

Automobile Safety - Metal on the Road

Automobiles are wondrous things. There are so many advantages that come with their use, our modern society simply would not have developed in the way that it has were it not for their influence.

But like anything else, there can be problems too.

Travel is essential for most people today, whether it just involves the daily drive to and from work, or using the car for more pleasurable reasons and the roads can be dangerous places.

The problem is, that the human body is rather frail. Automobiles are just not designed for fast speeds and heavy impacts. Our bodies don't have that much in the way of protection, like an armored exoskeleton for example, but what we do have is our brains - not that some drivers exhibit the use of theirs that much!

Right from the early days of auto history, the automobile's safe use has been an issue under scrutiny. Perhaps the ideal answer (in theory) was found right back then; to have a man with a red flag walking in front of every car on the roads, but this is hardly a practical option in the modern world.

Rolling Along Safety concerns have to be addressed in a combination of two main ways: the first being, better driving behavior and the second involving advances in technology.

Rollovers are one cause of concern that can affect any vehicle, not only SUV's and minivans, but there are ways to lessen the likelihood of a rollover occurring, as well as helping to prevent injury should one happen anyway.

Constantly proved by statistics, are the real benefits of wearing safety belts in instances of both collisions and rollovers. In the latter, which we are discussing here, there is a massive 75% decrease in likelihood of fatality in a rollover vehicle's occupants when these are worn. This is because most deaths in rollovers happen because the unfortunate people are either fully or partially thrown from the vehicle.

So belt up!

Wheels Firmly Grounded Ways of decreasing the chances of a rollover in the first place include making sure that your tires are not overly worn and are properly inflated. Vehicle control can be detrimentally affected by both of these factors, and even a slight slide can lead to more serious trouble if a car leaves the road.

Most rollovers happen in rural localities, where ditches and banks of soil often lurk beyond the edge of the road (which may well not have barriers) so don't think that it's cool to put your foot down hard because of the lower traffic levels in such areas.

If you do leave the road though in flatter areas of uneven ground, just reduce speed calmly and pull back onto the road when safe, don't panic and try to do so too quickly, as sharp turns are not a good idea at speeds found on the highway.

Another thing to consider is load; an overloaded vehicle, especially when a roof rack is employed will affect the automobile characteristics a lot, by heightening the center of gravity, so wisely heed the manufacturer's recommendations. Proper Tire Inflation and good winter tires are essential also. Its all part of your [automobile safety equipment](#).

Technology is helping here, with such as Electronic Stability Control (ESC) to help prevent rollovers, and new side airbag designs which come down from the roof like curtains to protect the head. But aid as these can, the owners and drivers still need to take their part and be responsible in their outlook.

Seeing Stars Naturally, manufacturers must also show appreciable responsibility as well, and to help encourage their enthusiasm over safety concerns, many governments now hold new car design up to much stricter standards than previously applied.

But regulations can be, shall we say, massaged at times. So, market forces are also of major importance in this field, not replacing but assisting government regulation. And in Europe, Japan and elsewhere around the world this is so, with testing regimes in place using the famous crash test dummies which are bristling with electronic sensors.

In the United States, the responsible body is the NHTSA (National Highway Traffic Safety Administration) and they dish out NCAP (New Car Assessment Program) star ratings, ranging from 1 (the worst) to 5 (the best).

These signify how safe (or not) automobiles are for front impacts (began in 1978) and side crashes (1997), then rollovers (starting in 2001), and more and more consumers are taking note of the results of these government tests, before purchasing a new model.

Though not all vehicles are tested in this scheme, the ones that are, are carefully selected as automobiles which are expected to be high volume sellers, as well as those with new and improved safety equipment or cars that are enhanced redesigns of older models.

So this way the NHTSA try to best cover their bases with available resources, with Federal motor vehicle safety standards relied on to cover the rest of the purchasable cars and trucks.

Another positive thing about this is that the automobiles chosen are bought in the marketplace from dealers in the same way as a citizen would buy theirs, so the auto companies cannot pre-select 'special examples' for the NCAP tests.

Air Matters Knowing you have a safer car can take a load off your mind, but strangely this may lead to more risk taking in some drivers, as in the case of airbags (which are designed to work with safety belts and not instead of them) when they first arrived on the scene.

These were quite controversial a little way back, as some claimed they were more of a hazard themselves than a guard. This controversial claim was hotly disputed amongst the ranks of safety experts and manufacturers, but now the fears have dissipated somewhat as air bags have improved with time. They now inflate with less violence, and so most people polled believe they are of great help in preventing injury, and are themselves safer than they were.

Though even with the latest advanced air bags, it is important to remember that small children (less than 12 years old is the US Government recommendation) can still be badly injured or killed by their operation, and so should always ride in the back seat.

Should You Brake, Steer Or Do Both Together With All Wheel ABS Another question was whether the right course of action to follow when faced with an almost inevitable collision, was to slam on the brakes or quickly turn the steering wheel.

Nowadays this is less of a problem as more automobiles are being fitted with an antilock braking system (ABS) either as factory standard or as an optional extra.

This perhaps is the best welcomed technological safety initiative, which uses sophisticated sensors to measure and control wheel speed, and alter brake pressure to get the best results, and prevent brakes from locking up the wheels which leads to spinning or skidding.

So if you have on these on your rear wheels, then you can do an emergency stop and remain in a straight line; on front and rear wheels, then you can control direction effectively whilst braking hard to further help you steer clear of an impact.

ABS is especially useful in the wet, though having this is no excuse to drive like a maniac and think you will always get away with it.

Another thing to remember is that you do not have to 'pump' the brake pedal when a sudden stop to your automobile's motion is needed, the electronically controlled valves will do all the work, just keep your foot pressed firmly down. Some drivers take their foot off the brake when they feel a pulsing sensation through the pedal, or hear a vibration-like noise. A perhaps natural reaction to an unexpected circumstance is to stop doing whatever is causing it, but here the driver must 'go with the flow' so to speak, as these noises and pedal responses are quite commonplace when ABS activates itself.

As Safe As The Drivers Are Automobiles are getting safer all the time, but until they drive themselves, we'll probably still have some problems to deal with (like other drivers, at the very least). In the final analysis, would we really want to own a car that was in charge of us?

About the Author

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