

IMPORT Auto TALK



By IAN NEILL



Just how effective are seat belts in preventing injuries and deaths in automobile accidents? Until recently any meaningful attempt to answer this question has been heavily tainted with conjecture.

In setting new safety standards for automobiles the U.S. National Highway Safety Bureau recently reopened debate on whether or not the 3-point lap-and-diagonal "shoulder harness" type of belts are of significant benefit. The Bureau requested comments from interested parties, as well as all available statistical data.

As it happened, the Volvo Company of Sweden had on hand the most complete and perhaps the only conclusive report on the subject. It is the most compelling argument for using 3-point seat belts I have yet encountered. I pass along the following assessment of the Volvo study as reported in a recent article in Road and Track Magazine with the hope that more people will use this most essential item of safety equipment.

"The trouble with most information available to date is that not enough variables could be eliminated — too many sizes and types of cars involved, insufficient data about how tight the belts were, and purely insufficient numbers of cases in which such belts have been used. So how did Volvo get the data? In Scandinavia Volvo has an unusual guarantee plan: with the purchase of a new Volvo comes a 5-year insurance policy — included, of course, in the price of the car. So all accidents in which Volvos are involved have to be reported to the company. All Volvos built since 1959 have had Volvo's original 3-point belts fitted to the front seats. (This is the same type lap-and-shoulder harness fitted as standard, equipment in every Datsun Sedan, Station Wagon and Sports Car we sell at NEILL DATSUN. The statistical basis for the survey looks unimpeachable. It was limited to Sweden and was conducted from March 28, 1965, to March 28, 1966. The total number of reports properly filled out covered 28,780 drivers.

The number of injuries increases rapidly with the accident speed, as would be expected. The driver is injured about two-and-a-half times as often (and the front-seat passenger about twice as often) at 50 mph as at 30 mph. The unbelted front passenger sustains significantly more injuries than the drivers — the appellation "death seat" isn't far-off. With the belts in use there were NO FATALITIES AT ANY SPEED BELOW 60 MPH. Without belts there were fatalities at speeds as low as 12 mph.

When we look over this report one thing stands out above all else; when we legislate into existence "safe" interiors, with soft knobs, gentle surfaces and collapsible steering columns; we're essentially protecting those who won't bother to protect themselves. Those who are capable of rational thought about the real dangers of driving will get the belts and use them."

WHAT THE EXPERTS SAY:

"The shoulder lap belts in the Datsun are about the best we've seen yet in a car of this price."

Track & Traffic

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Nissan Automobile Co. (Canada) Ltd., makers of Datsun cars and trucks, completed their new parts and service complex in Toronto last June. This 12½ acre facility is part of a nation wide expansion programme to keep pace with the rapid increase in sales of Datsun vehicles in Canada.

This giant facility has 65,000 square feet of building of which 40,000 square feet will be devoted to parts (between 1-1/2 - 2 million dollars worth of parts to be kept in stock at all times) service school, complete car-ready dept. and elaborate distribution and administration offices. There is enough space to store 3,000 new cars which will be handled by the latest shipping equipment.

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