

Survey finds safe drivers wear seatbelts

More than two million persons suffered disabling injuries from motor vehicle accidents in the U.S. in 1980—and 53,330 lost their lives. This—in a nation where, according to the National Safety Council, only 10.9 percent of all motorists regularly use occupant safety restraints.

How many of these injuries and deaths could have been prevented had seat belts been compulsory no longer is a matter for conjecture.

In the Canadian province of Ontario, for example, where the use of seat belts is required by law, accidents in which safety belts were not worn by 30,206 drivers resulted in injuries to 8,780 or 29 percent, while 370 were killed.

In contrast, of the 265,392 drivers involved in accidents who were wearing seat belts, only 38,216 or 14 percent were injured; 143 were killed.

Will drivers take greater risks where they're compelled by law to buckle up?

Not according to a study by three General Motors researchers.

Risk-taking—measured in terms of how closely one car follows another in high-flow freeway traffic—was analyzed in Ontario, with a seat belt law dating back to 1976, and in Michigan where there is no such law.

Observers collected data on 4,812 cars and light-duty trucks by photographing each vehicle as it passed a reference mark and recording the time interval between the successive photographs.

They determined that 51 percent of the drivers in Ontario used their shoulder harness, compared with only about 17 percent in Michigan.

Actual conditions

Using actual driving behavior under compulsory conditions, the study challenges the hypothesis that claims the benefits of seat belts and other motor vehicle safety equipment may be diminished to some extent because of various offsetting types of behavior adopted by drivers when these things are required by government.

The GM study shows just the opposite: Those drivers who used their shoulder harness took less rather than more risk.

In a second study, GM researchers sought a correlation between tailgating and the driver's previous driving record. The authors studied 2,576 drivers in Michigan who were traveling along a local freeway during high-flow afternoon rush-hour traffic.

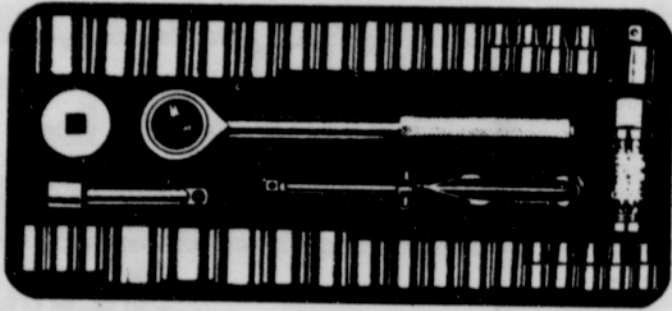
Accident-involved drivers or those with traffic violations were more likely to tail other vehicles, the observers found, than accident-free drivers or those without violations.

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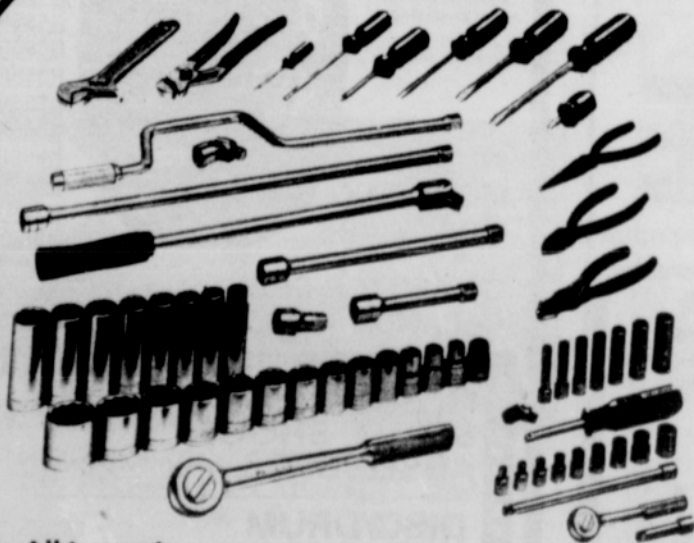
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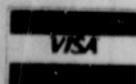
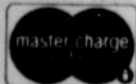
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