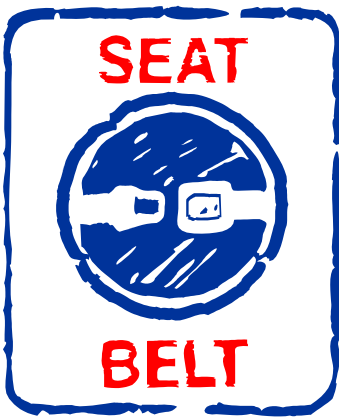


Don't neglect safety with your 50+ year old Classic

By Bill Crumrine

Once in a while when talking with car club friends, the subject of old car safety comes up. This affords me the opportunity to get on my soap box and harp on the subject of seat belts.

The conversation usually goes something like this. I ask: "How many of you regularly wear a seat belt when driving modern?" The responses run from "it's the law," or "it's safer" to "my wife asks (tells) me to wear it".



Everyone acknowledges seat belts prevent injuries and save lives. There is not much argument about that.

So when we get behind the wheel of our XYZ which is nicely equipped with a safety interior, including who knows how many air bags, a road tuned suspension giving the car wonderful handling and agility, magnificent ABS brakes, superior tires, crash zones and much more (perhaps even electronic stability control), we buckle up. Cars of today are much safer than those produced just a few years ago.

Now for the big question: how many of your old cars have seat belts? The muscle car crowd always smiles and enthusiastically agrees. Not many hands go up in those with cars of the 20's, 30's and 40's.

So my pitch is primarily focused on these (you) guys—since probably the older the car the less safe it is. Consider composite construction, wipers, suspension systems, visibility and braking systems to name a few. A lot of progress was made from 1925 to 1948.

When I asked why people are not interested in installing belts, at least in the front seats of these older cars, responses are "I don't drive the car much", "I don't drive the car very fast", "they don't look good," or "I never got around to it."

These are not good reasons.

An accident can happen anytime anywhere, so protect yourself and your passengers as well as you can. That 3 ton SUV driven by some nut on a cell

phone drinking a latté can do real harm.

Seat belts may not be attractive, but installed properly they can be almost out of sight when not in use. CCCA judging does not penalize their installation if it is done properly.

The first time I rode as a front seat passenger in our 1932 Pierce-Arrow, I realized how vulnerable the passenger is. The car is a two door with huge doors, has individual front seats which remind me of sitting on a large beach ball with nothing to hang onto! In a collision, if you somehow managed to stay in the car the large ride control and freewheeling levers on the dash are waiting to rearrange your face.

The driver has to watch out for the rear view mirror and the windshield opening crank. Of course, he has the steering wheel, but I don't know if that is a good or bad.

I decided to buy aircraft type seat belts. They came in a variety of colors and were nicely made.

It's important to install them as directed and to anchor them securely to the frame—not to a wooden or sheet metal floor pan. We were lucky on this one; frame members with holes were located just where we needed them. When not in use these belts are nearly invisible stashed under and between the seats.

Our 1937 Pierce-Arrow is also a coupe with enormous doors, but has a bench seat. Both cars have wood/metal composite body construction and I question the reliability of the door latches in the event of a collision. Since it is probably safer for occupants to stay in a vehicle rather than fall out, belts were installed as soon as we acquired the car. Installation was more difficult, as we had to fabricate a partial cross member in order to have something to tie the passenger belt to. Surprisingly, there were seat belts in the rumble seat when we bought the car.

Why not make the decision today to make your car as safe as possible. What have you to lose?

Modern driving on a per mile basis is probably safer than it has ever been. Traffic is worse, roads have not significantly improved in the last 20 years, and I am pretty sure drivers have not suddenly become more polite and courteous. However, new cars are better and safer. Logic and good sense tell you it's the thing to do, so go ahead, make your vintage car as safe as you can, you will be glad you did.