



# Fast Cars, Cool Rides: The Accelerating World of Youth and Their Cars

*Amy L. Best*

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Bass booms from custom speakers, pick-up trucks boast lowered suspensions, chrome rims reflect stoplights, and bare arms dangle from open windows. Welcome to Santa Clara Street in San Jose, California, where every weekend kids come to cruise late at night, riding their cars slow and low. On the surrounding, less-traveled streets you can also find young men racing customized cars to see who has the "go," not just the "show." And, in the daylight hours, in a nearby suburb, you might find a brand new SUV parked in the driveway, a parents' Sweet 16 present.

In **Fast Cars, Cool Rides** Amy Best provides a fascinating account of kids and car culture. Encompassing everything from learning to drive to getting one's license, from cruising to customizing, from racing to buying one's first car, Best shows that never before have cars played such an important role in the lives of America's youth as they do today. Drawing on interviews with over 100 young men and women, aged 15-24, and five years of research—cruising hot spots, sitting in on auto shop class, attending car shows—Best explores the fast-paced world of kids and their cars. She reveals a world where cars have incredible significance for kids today, as a means of transportation and thereby freedom to come and go, as status symbols and as a means to express their identities. But while having a fast car or a cool ride can carry tremendous importance for these kids, Best shows that the price, especially when it can cost \$30,000, can be steep as working-class kids work jobs to make car payments and as college kids forgo moving out of Mom and Dad's house because they can't pay for rent, car payments, and car insurance.

**Fast Cars, Cool Rides** offers a rare and rich portrait of the complex and surprising roles cars can play in the lives of young Americans. Fasten your seatbelts, it's going to be a cool ride.

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