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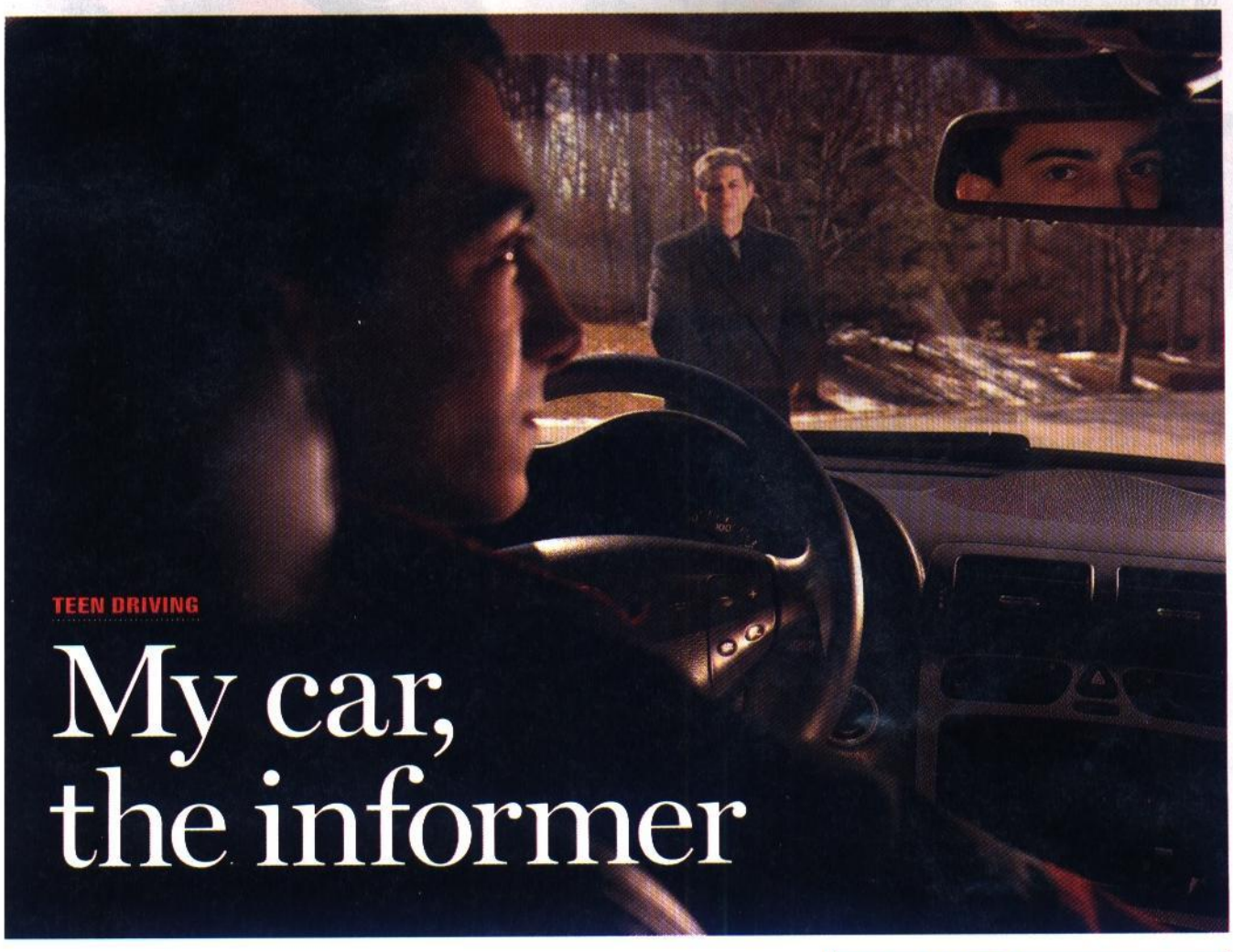
Diversions

EDITED BY MARC SILVER



TEEN DRIVING

My car, the informer

BY DAVID LAGESSE

When new driver Andrew Auerbach hit 73 mph, his parents didn't need a police report to know. A computerized "black box" in the car signaled them, and dad Jeffrey signaled his displeasure. "We had a long discussion," says the father of the 16-year-old Maryland resident.

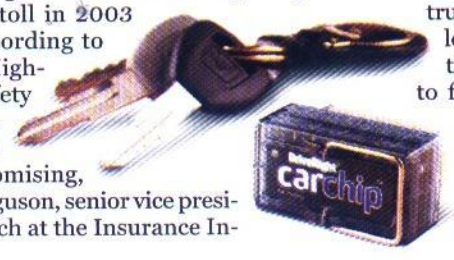
It sounds like a parent's dream and a teen's nightmare: an electronic snitch along for the ride. A growing number of companies are introducing small boxes that watch, record, and report—some instantly—speed, braking, and rate of acceleration. Some even pinpoint where the car is.

Kids, of course, bristle. "I felt I'd lost the trust of my parents," says Mike Manley, now 18, whose parents got him a new car in 2003 on the condition it be equipped with a black box. Two years with the device have mellowed his outlook; Manley, of Staten Island, N.Y., now thinks the monitors could save lives.

"He had no choice," adds Manley's mom, Patricia. As in most homes, the family wheels come with family rules. And with good reason. Vehicle accidents are the leading killer for those ages 15 to 20. The toll in 2003 was 3,657, according to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration.

The monitors seem promising, says Susan Ferguson, senior vice president for research at the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety. Some data from operators of commercial fleets suggest that drivers act more responsibly if they know they're being monitored. Psychologists, meanwhile, warn that teen-parent relationships should be based on trust, and so teens should at least be told the monitor is there. And parents do need to follow through with any promised punishment.

The dozens of systems all track speed, perhaps the best indicator of careless driving. In most cases,



IN LOCO PARENTIS. When 16-year-old Andrew Auerbach goes driving, a computer monitor reports his speed to dad Jeffrey. Below: the CarChip monitoring device.

The Auerbach's here are Alltrack USA customers !!

FROM TOP: CHARLIE ARCHAMBAULT FOR *USN&WR*; DAVIS

parents plug a small black box into a dashboard port (part of any car made since the mid-'90s). The monitor taps data generated by on-car computers—everything from a precise speedometer reading to whether seat belts are buckled. Others calculate speed, and the car's location, by communicating with global-positioning satellites.

Ding. Prices depend on how much data the systems gather and whether they include some immediate feedback—in the car or transmitted to parents remotely. About $140 buys a basic CarChip *(carchip.com)* that gathers 75 hours of data, which parents can download. The $200 CarChip accumulates 300 hours of data and warns drivers with a tone if the driver exceeds preset limits for speed.

Want to make sure your kid can't ignore the warnings? The RS-1000 ($280 at *roadsafety.com*) sounds a warning tone for offenses and ups the volume, if need be, so a loud radio can't drown it out. The SmartDriver ($500 at *smartdriver.com*) turns on a red light in its in-car box for a violation; it stays red until parents download the data.

For a monthly fee of $15 to $20, you'll get an instant report. The Real-Time GPS ($390 from *alltrackusa.com*) posts speed and location info to a password-protected website and can notify parents by phone or E-mail when a teen exceeds a predefined speed limit or drives outside a defined area. If professionally installed, it can enable a parent to honk the car's horn or disable the engine after it's turned off. ULocate *(ulocate.com)* and Teen Arrive Alive *(teenarrivealive.com)* piggyback on GPS-enabled Nextel cellphones. Their monthly fees come on top of the cell charges.

Finally, some parents are installing small video cameras in the front seat facing the road, like *drivecam.com*'s $1,400 model. You'll see for yourself if your kid drifts from lane to lane, runs a stop sign, or tailgates.

Meanwhile, those tattling black boxes can lead to good news for your kid, too. When Jeffrey Auerbach saw that his son was consistently following the rules, he loosened curfews and other limits. As for Andrew, when his friends urge him to do something risky, he'll tell them: No can do. The chip snitch is watching. ●

Smart Chart

EAT THE BUNNY

New sweet treats are the perfect excuse to get hopped up on sugar this Easter. Devour these too fast and you may end up with egg on your face—although would you mind?

CHOCOLATE	PRESENTATION	TASTE
A. 25 Pack Mini Square ($38, *josephschmidtconfections.com*, 866-237-0152)	Papier-mâché puffs from the handmade box, filled with five types of truffles.	Spectacular centers, such as Grand Marnier, gave these the Easter edge.
B. Easter Artisan Eggs ($5 each, *moonstruckchocolate.com*, 800-557-6666)	Shells are patterned with powder-blue polka dots and splotchy calico.	Decadent fillings like peanut butter and krispies call to your inner kid.
C. Oeuf de Pâques Box ($28, *recchiuticonfections.com*, 800-500-3396)	Ten halved dark-chocolate eggs are decorated with a single yellow stripe.	Nothing too elaborate, but the glorious ganache was heaven to choco-purists.
D. Bunny Box ($35, *manhattanfruitier.com*, 800-841-5718)	Five white chocolate bunnies frolic with powdery truffles in a wooden box.	Hazelnutty hares are fine. Honey-caramel truffles are divine. *–Vicky Hallett*

Ask Us

Q In Gunner Palace, a new documentary, the Iraq war sure looks like hell—not enough armor, scared soldiers. What do soldiers think of the movie?

A Soldiers got a peek when filmmaker Michael Tucker took **Gunner Palace** on a tour of cities near military bases before the March 4 première. When a wisecracking GI shows off scrap metal used to armor a humvee, saying, "This way, shrapnel will stay in your body instead of going clean through," soldiers in the audience laughed aloud. "It's gallows humor for them," says Tucker, who bunked for 60 days with 400 soldiers in a bombed-out Baghdad palace once home to Uday Hussein. He shows soldiers going after insurgents—and rapping about blazing guns and woozy stomachs—"cuz for y'all this is just a show, but we live in this movie." *–Bret Schulte*

FROM TOP: JEFFREY MACMILLAN FOR USN&WR (4); PALM PICTURES