



April 2005

## Seat Belts: History

This fact sheet about seat belts outlines their history.

It is part of a range of fact sheets about seat belts, other titles are:

- "Seat Belts: Advice and Information"
- "Seat Belts: History"
- "Seat Belts: Law"

### Seat Belts: A Short History

#### 1930's

Several U.S. physicians equip their own cars with lap belts and begin urging manufacturers to provide them in all new cars.

#### 1954

Sports Car Club of America requires competing drivers to wear lap belts.

#### 1955

Society of Automotive Engineers (SAE) appoints Motor Vehicle Seat Belt Committee.

#### 1956

Volvo markets 2-point cross-chest diagonal belt as an accessory. Ford and Chrysler offer lap belts in front as option on some models. Ford advertising campaign focuses on belts.

#### 1957

Volvo provides anchors for 2-point diagonal belts in front.

#### 1958

Nils Bohlin, a Volvo design engineer patents the "Basics of Proper Restraint Systems for Car Occupants," better known as a three-point safety belt. It comprises two straps: a lap strap and shoulder strap. Volvo provides anchors for 2-point diagonal belts in rear.

#### 1959

Volvo introduces 3-point belt in front as standard, in Sweden.



# Road Safety..... ..... Information

## 1962

U.S. manufacturers provide seat belt anchors in front outboard as standard

The January 1962 issue of *Which?* strongly advocated belt wearing, revealing that a "first survey" of their effectiveness in Britain showed they would reduce the likelihood of death and serious injury by 60%.

## 1963

Volvo introduces 3-point belt in front as standard, in USA

## 1964

Most U.S. manufactures provide lap belts at front seat positions

## 1965

It becomes compulsory to fit seat belts in the front of cars built in Europe.

## 1967

New cars in the UK must be fitted with front seat belts by law. Great Britain requires 3-points in front outboard positions.

## 1968

Great Britain requires retrofit of 3-point belts in front of newer cars.

## 1970s

"Clunk Click" TV commercials, starring Jimmy Saville show the dangers of being thrown through the windscreen in a collision. "Clunk, click every trip" is still one of his most remembered phrases, along with "now then, now then" and "guys and gals".

## 1973-74

A clause in the Road Traffic Bill concerning seat belts was introduced at Report stage in the Lords. The Bill was dropped on the dissolution of Parliament in 1974.

A similar clause was again included in the Road Traffic Bill, but after a close vote in the Lords, it was removed. A separate Bill was introduced but the Second Reading was never completed.

## 1974-75

After passing through the Lords, the Bill was adjourned at the Second Reading in the Commons due to insufficient parliamentary time.

## 1975-76

John Gilbert, Minister of Transport, introduced a Road Traffic (Seat Belts) Bill in 1976. Later that year, the Bill was hastily withdrawn when a vote showed that "Only 99 MP's would be present instead of the necessary 100".

**1976-77**

Two more seat belt Bills were introduced. Both failed. The first - in spite of a majority of 110 at its Second Reading in the Commons - was abandoned because there were "too few people in the House". The second Bill was defeated in the Lords by 55 votes to 53.

**1978-79**

In November 1978, William Rodgers MP introduced a seat belts Bill. It completed its First and Second Readings in the House of Commons with a majority of "almost 100". Labour lost the General Election in 1979 and their Bills were shelved.

**1979-80**

Neil Carmichael introduced a Private Members Bill for seat belt compulsion during this parliamentary session. A smooth passage through the Committee stage early in 1980 led to the Bill being "talked out" at the Report stage during September 1980.

**1980**

Lord Nugent of Guildford, RoSPA's President, introduced a Private Members Bill. It gained a majority of 36 at the Second Reading, but again failed for procedural reasons.

**1981**

Lord Nugent seized his chance with an amendment to the Transport Bill which introduced seat belt wearing for a trial period of three years. RoSPA's president triumphed and the Bill became law...at last.

**1983**

From 31 January, it becomes compulsory for drivers and passengers (adult and children) to wear seat belts for a three-year trial period. Over 90 % of drivers complied at that time and still do.

**1986**

Both Houses of Parliament vote overwhelmingly to retain the requirement permanently.

**1987**

Rear seat belts required to be fitted to new cars.

**1989**

Wearing rear seat belts becomes compulsory for children under 14.

**1991**

It becomes compulsory for adults to belt up in the back.

**1993**

"Elephant" TV commercial demonstrates the danger presented by an unrestrained back seat passenger in a crash, who can be thrown forward with the impact of three and a half tons.



# Road Safety..... ..... **Information**

**1996**

Seat belts fitted to minibuses and coaches carrying groups of children on organised trips. (Forward facing seats required – sideways facing ones no longer permitted).

**1998**

“Julie” TV commercial comes as a reminder that unbelted rear seat passengers can not only injure themselves, but can also kill other people in the car.

**2001**

Seat belts required to be fitted to all minibuses and coaches.

**2003**

20th anniversary of seat belts - 50,000 lives saved.