



NEWS RELEASE

Gen Alpha Turns 16: New CarMax Survey Reveals the Next Generation of Drivers Is Ready to Get Behind the Wheel

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More than two thirds of Gen Alpha teens say they are excited about the idea of driving

RICHMOND, VA, Aug. 25, 2026 (GLOBE NEWSWIRE) -- As the first members of Gen Alpha turn 16, they're approaching one of life's biggest milestones: getting a driver's license. With student parking lots across the country starting to feature more and more of the eldest members of this new generation of drivers, CarMax, Inc. (NYSE: KMX), the nation's largest retailer of used cars, commissioned new research to better understand how they are navigating that milestone and what they and their families have in mind when shopping for a car.

The findings reveal they are eager to get behind the wheel. Unlike widely reported trends among Gen Z, who delayed getting their licenses and expressed greater ambivalence toward driving, this next generation of drivers is telling a different story. Gen Alpha is widely reported to have begun in 2010, and CarMax found that four in five Gen Alpha teens ages 14-16 (80%) either already have their license or plan to get it as soon as they are legally allowed to, while more than two-thirds (68%) say they are excited about the idea of driving.

For many of the teens surveyed, driving is about more than just transportation. Among those who already have their license or plan to get one, three-quarters (75%) view getting a driver's license as a major life milestone. The excitement is largely fueled by the independence that comes with driving, with teens most looking forward to being able to go wherever they want, whenever they want (33%) and no longer relying on parents for rides (31%).

But perhaps the biggest surprise is how many Gen Alpha teens think they'll be getting a car after getting their license and how they want to shop for it. The survey found that 95 percent of these teens who already have their

license or plan to get it expect to have access to a vehicle right away, with 40 percent of them expecting their family will purchase a vehicle for them to drive. And despite being the first generation raised entirely in a digital-first world, the overwhelming majority (86%) say it's important to see, sit in and test drive a vehicle before their family makes a purchase decision.

"After years of hearing about Gen Z delaying getting their license, we wanted to understand how that trend could play out as the oldest members of Gen Alpha reach driving age," said Corey Haire, Vice President of Regional Sales at CarMax. "Contrary to Gen Z, we found that the next generation of drivers are eager to get behind the wheel and have the freedom to explore new places, connect with others, and gain a greater sense of independence. With the ability to compare options, take a test drive and learn from knowledgeable associates, CarMax is uniquely positioned to support families during the moments that matter most in their lives, like getting your first car."

By the Numbers: Gen Alpha's Road to Independence

Gen Alpha Is Ready to Drive

- 80% already have their license or plan to get it as soon as legally allowed
- Only 2% don't plan to get a driver's license at all
- 68% are excited about driving
- 26% admit they're nervous about getting behind the wheel

Driving Represents Freedom

According to those who already have their driver's license or plan to get it:

- 75% view getting a driver's license as a major life milestone
- 33% are most excited about being able to go wherever they want, whenever they want
- 31% can't wait to stop relying on parents for rides

Design and Drive Lead the Way

- 37% are most excited about how a car looks
- 30% prioritize how it drives
- 13% prioritize fuel efficiency
- Just 11% prioritize features like touchscreens and sound systems
- Only 8% prioritize driver-assistance technology

From License to Driver's Seat

According to those who already have their driver's license or plan to get it:

- 95% expect to have access to a vehicle as soon as they get their license
- 40% expect their family will purchase a vehicle for them to drive
- 28% expect to receive a hand-me-down
- 25% expect to share a family vehicle

Digital Natives Still Want an In-Person Experience

- 86% say it's important to see, sit in and test drive a vehicle before a purchase decision is made
- Including 48% who say it's very important
- Just 14% say it isn't important

Helping Families Navigate the First-Car Journey with Confidence

As Gen Alpha approaches driving age, families are making decisions that blend emotion with practicality. While parents typically prioritize factors like affordability and reliability, a pattern CarMax often hears from families, survey results show teens are thinking about freedom and independence.

While Gen Alpha is the first generation to be born entirely in a digital-first world, never knowing life without the internet at their fingertips, the survey suggests they are not looking for a fully online path to car shopping. When evaluating qualities like how a vehicle looks and feels on the road, the majority still values the hands-on experiences that come from seeing a vehicle up close and taking it for a test drive. For digitally-native teens and their families, the path to a first car may start online but doesn't end there. The convenience of researching cars online paired with the confidence that comes from being able to compare options in person allows them and their families to drive away feeling like they found the right car.

At CarMax, families don't have to choose between shopping online or in-store; they get the best of both. Teens can start exploring online to find a car that excites them with the ability to experience what they value most in person: how the car looks and drives. At the same time, parents can feel confident that the priorities they most often discuss with CarMax associates, including affordability, reliability and long-term value, remain at the center of the decision-making process. CarMax helps families shop with confidence and focus on finding the right fit, with tens of thousands of vehicles across most makes, models and price points, upfront no-haggle pricing, more than 25,000 vehicles priced under \$25,000, and every vehicle being CarMax Certified quality and backed by a 10-Day Money-Back Guarantee and a 30-day limited warranty.

"We know that Gen Alpha teens feel that getting their driver's license is a major life milestone. Families should treat

it like one by making the car shopping experience feel like an exciting new chapter,” Haire continued. “At CarMax, families can browse tens of thousands of vehicles from the comfort of their couch, then come in to sit in and test drive the ones that excite them most. And with upfront pricing and knowledgeable support along the way, both teens and their parents can focus on finding the right car they can count on.”

For more advice and guidance, CarMax associates shared tips to help parents and teens navigate the first-car journey with greater clarity and confidence: <https://www.carmax.com/articles/gen-alpha-first-car-survey-2026>

Survey Methodology

The CarMax Survey was conducted by **Wakefield Research** among 1,000 U.S. Teens Ages 14 to 16, between July 17th and July 29th, 2026, using an email invitation and an online survey. The data has been weighted.

About CarMax

CarMax, the nation's largest retailer of used autos, has earned customers' trust for more than 30 years by leading with integrity, transparency and honesty. CarMax continues to redefine car buying and selling for millions of customers, delivering the easy and confident experience they love. CarMax has more than 255 store locations, approximately 28,000 associates, and is proud to have been recognized for 22 consecutive years as one of the Fortune 100 Best Companies to Work For®. During the fiscal year that ended February 28, 2026, CarMax sold approximately 780,000 used vehicles and 540,000 wholesale vehicles at its auctions. In addition, CarMax Auto Finance originated \$8 billion in auto loans during fiscal 2026, adding to its \$16 billion portfolio. CarMax is committed to helping its communities thrive and reducing the environmental footprint of its operations. Learn more in the [2026 Responsibility Report](#). For more information, visit www.carmax.com.

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