standard cars. In addition, Items should not be added to a roof rack of an already top-heavy vehicle.

PRODUCING THE RISK OF ROLLOVER CRASHES IN 15-PASSENGER VANS

Fifteen-passenger vans typically have seating positions for a driver and



14 passengers. They are widely used by community organizations to take members on short trips and outings. Colleges use them to drive sports teams to intercollegiate games and vanpools use them for commuters. What increases the risk of rollover crashes? Recent research conducted by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) has found that the risk of a rollover crash is greatly increased when 10 or more people ride in a 15-passenger van. This increased risk occurs because the passenger weight raises the vehicle's center of gravity and causes it to shift rearward. As a result, the van has less resistance to rollover and handles differently from other commonly driven passenger vehicles making it more difficult to control in an emergency situation. Placing any load on the roof also raises the center of gravity and increases the likelihood of a rollover.

What Situations Can Cause A Rollover? A rollover crash is a complex event, heavily influenced by driver and road characteristics as well as the design of the vehicle. In studies of single-vehicle crashes, NHTSA has found that more than 90 percent of rollovers occur after a driver has lost control of the vehicle and has run off the road. Three major situations can lead to a rollover in a 15-passenger van.

- The van goes off a rural road. If this occurs, the van is likely to overturn when it strikes a ditch or embankment or when it is tripped by an object or when sliding in soft soil.
- The driver is fatigued or driving too fast for conditions. A tired driver can doze off and lose control. The driver can also lose control when traveling at a high speed causing the van to slide sideways off the road. The grassy or dirt medians that line highways can often cause the van to overturn when the tires dig into the dirt.
- The driver overcorrects the steering as a panic reaction to an emergency or to a wheel dropping off the pavement. Especially at freeway speeds, this situation can cause the driver to lose control, resulting in the van sliding sideways and rolling over.
- A tire blows out or delaminates causing an unstable steering condition. In this situation, the unstable steering condition is magnified by the high center of gravity and poor suspension design of these vehicles thereby causing the vehicle to rollover.

What can organizations do to protect their passengers? Over the past decade, 80 percent of people killed in rollover crashes in 15-passenger vans were unbelted. Passengers can dramatically reduce their risk of being killed or seriously injured in a rollover crash by simply using their seat belts. Organizations that own 15-passenger vans should have a written seat belt use policy. Drivers should be responsible for enforcing the policy. However, the seat belt systems in some large vans have been alleged to be defective and/or confusing resulting in non-use by some passengers.

Seat belt use is especially critical because large numbers of people die in rollover

crashes when they are partially or completely thrown from the vehicle. NHTSA estimates that people who wear their seat belts are about 75 percent less likely to be killed in a rollover crash than people who don't.

Does an experienced driver make a difference? Significant differences in the design and handling characteristics of a 15-passenger van make it drive differently from other passenger vehicles. Therefore, an organization that owns a 15-passenger van should select one or two experienced drivers to drive the van on a regular basis. These drivers will gain valuable experience handling the van. This experience will help make each trip a safe one.

How can rollover crashes be prevented? Because most rollover crashes don't involve other vehicles, they are often preventable. Here are some tips for drivers to minimize the risk of a rollover crash and serious injury:



HELPFUL TIPS TO AVOID 15 PASSENGER VAN ROLLOVER ACCIDENTS

If you are a driver or occupant of a 15 passenger van you are at risk for serious physical injuries. There are steps that you can take to help prevent dangerous rollover accidents which include staying calm and thinking clearly in the event of an accident or rollover.

Read the instruction manual for your 15 passenger van. Become familiar with the safety features of your vehicle, as well as any hazards to be aware of, cargo weight limits and cargo positioning suggestions.

Use common sense while operating your 15 passenger van. Never drive any vehicle under the influence of drugs, alcohol, sedative medication, or if you are tired. These dangerous driving habits may result in fatal accidents, due to the driver's lack of alertness, attention, and altered reaction time.

Do not overload your 15 passenger van with cargo and do not use the roof rack. Cargo that is secured on the roof racks of 15 passenger vans, may contribute to the shift of the center of gravity, which makes the vehicle more likely to fish tail. Too much cargo in or on top of a 15 passenger van places all passengers at greater risk for rollover injuries. The United States Government has issued a directive NOT to carry any more than 10 passengers in these type vans because the center of gravity shifts and makes them more prone to rollover. Private drivers and occupants should follow this directive to reduce the propensity of 15 passenger van rollover.

Keep your tires in good condition. Tires that are worn, over inflated, or under inflated, will affect how the vehicle handles in various conditions. Icy roads, gravel, wet pavement, and other changes in the road may result in serious injury if the tires cannot properly handle the road. 15 passenger vans are more susceptible to rollover in the event of a blowout or tread delamination—low tire pressure can contribute to blowout and tread delamination.

Drive carefully and cautiously on rural roads. Many rural roads are very curvy and dark, differing greatly from well maintained roads of the city. Be prepared to adjust your speed and change lanes to avoid accidents and prevent rollovers. Reduce speed as 15 passenger vans do not maneuver as well and are prone to rollover during sharp turning movements.

Do not operate your vehicle with nine or more passengers. The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) has reported that ten or more passengers in a 15 passenger van will add to the risk of a vehicle rollover. Just like filling the van with too much cargo, the weight of a large number of people will reduce maneuverability and shift the center of gravity.

Wear your seat belt at all times. People who wear seat belts are less likely to sustain serious or fatal injuries in the event of a rollover or vehicle accident, compared to passengers who do not wear seat belts. In fact, passengers who wear seat belts are approximately 75% less likely to die as the result of a 15 passenger van rollover. Passengers who do not wear seat belts are at risk for serious injuries, many times as the result of being ejected from the vehicle. Seatbelts in 15 passenger vans can be confusing. Sort out and buckle seat belts **before** beginning your trip.

Learn how to properly maneuver and steer your vehicle in various situations. It is very important to know how to control your vehicle in different emergency situations and avoid over steering and driving off the curb, which may cause 15 passenger vans to rollover. Emergency maneuvering of a 15 passenger van may also cause the van to rollover, resulting in serious injuries.

Be aware of your surrounds. Staying aware of your surrounding may prevent serious accidents from occurring. If you are aware of changes in the weather, road conditions, road construction, and other drivers you will be more informed about what to expect while operating your 15 passenger van. Leave plenty of room between your vehicle and vehicles ahead to insure clear visibility of road conditions and to provide added response time in case of emergency and prevent over steering and resulting rollover.

- Avoid conditions that lead to a loss of control. Never drive while under the influence of alcohol or other drugs. Make sure you are well rested and attentive, and always slow down if the roads are wet or icy.
- Drive cautiously on rural roads. Be particularly cautious on *curved* rural roads and maintain a safe speed to avoid running off the road.
- Know what to do if your wheels drop off the roadway. If your wheels drop off the roadway, or pavement, *gradually* reduce speed and steer back onto the roadway when it is safe to do so.
- Properly maintain your tires. Make sure your tires are properly inflated and the tread is not worn down. Worn tires can cause your van to slide sideways on wet

or slippery pavement. Improper inflation can cause handling problems and can lead to catastrophic tire failures, such as blowouts. Therefore, check tire pressure and treadwear once a month.

What are other considerations for safe driving? When a 15-passenger van is not full, passengers should sit in seats that are in front of the rear axle.

Because a 15-passenger van is substantially longer and wider than a car, it:

- Requires more space and additional reliance on the side-view mirrors for changing lanes;
- Does not respond as well to abrupt steering maneuvers;
- Requires additional braking time.

Additional "15 Passenger Van Rollover Information"

- NHTSA Repeats Rollover Warning To Users of 15-Passenger Vans ([Press Release](#))
- [Reduciendo El Riesgo De Accidentes Por Vuelcos En Camionetas De 15 Pasajeros](#) - posted 5/13/2004
- Reducing The Risk of Rollover Crashes in 15-Passenger Vans" - Flyer ([PDF - Laser Resolution](#))
- Reducing The Risk of Rollover Crashes in 15-Passenger Vans" - Hangtag ([PDF - Laser Resolution](#))



U.S. Department
of Transportation
National Highway
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DOT Auto Safety HotLine
888-327-4236
TDD 800-424-9153



How To Contact 15 Passenger Van Rollover Accident Attorney

Persons who have been injured in accidents involving a 15-passenger, 12-passenger, 10-passenger, or cargo van, or family members of loved ones who have died, who would like to learn more about their legal rights, are welcome to contact an attorney at [The Law Offices of Berglund & Johnson by clicking here](#). There is no charge or obligation for our review of your case.

Alternatively, you may call toll-free at 1-800-4If Hurt (1-800-443-4878) and ask to speak to Senior Partners David W. Berglund or Daniel W. Johnson.

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General Information and History of Ford 15 Passenger Vans

Ford E-Series

Ford E-Series

Production 1961—
present



Assembly Avon Lake, Ohio; Lorain, Ohio

Class Full-size Van

The **Ford E-Series**, formerly named and also known as the *Econoline* or "Club Wagon," is a line of full-size vans (both cargo and passenger) and truck chassis from the Ford Motor Company. The E-Series is related to the Ford F-Series line of pickup trucks. The line was introduced in 1961 as a compact van and its descendants are still produced today. The Econoline is produced solely at Ford's Avon Lake, Ohio plant after the closure of the Lorain, Ohio plant in December 2005 and the consolidation of all production at Avon Lake. A derivative called the *Ford Chateau Wagon* is marketed in the Philippines.

As of 2008, the Econoline is the only van in the Ford lineup in North America since the demise of its other vans – **Club Wagon** in 1998, and the Freestar minivan in 2007. For the 2010 model year, Ford will return to having two vans as it gets the Ford Transit Connect compact MPV, which debuts at the 2008 Chicago Auto Show.

The Ford E-Series and Club Wagon currently hold 50.6% of the full-size van market in the United States with 168,722 sales in the United States in 2007. It has been the best selling American full-sized van for 28 years, since 1980.

1961-1967 Compact van

First generation (Flat Nose)

Production 1961-1967

Body style(s) 3-door Van



The first E-Series was based on the compact Ford Falcon; sized roughly to compete with the 1961 Chevrolet Corvair Sportvan and Volkswagen Type 2, which was 172.3 in (4376 mm) long. The first E-Series had a flat nose with the engine between and behind the front seats, later adopted by the Chevrolet Van and Dodge A100. Early models had a 144 cid 6-cylinder engine with a manual 3 speed transmission. Later models had a 170 cid or 240 cid engines with an automatic transmission. It was an immediate success with utilities like the Bell Telephone System. In the first 1961 model year, 29,932 standard vans, 6,571 custom Econoline buses, 11,893 standard pickups and 3,000 custom pickups were made. It was originally offered as a cargo van, an 8-passenger van with 3 rows of seats (which carried the Ford Falcon name) and as a pickup truck. A 165 lb (75 kg) weight was fitted over the rear wheels to balance the front-heavy vehicle, sometimes removed by current owners.

1968-1976 Full-sized van

Second generation

Production 1968-1974



Body style(s) 3-door Van

The 1968 Ford E-Series revolutionized van design by moving the engine all the way to the front under a short hood. These would be the first vans used as the basis for the now popular Class C van cab motorhomes, a class still dominated by Ford. The 1968 E-Series also used Ford's "Twin I-Beam" front suspension design, and was now available with a V8 engine. Over the next six years, the "Big Three" (GM, Chrysler and Ford) would all redesign their vans, with hoods gradually evolving to a short conventional truck-like hood, and evolving from being based on compact cars to using components from full-sized pickup trucks.

The grille was redesigned in 1971, and a year later E-Series offered a new feature, and a new model. Sliding rear doors were an option for 1972, as well as the Hi-Cube van, the first van with a stripped chassis used for something other than recreational vehicles.

1977-1991

Third generation

Production	1975–1991	
Body style(s)	3-door Van	
Layout	FR layout	
Platform	Ford VN platform	
Engine(s)	300 in³ I6 302 in³ Windsor V8 351 in³ Windsor V8 460 in³ 385 V8 6.9 L Navistar diesel V8	
Transmission(s)	3-speed manual 3-speed automatic 4-speed automatic	
Wheelbase	SWB: 124 in (3149.6 mm) LWB: 138 in (3505.2 mm)	
Length	SWB: 186.8 in (4745 mm) 206.8 in (5253 mm) LWB: 226.8 in (5761 mm)	
Width	79.9 in (2029 mm)	

Height	79.2 in (2012 mm) (150)
	80.1 in (2035 mm) (150 Extended)
	83.4 in (2118 mm) (E250 Extended)
	80.6 in (2047 mm) (E150 Super)
	85.4 in (2169 mm) (E350)
	85.3 in (2167 mm) (E350 Super)
	80.9 in (2055 mm) (150 Club Wagon)
	84.1 in (2136 mm) (350 Club Wagon)

The E-Series was redesigned in 1975 with more ergonomic controls and a full frame, allowing it to be used as a truck chassis. The nose now had a proper hood, very close to the length used today. This body style continued through 1991. In 1979 the front grille and headlights were face-lifted and square headlights were incorporated. In 1983, Ford's "Blue Oval" logo was integrated into the front grille. Van conversions became a popular alternative to sparse factory passenger accommodations.

The basic appearance of the front end of this car was replicated for the Ford Ranger and its SUV offspring the Ford Bronco II.

1992-present

1994 Ford Econoline

Fourth generation

Production	1992-present	
Body style(s)	3/4-door Van	
Layout	FR layout	

Platform	Ford VN platform
Engine(s)	4.2 L <i>Essex</i> V6 302 in ³ <i>Windsor</i> V8 351 in ³ <i>Windsor</i> V8 4.6 L <i>Triton</i> V8 5.4 L <i>Triton</i> V8 6.8 L <i>Triton</i> V10 6.0 L <i>Power Stroke</i> V8
Transmission(s)	4-speed automatic 5-speed <i>TorqShift</i> automatic
Wheelbase	138 in (3505 mm)
Length	2006-present SWB: 217 in (5512 mm) 2006-present LWB: 237 in (6020 mm) 2004-present Wagon SWB & 1996-2005 SWB: 211.9 in (5382 mm) 2004-present Wagon LWB & 1996-2005 SWB: 231.9 in (5890 mm) 1994-95 & 2006-07 SWB: 212 in (5385 mm) 2006-07 LWB: 232 in (5893 mm) 1992-95 LWB: 231.8 in (5888 mm) 1992-95 Econoline: 211.8 in (5380 mm)
Width	79.3 in (2014 mm) Wagon: 70.1 in (1781 mm) 1992-93 SWB: 79.5 in (2019 mm) 1992-93 LWB Van: 79.9 in (2029 mm)
Height	1992-93 Club Wagon/2006-present E-150 Van & Wagon: 80.9 in (2055 mm) E-250: 83.4 in (2118 mm) E-350: 84.1 in (2136 mm) 1992-2005 E-150 Van: 80.7 in (2050 mm) 1992-93 E-150: 81 in (2057 mm)
Curb weight	4773 lb (2165 kg)

The redesigned 1992 E-Series was available with a 4.9 L inline six, 5.0, 5.8, and 7.5 liter V8 engines, or a 7.3 L Power Stroke diesel V8. The consumer-oriented *Chateau Club Wagon* version was *Motor Trend* magazine's Truck of the Year for 1992. The design was more aerodynamic, and no longer featured taillight lenses shared with 70s F-Series trucks.



Ford Econoline ENG van used by WCTI-TV in New Bern, NC (left)

With this body style, Ford dominated the market for 15 passenger vans once created by Dodge. It was favored by churches, but the high heavy-duty body became notorious for rollover incidents due to the high center of gravity and the weight of 15 adults. For this reason it is recommended that only trained drivers be used, and nothing be carried on the roof of such vehicles. (For further information on

this topic, see Rollover Safety, above.)

Starting in late 1996, Ford updated the 1997 Econoline front end with a new grille that featured an oval cutout and new lower front bumper trim. Also new was an ergonomic dashboard layout consisting of dual airbags. Also introduced at this time were the new line of Ford Triton engines and the end of using the 4.9 L I6, 5.0L, 5.8L and 7.5L V8s in the E-series. The new lineup of engines featured a non-Triton 4.2 L V6, 4.6 L and 5.4 L Triton V8s, and for the first time in the E-Series, a 6.8 L Triton V10. The 7.3 L diesel remained unchanged.

For 2001, Ford again refreshed the E-Series, with a new *E-150 Traveler* model targeted at families.

E-Series

By this time, the Econoline was known as the "E-Series," and was sold as such in the literature on commercial vans and ambulance packages, another category dominated by Ford. Heavy-duty cutaway van models also featured "E-350" or "E-450" badging on the front fenders. Starting in 2001, however, Ford officially fully rebranded the Econoline as the *E-Series* in all badging and consumer sales literature. With the development of more sophisticated 7 passenger minivans, the market for passenger versions declined, so the "Club Wagon" designation for passenger wagons has been dropped.

Full-sized vans have a very high floor, and seats which are bolted to the floor, whereas the latest minivans feature low step-in height, and seats which can fold into the floor. However, compared to popular 3-row SUVs, only full-size vans have the towing and payload and optional diesel power of full-sized pickups and room for 8 to 15 passengers plus their baggage. Crew bench seating is optional on the cargo version and can seat 5 passengers comfortably with ample cargo space.



2003-2007 Ford E-Series

For 2003, Ford refreshed the E-Series by changing the grille style, incorporating an integral Ford logo.

2004 saw the replacement of the 7.3 L Power Stroke diesel and the introduction of the new 6.0 L Power Stroke with more power than the 7.3 L, but still detuned from the same engine in the F-Series due to a lack of airflow in the engine compartment. The 6.0

Powerstroke is intercooled, however the 7.3L lacked an intercooler. In 2006, the 6.8 L Triton V10 produced 305 hp and 420 ft·lbf torque, 235/440 for the diesel.

The E-series is an excellent tow vehicle, due to the available GCWR (Gross Combined Weight Rating) of up to 20,000 pounds, and its relatively low curb weight. No other van or SUV can match its available towing capacity and payload.^[citation needed]

95 percent of van sales are to commercial or fleet-end users, about half are cargo vans. The E-Series cargo area features a double-wall design — a full-size van exclusive — which leaves the exterior sheet metal less vulnerable to damage from shifting cargo.^[2]

In early 2007, the E-series was listed by Autodata as one of the top 20 best selling vehicles in the United States, most likely due to fleet sales. The competing models from GM are lightly updated from their late 1990s design. Chrysler abandoned its Ram Van, a body style essentially unchanged from the 1970s, in favor of the Sprinter, a narrow European Mercedes-Benz van with a 150 hp (112 kW) turbodiesel engine, which has found favor primarily in commercial delivery with its high roof, and high-end, high-mileage Class C RV.

2008-2009

2008 Ford E-250

Ford introduced the new E-Series at the New York Auto Show in March 2007. The van had received completely redesigned front end sheet metal similar to that of the 2008 Ford Super Duty trucks, which Ford claims makes the vans look "Built Ford Tough." It has been overhauled with better handling, more payload and a sharper look.



Updates to the front end of the van include larger headlights, a bold new grille to showcase its "strength and reliability", and a longer hood than previously used on E-Series and Econoline vans. The 6.0L turbo diesel is retained on the Super Duty E-series, while Super Duty F series received the new 6.4L twin turbo diesel. Gasoline engines (4.6L and 5.4L V8 and 6.8L V10 on cutaway only) are carryover. No major interior improvements were made. However, Ford says the 2008 E-Series line-up rides on an improved chassis. A series of upgrades to the braking, suspension and steering systems have resulted in improvements in ride and handling, braking performance and load carrying capability.

The chassis and suspension improvements have also resulted in an increase in the maximum gross vehicle weight rating (GVWR) from 14,050 pounds to a class-leading 14,500 pounds. Additionally, the maximum front gross axle weight rating (GAWR) is increased by about 10 percent, from 4,600 pounds to a class-leading 5,000 pounds.

For 2009, the E-Series will receive a new dashboard, complete with an available in-dash navigation system and up fitter switches as used in the F-Series Super Duty trucks. Also included is a passenger-side glove compartment, a first for the E-Series. Previously, the glove compartment was integrated in the engine cover.

Another new 2009 option is the rear-view backup camera, which is becoming widely available throughout the industry on smaller vehicles; it is another first for Ford in the full-size van field.

Incredibly, despite all of the changes, however, the E-Series continues to use Ford's "Twin-I-Beam" swing-axle front suspension system. This system, which was first used in Ford pickups in 1965, has seen its share of improvements through the years, but has been surpassed by more modern independent front suspensions. It is difficult to keep Twin-I-Beam vehicles' front wheels properly aligned, as the geometry of the suspension precludes easy adjustment.

Ford Motor Company Light Truck Timeline, North American Market 1980s–Present

Type	1980s									1990s									2000s									2010		
	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Compact pickup	Courier			Ranger			Ranger			Ranger			Ranger			Ranger														
Mid-size Pickup																			Explorer Sport Trac			Sport Trac								
Full-size pickup	F-Series			F-Series			F-Series			F-Series/F-150			F-150			F-150														
																			Super Duty			Super Duty			Super Duty					
Ute																												Falcon		
Van	E-Series									E-Series																				
																												Transit Connect		
Compact SUV																			Escape			Escape								
Mid-size SUV				Bronco II			Bronco II			Explorer Sport			Explorer Sport																	
										Explorer			Explorer			Explorer			Explorer											
Full-size SUV	Bronco			Bronco			Bronco			Expedition			Expedition			Expedition														
																			Excursion			Expedition EL								
																												Edge		
Crossover																												Flex		
																						Freestyle			Taurus X					

Minivan		Aerostar			
			Windstar	Windstar	Freestar

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