



YOU OWE YOUR FAMILY SAFETY SEAT BELTS

Racing drivers and safety experts use them; they could save 10,000 lives a year and countless injuries—yet we resist them!

By J. C. FURNAS

A free-lance writer who has specialized in automotive safety for a number of years, J. C. Furnas is perhaps best known for his realistic article, "And Sudden Death," which was originally published 25 years ago and has since been reprinted in millions of copies. In 1936, collaborating with the late Ernest M. Smith, he also wrote a book, "Sudden Death and How to Avoid It." Furnas' personal crusade for automobile seat belts has the wholehearted endorsement of leading safety organizations as well as the auto industry itself.

A YOUNG RELATIVE of mine is a lucky girl. Just 17 at the time, she was driving the family car along the Maine Turnpike some years ago with a girl friend. The car behind smashed into them at tremendous speed. It was the other driver's fault, but traffic crashes are as likely to kill the innocent as the guilty.

State troopers viewing the demolished cars were amazed that the two girls had been able to walk away from the wreck—shaken up, true, but with only trifling injuries.

Another of those once-in-a-blue-moon acci-

dents? Not at all—no freak about it. What made the difference between a few bruises and death or disfigurement were safety belts the girls had securely buckled around them.

The belts were there because the driver's uncle-in-law—meaning me—had installed seat belts in his car six years before, had fallen in love with the security-plus-comfort they offer, and has crusaded for universal use of them ever since. The girls are alive today because the driver's father, my brother-in-law, heard me—how could he help it?—was converted, put belts in his cars, and somehow beat into his offspring the absolute necessity of using them.

In other cases, it has been employers who have acted as stern teachers, providing belts in company cars and insisting employees use them. Consider the salesman for a California salt company whose company car met the Southern Pacific's "Daylight" streamliner at an unprotected grade crossing in San Lorenzo, Calif. The auto was knocked 100 feet and totally demolished—one of those twisted wrecks that made the front pages. The salesman merely unbuckled his safety belt and stepped out

with only minor bruises here and there.

In nearby Oakland, Calif., still lives—thanks to safety seat belts—another user of company cars who was flipped upside down after colliding with a truck. The police recorded the car as a "total wreck," but the driver merely found himself dangling upside down in his belt, a little breathless.

Consider what it implies when automobile racing rules, trying to reduce the hazards of the sport, bar drivers whose cars do not use properly made and properly installed safety belts.

The annals of racing are full of striking results—such as the car in a French sports-car race that went out of control, left the course, and turned end-over-end four times. The driver unbuckled, got out unassisted, and ran half a mile to tell his wife he was all right.

If all cars in the United States had had proper safety belts properly used since World War II, our cemeteries would contain some 100,000 fewer men, women, and children needlessly killed in highway accidents. In addition, a million or so would have been saved from excruciating and often permanently disabling injury.

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