

## Putting big vans to the rollover test [Watch video](#)

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15 passenger vans fill a vital role. They're a cost effective tool to get smaller groups from point "a" to point "b." But some say they have a deadly design flaw. Investigative Reporter Kristin Stinar put our own 15 passenger van to the test.

The experts blame the rollover propensity of the vans on two things. First, there's a section added on to the back to accommodate an extra row of seats. And second, it's taller than other vans. The result is a vehicle that's one of the most top-heavy on the road. Fill it with passengers and the likelihood that it will roll triples.

At just 30 miles per hour our test showed how unstable a 15 passenger Ford van can become. "This thing is just a squirrel!" said Dave Schultz while driving it. Schultz pushes vehicles to their breaking point for a living. But this vehicle nearly pushed this professional driver to their own breaking point. "I had a difficult time with the second and third skid there."

Ford, Daimler-Chrysler and General Motors make 15 passenger vans. State records show there are more than ten thousand here in Minnesota. Some haul people to the airport. Others ferry kids to camp. But some may think twice after seeing the disturbing images shown on the news of these vans rolled over and their passengers ejected. The University of Minnesota rolled five of its vans in just three years. Fortunately no one was killed.

We took Channel Five's fifteen passenger Ford van to the **Minnesota Highway Safety Center**, attached cameras inside and out and headed out on the training course.

We swerved to avoid an obstacle then swerved back to stay on the road. "Come in, jam it one way, jam it back the other way. See?! We were off on one wheel there," said Schultz from the driver's seat. One wheel off the ground., with only three people inside, at just 35 miles per hour.

We added another four passengers and tried it again. "It felt like the thing was coming apart and I didn't know if it was going to roll. I seriously didn't know," said one of the passengers, KSTP Producer Mike Maybay. "Um, it's scary. I didn't think that they could get this out of control," said Kayleen Hansen, a St. Cloud State University student and Minnesota Highway Safety Center employee.

The Federal Government has issued repeated **warnings** about the rollover risk. Chrysler and GM extended the wheelbase on their vans, making them

more stable. But Ford hasn't. "In my opinion they are safe as long as you know how to use them," said the Minnesota Highway Safety Center's Larry Ouellette.

After its five rollovers... the U of M did something few schools have, requiring van drivers take a training course. "After I took it I was a lot more afraid of driving the vans because I saw all the accidents," said U of M student Tom Flint.

Pastor Bonnie Wilcox from Shepherd of the Valley Lutheran Church in Apple Valley plans to send 8 groups of kids on trips in the vans this summer. Before each trip she reminds the drivers and the kids of the danger. "(I) try to make it a fun experience as we leave but also very serious, to have them raise their right hands and promise that they will use their seatbelts whenever the van is moving."

Since the U of M instituted its training policy last summer, none of its 15 passenger vans have rolled. The State of Minnesota also uses these vans but is in the process of getting rid of its fleet.

Ford tells us it believes its 15 passenger vans are safe but encourages drivers to be aware there are unique characteristics of a vehicle that size that require different handling. To read Ford's entire statement on 15 passenger vans click [here](#).

To see the warning from the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration click [here](#).

To see recent recommendations from the National Transportation Safety Board click [here](#).

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