

Rewards Raise Belt Use; Fall-Off Seen Later

Some reward programs to encourage seat belt use have achieved increases in the levels of safety belt use, but usage tends to decline when rewards are dropped, recent studies show.

The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) has listed economic rewards as one of many approaches it hopes to use as part of its national safety belt campaign. Studies of their effectiveness show that some people will respond to rewards, but questions remain as to the long-term effects of such programs and whether the habit of wearing safety belts will be carried over into situations where the rewards are absent.

Institute Film Opens In D.C., Boston Theatres

Selected K-B theatres in the Washington, D.C., area and Sack theatres in the Boston area now are showing a new Insurance Institute for Highway Safety film that describes the causes of facial injuries in highway collisions, and looks at the range of solutions available to reduce these injuries. The 10-minute film, "Faces in Crashes," will be shown for at least four weeks as a short subject with the theatres' regularly scheduled feature movies.

In a joint announcement with the Institute, K-B Theatres owner Ron Goldman said, "We felt after seeing an advance print of 'Faces in Crashes' that as a public service we had to give our audiences the opportunity to see this documentary film. The information it contains is vital to the interest of anyone who drives, or whose youngsters drive or travel by car."

Goldman told *Variety*, the show business periodical, that he was "very pleasantly surprised" at publicity over the showing of the film. Goldman told the *Variety* reporter that he had contacted no one about the film, but as soon as the word got out he found himself being interviewed by a number of radio and television stations and the local newspapers. "I really never expected that to happen," the theatre owner said.

(Cont'd on page 7)

E. Scott Geller of Virginia Polytechnic Institute in Blacksburg, Va., has shown that some rewards can raise belt usage rates in a study of staff and students at two campus parking lots. At one parking lot, the researchers handed out literature which urged seat belt use and also offered a chance to win a prize. The prizes were not contingent upon belt use.

At the second lot, fliers were given to drivers who were not wearing their belts which said, "Next time wear your seat belt and receive a chance to win a valuable prize!" Belt users got fliers urging belt use which included a chance to win a prize.

During baseline surveys of belt use in both lots, observers found belt use levels in the second lot 4 percent higher—26 percent—than the first lot. During the program, belt use rates in the lot where rewards were offered for seat belt use rose 22 percent—to 46 percent—compared to only a 2 percent rise in the other lot. After the program was concluded, driver belt use in the lot in which rewards for seat belt use had been offered was 16 percent higher than the other lot—38 percent—but declining.

Toward the end of the follow-up period, belt use levels were about the same at both lots and no higher than during the period before the program began.

Some company programs to increase seat belt usage by using rewards have also shown increases in belt use. At the Dupont Co.'s Berg Electronics Fishing

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Rewards Raise Belt Use; Fall-Off Seen Later (Cont'd from page 1)

Creek plant in New Cumberland, Pa., a 90 percent belt use level was reported as a result of a 1980 six-month seat-belt education program combined with a contest in which all employees arriving for work who were observed wearing their belts received a choice of 71 different rewards at the contest's conclusion. The prizes included such items as toasters, and each cost the company from \$12 to \$15 wholesale, the plant's safety director Kenneth Spoonhour reported.

Since the education campaign ended, the reward program has continued, together with monthly audits of seat belt use. Employees observed wearing their belts are given a small gift costing the company from \$1 to \$1.50, Spoonhour told *Status Report*.

Unannounced audits conducted by the company in August and September 1980 showed belt use rates of 85 and 88 percent, Spoonhour reported in the September/October 1981 issue of *Traffic Safety*. Another audit completed April 30, 1981—10 months later—reported that 88 percent of the employees were still wearing seat belts. This compares with an initial use rate by commuting employees of 46 percent and a 3.2 percent use rate in the community, Spoonhour said.

Institute Conducts Spot Survey

Later observations conducted by researchers for the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety showed continued high levels of lap/shoulder belt use, although not as high as those reported by the company.

At least 61 percent of the outgoing drivers on the day shift during the first observation period were seen wearing lap/shoulder belts while 67 percent of incoming drivers wore their belts the following morning. Usage levels were substantially lower among evening (incoming) and night (outgoing) shift workers, with 51 and 39 percent respectively seen wearing lap/shoulder belts. Usage levels in the surrounding community, based on limited observations, were between 10-15 percent.

Although use rates observed by the Institute are lower than levels reported by Spoonhour, they apparently represent significant increases in the rates of belt use by employees in the commute to and from work. The comparatively high use rates a year after the high stakes campaign had been concluded is probably due to the continued use of small rewards by the company, suggest the Institute researchers. (For example, they noted that employees wearing belts had received a free can of tar remover the morning of the first Institute survey.)

It remains to be seen whether such reward programs can maintain high levels of belt use if no additional rewards are available and also whether the increased usage occurs on trips other than to and from work. The practicality of implementing long-term reward programs remains an even larger question. Research conducted by Opinion Research Corp. for NHTSA last year showed company safety managers reluctant to even undertake seat belt education programs.

NHTSA has recently funded a study by the Highway Safety Research Center, University of North Carolina, that will evaluate the effectiveness of offering financial rewards for seat belt use. The project would be conducted in two North Carolina counties and would give a \$10 reward to randomly-selected individuals for using safety belts. The people receiving the rewards would be part of a 3,000-person group that will receive seat belt education stressing the risks of automobile crashes.

Safety Found A Major Concern Of Auto Shoppers

Crash protection ranks high on the list of decision-making factors in auto purchasers' minds, respondents to an insurance industry-sponsored survey have indicated.

The public opinion survey, called "Public Attitude Monitor 1981," was commissioned by the All-Industry Research Advisory Council and conducted by Yankelovich, Skelly and White. It determined that 63 percent of those

polled considered as “very important” the “degree to which the car protects people from injury,” trailing only cost and mileage ratings as the prime concerns of car shoppers.

Ranked just below the crash protection issue in importance, according to those interviewed in the survey, was the matter of “how costly it would be to repair the car after an accident.” That question was considered very important by 51 percent of the survey participants.

Auto makers should provide the “leadership to see that cars are built to be as safe as possible,” a majority (57 percent) said. When asked who they would look to for such leadership, others said: federal government, 30 percent; consumer groups, 24 percent; insurance companies, 10 percent; and state government, 6 percent.

Of those polled, 51 percent thought about the right safety features are now provided on new cars, and 39 percent believed more safety features are needed. Only 4 percent thought there should be fewer safety features, and 6 percent were uncertain.

Copies of the “Public Attitude Monitor 1981” are available from the All-Industry Research Advisory Council, 7315 Wisconsin Ave., Suite 231-W, Bethesda, MD. 20814.

NHTSA Contract Produces Promotion Group

A new group created out of a study prepared for the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) is soliciting donations in the \$25,000 to \$200,000 range from automotive and other major corporations.

According to documents describing the newly formed Traffic Safety Foundation, the group’s purpose is to “support, enhance, and augment the safety program of the federal government.”

In a letter introducing the group to corporate executives, executive director Stephen A. Jacobs said, “Some attempts by government to regulate and to legislate traffic safety have been unproductive, detrimental to economic growth, and burdensome to the people of America as taxpayers and as citizens whose freedom to express personal choice is paramount.” Jacobs, who did not specify which “attempts” he is referring to, said one of the first programs the organization would become involved in would be NHTSA’s safety belt campaign.

Although none of the foundation’s staff has had previous experience in the traffic safety field, the fund-raising effort has won the apparent support of NHTSA head Raymond Peck. In a prospectus accompanying the letter, Jacobs said Peck would be a member of the foundation’s board, but Peck resigned December 11.

In a letter to Jacobs, Peck both praised the organization and withdrew from an official role, saying there “could be an appearance of impropriety for the administrator to serve on the board of trustees.”

Two brief letters signed by President Reagan praising the program have accompanied Jacobs’ fund-raising letters to corporate executives.

The federally-funded study generating the formation of the foundation was conducted by Jacobs but is not yet public, NHTSA officials have told *Status Report*. A copy made available privately revealed the NHTSA administrator was to have served on the foundation’s board ex-officio.

FTC Urged To Sharpen Warnings On Jeep CJ-5s

In response to a solicitation for comments by the Federal Trade Commission (FTC), two organizations have urged that the agency be more specific in the warning labels it has proposed be required for Jeep CJ vehicles to inform owners of the hazards of on-road use.

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FTC Urged To Sharpen Warnings On Jeep CJ-5s (Cont'd from page 3)

Both the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety and the Center for Auto Safety, a consumer organization, objected to the language in the proposed consent order designed to notify Jeep operators that the vehicle "handles and maneuvers differently from an ordinary passenger car." (See *Status Report*, Vol. 16, No. 19, Dec. 9, 1981.) Comments from both organizations urged that it be clearly stated that under certain highway conditions the Jeep CJ vehicles are prone to roll over. The proposed agreement had used the phrase, "loss of control."

"If operators are misled into believing that the problem is simply possible loss of control, which does not sound as potentially dangerous as rollover, they may underestimate the risk involved," the Institute said in a letter submitted to the FTC comment file.

"'Loss of control' is unacceptably vague," the Center for Auto Safety commented. The Center for Auto Safety also said the proposed agreement is defective in that it fails to prohibit further "deceptive advertising."

These comments were two of the four received by the FTC when its 60-day public comment period ended February 2. The others consisted of a suggestion by a Sacramento, Calif., law firm that a similar warning be required for the Toyota Land Cruiser, and a defense of the Jeep CJ-5 by the California Association of 4WD Clubs, which said, "We have never before in over twenty years heard that this vehicle has bad highway handling characteristics, in spite of the fact our programs and members are strong on vehicle safety."

The public comment period having closed, the FTC will review the docket and may issue a consent order on a final basis.

Tax Incentives For Air Bags Draw Support

In a hearing before the Senate Subcommittee on Taxation and Debt Management, auto insurers' and consumers' representatives have endorsed a bill offering tax incentives for air bag installation in cars.

Of those testifying at the January 28 hearing, only a Ford Motor Co. official opposed the measure, saying the auto maker is now engaged in talks with the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) aimed at setting up an air bag demonstration program.

Air bags will save lives and tax dollars, the bill's author, Sen. John C. Danforth (R. - Mo.), told the committee. NHTSA figures show the government pays about \$6 billion annually in Medicare, Medicaid, and disability payments attributable to automobile crash injuries. The bill, S. 1887, proposes a \$300 tax credit for domestic auto manufacturers for each car produced with air bags, and a \$300 excise tax on the sale of domestic and foreign autos sold without air bags. (See *Status Report*, Vol. 16, No. 20, Dec. 21, 1981.)

Ultimately, said Danforth, taxpayers could save around \$3.8 billion each year if air bags were in all cars, and up to 9,000 lives could be saved annually. Estimates prepared by the staff of the Joint Committee on Taxation project revenue losses attributable to the tax credit would average \$2 billion for each year the tax credit remained in place.

Danforth said he was "not wedded to a single word" of the bill. "I am, however, committed to the passage of legislation which will make this long overdue safety technology widely available in the U.S.," he said. Danforth is a member of the Senate Finance Committee and chairs the Commerce Committee's Subcommittee on Surface Transportation.

Institute Film Shown

At Danforth's request, William Haddon, Jr., M.D., president of the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety, opened the hearing by presenting a new Institute film, "Faces in Crashes." (See page 1.) Before introducing the film, Haddon said, "the statement that more than 50,000 people are killed each year has become something of a cliché. . . . What this really means is that more than 50,000 Americans each year are literally torn, crushed, and lacerated to death in split seconds.

“I think that if instead of split seconds, these killings took place in each case over a period of weeks, it would be appallingly obvious that we don't need to tolerate this.”

Lowell Beck, president of the National Association of Independent Insurers (NAII), a trade association representing more than 500 insurers, said the organization supports the Danforth bill. Beck noted NAII has filed suit to overturn the NHTSA administrator's recent decision to drop the federal automatic restraint requirements of FMVSS 208. (See *Status Report*, Vol. 16, No. 19, Dec. 9, 1981.)

Robert F. McDermott, chairman of the United Services Automobile Association (USAA), and Douglas M. Fergusson, director of safety services for Nationwide Insurance Companies, testified in support of the measure, along with Clarence Ditlow of the Center for Auto Safety and Stephen Teret of the American Public Health Association. Former NHTSA administrator Joan Claybrook said she would support the bill, although she suggested modifications.

Air Bag Demonstration Program Hinted

Roger E. Maugh, director of automotive safety for the Ford Motor Co., hinted an air bag demonstration program may be in the works. Maugh said NHTSA had approached Ford requesting participation in a cooperative government/industry air bag demonstration program.

“Ford has advised NHTSA that we endorse the concept of a cooperative government/industry air bag demonstration program and will work to make it a reality,” said Maugh. He indicated the price for such cooperation might be “modifications” to the now-extinct passive restraint regulations and said in the face of such discussions, legislation is unnecessary.

Sen. Bob Packwood (R. - Ore.), chairman of the subcommittee, has agreed to hold a second day of hearings in March to accommodate NHTSA head Raymond Peck, who has said he will reveal the results of private discussions with auto manufacturers and state the administration's position on S. 1887 at that time.

A Preoccupation With Automobile ‘Muscle’

The Massachusetts registrar of motor vehicles, Richard E. McLaughlin, concerned by the threat to highway safety implied in an automobile advertisement last year, wrote this letter to the advertiser, Nissan Motors Corporation:

Gentlemen:

Your current full page advertisement tells us that Datsun Turbo ZX drivers “OWN THE ROAD”.

I do not believe, as one of the senior Motor Vehicle Administrators in this country, that I have ever seen such an arrogant, anti-social example of corporate irresponsibility.

NOBODY “owns the road” in the United States of America. The American Road is a commonly held and shared trust belonging to *all* Americans and cannot be arrogated to the selfish and irresponsible abuse of the type driver you are so obviously trying to attract.

I am calling the attention of all my fellow Motor Vehicle Administrators in the U.S. and Canada to this dangerous campaign — and I have directed all Massachusetts law enforcement officers to accord particular attention to the manner of operation by drivers of this vehicle.

We never needed “muscle cars” — and with our current energy crisis they are even less to be tolerated. A 50 MPH speed in 5.1 seconds is scarcely compatible with a national 55 MPH speed limit.

You would do well to reconsider this absurd and dangerous advertising campaign.

Sincerely,
Richard E. McLaughlin
Registrar

(McLaughlin later said, “Nissan never did give me the courtesy of a reply but, on the other hand, I have not seen any further appearance of this particular advertisement.”)

Tough Bumpers

Why Does Detroit Fight a Standard Car Buyers Want?

Should the Federal government weaken its standards for auto bumpers? Federal regulators lean that way, arguing it doesn't pay to invest an extra \$30 to \$50 in bumpers to protect cars in 5-mile-an-hour crashes.

That isn't surprising. "Cost-benefit" comparisons between 5-m.p.h. bumpers and 2.5-m.p.h. bumpers are inconclusive. And President Reagan has made clear his support for efforts to reduce regulation.

But why are the auto companies so eager to roll back the 5-m.p.h. standard when it is clear that car buyers want it? This may be yet another case in which Big Auto takes aim at Washington and shoots itself in the foot.

In 1973, the Feds set a 5-m.p.h. standard for front bumpers and 2.5-m.p.h. standard for rear bumpers. The idea was to protect brake and steering systems in low-speed collisions and to lower astronomical repair bills for "fender-bender" accidents. A year later the rear bumper standard was upgraded to 5 m.p.h.

Now, after surveying accident rates and repair costs, Federal regulators say the 5-m.p.h. standard should go. They prefer a 2.5-m.p.h. standard — or, conceivably, no standard at all — because the tough bumper "costs consumers more than it saves them."

But it probably doesn't. Insurance industry researchers point out serious flaws in the Government's analysis:

□ Many of the cars surveyed were built before lighter, more crashworthy bumpers were developed.

□ The potential saving from tough bumpers was underestimated, since car owners rarely remember accidents in which no repairs were needed.

□ The true cost of fender-benders was underestimated because little weight was given to the time lost in getting repairs made.

The real puzzle is the position of the auto companies. From the seller's view, good bumpers are amenities, like carpeting or stereos. If the public wants them, why shouldn't Detroit be happy to accept cash in return?

Customers are indeed willing to pay \$30 to \$50 (or more) for 5-m.p.h. bumpers. A recent survey shows that 85 percent of owners of late-model cars would pay \$50 extra for the better bumpers; 68 percent would pay \$100 extra, and 36 percent would pay \$200 extra. Why, then, is the auto industry opposed to the current standard?

The reason can't be Detroit's usual neurosis — import anxiety. Domestic bumpers are as good as those from Yokohama. The Ford Fiesta, in fact, has one far more crashworthy than its Japanese rivals. Perhaps Detroit simply wants to pocket the saving.

But the most likely — and depressing — explanation is that Big Auto is stuck in an ideological trap, indiscriminately opposing *all* Government regulation, cost effective or not.

Whatever the reason, it is probably shortsighted. Auto buyers want value for their \$9,000 purchase. It hardly makes sense in this market to sell a car that requires hundreds of dollars in repairs every time it nudges a parking meter.

PETER PASSELL

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Georgia Finds 55 MPH Limit Is Saving Lives

Even though vehicle speeds on Georgia interstate highways have pushed upward from the 1974-1976 levels, the 55 mph speed limit has had its effect in holding fatalities on those roads to 31 percent below levels of the 70 mph era, Georgia highway officials have reported.

Before the national speed limit took effect, highway fatalities were averaging 17 a month on the Georgia interstate system, a state analysis shows. "Fatalities dropped to an average of 8 per month, a 53 percent reduction, immediately following the implementation of the 55 mph speed limit," state authorities report. "The only thing that changed to produce the immediate reduction was the travel speeds of motorists."

At the same time the 85th percentile speed (the speed at which or below which 85 percent of the vehicles travel) dropped from 68 to 61 mph, and the average speed dropped from 62 to 57 mph.

The best compliance continued from 1974-1976, Georgia's officials observed, with the fatality rate dropping to a low of 7.5 per month by 1976. Then speeds began to climb in 1977 and the fatality rate has averaged 12 per month since that time. Even so the fatality rate has remained 31 percent below the prespeed-limit mark.

HSRC Study Confirms Motorcycle Lights-On Law Benefits

Significant benefits are indicated from laws requiring motorcyclists to use their lights whenever their vehicles are operating — whether day or night — a study from the University of North Carolina Highway Safety Research Center (HSRC) has concluded.

Researchers studying North Carolina crash records found a reduction of more than 18 percent in multivehicle crashes involving motorcycles after the state adopted a lights-on law in 1973. The findings confirmed conclusions reached in an earlier HSRC study released in 1977. At that time data were used for 1971 through 1976. In the new study data for two more years — through 1978 — are analyzed.

Nineteen states now require the use of lights whenever a motorcycle is operating. The practice is believed to increase the conspicuity of the vehicle and thus reduce the danger of the cyclist being struck by another vehicle.

“On the basis of the preponderance of evidence, it is recommended that states enact legislation requiring the use of headlights during daylight operation of motorcycles,” the HSRC study said. “Such legislation appears to be a highly cost-effective method of reducing injury and death from motor vehicle crashes.”

The study is titled, “The Impact of a Motorcycle Lights-On Law: An Update,” and was conducted by Patricia F. Waller of HSRC and Lindsay I. Griffin III of Texas A&M University.

Institute Film Opens In Washington Theatres (Cont'd from page 1)

Following the K-B lead, the Sack chain of theatres in the Boston area became the second group to book the film. A. Alan Friedberg, president of the Sack company, said “Faces in Crashes” will be scheduled for a month on two screens in Boston and eight screens in the surrounding communities.

Americans sustain more than 300,000 injuries to their faces in car crashes every year. Crashes are by far the leading cause of severe facial lacerations and fractures. Drivers' faces most commonly are injured by steering wheels. For passengers, windshields are the primary source of severe facial injury. (See *Status Report*, Vol. 16, No. 4, March 17, 1981.) “Faces in Crashes” documents this major health problem, primarily through interviews with men and women whose faces, or those of their loved ones, have been injured in collisions.

The film also shows how facial injuries could be reduced. Well-researched approaches to protecting faces in crashes include wearing seat belts, equipping cars with anti-laceration windshields, and installing air bags to protect occupants from violent crashes with interior structures. Although thousands of cars in Europe now have the anti-laceration windshields, and some have air bags, not a single car for sale in the United States today has these modern technologies.

“Faces in Crashes” (16mm) is available for loan on a first-come, first-served basis, and for sale (\$90) from the Communications Department, Insurance Institute for Highway Safety, Watergate 600, Washington, D.C. 20037. Video cassettes (3/4” and 1/2”) are available for \$40.

On The Inside

- **SOME SUCCESS** has been reported for reward programs to increase seat belt use, but studies show results are temporary. ...Page 1
- **'FACES IN CRASHES,'** a new film produced by the Institute, has opened in movie theatres in Washington and Boston. ...Page 1
- **CRASH PROTECTION** ranks high as a decision-making factor for car shoppers, a new survey for the insurance industry indicates. ...Page 2
- **A NEW SAFETY GROUP** created from a study prepared for NHTSA is soliciting funds from auto makers and other corporations. ...Page 3
- **MORE SPECIFIC WARNINGS** on the hazards of on-road use of Jeep CJ vehicles have been urged on the Federal Trade Commission. ...Page 3
- **TAX INCENTIVES** for the installation of air bags in cars have been supported in a Senate subcommittee hearing. ...Page 4
- **AN AUTO ADVERTISEMENT** exploiting high performance features has raised the concern of a Massachusetts official. ...Page 5
- **'TOUGH BUMPERS'** is an editorial comment on the proposed weakening of the bumper standard reprinted from the *New York Times*. ...Page 6
- **THE NATIONAL SPEED LIMIT** has had its effect in holding down deaths on Georgia interstate highways, state officials report. ...Page 6
- **SIGNIFICANT BENEFITS** are found from motorcycle lights-on laws in a study from the Highway Safety Research Center. ...Page 7

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