

Newspaper article for 032614

Do you know of Nils Bohlin? Bohlin was a Swedish engineer and inventor who worked for Volvo back in the late 1950's. Prior to that, he had designed ejector seats for Saab fighter airplanes. When he went to work for Volvo, pretty much the only people who used a seat belt were race car drivers. Bohlin had worked with four-point seatbelts in airplanes, but it wasn't until one of the Volvo CEO's lost a relative in a car crash that the company became motivated to increase its safety measures.

Back then, only two-point lap belts were installed in vehicles. Bohlin developed the three-point seat belt, introduced in Volvo cars in 1959. The belts secured both the upper and lower body utilizing straps that joined at the hip level and buckled below the hip – like the ones most vehicles are equipped with today.

So, by the time you're read this far, you either really like – or really don't like – Nils Bohlin! However, statistics from the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration boast that seat belts save more than 11,000 lives each year. Quite frankly, that's a lot of loved ones saved!

The State of Texas has laws in place that require all passengers and the driver of an operating vehicle to use a seat belt, if available. Fines are in place if you are caught in violation of these laws. Additional laws require that any child under 8 years old must be in a federally approved child car seat while the vehicle is in operation, unless the child is more than 4 feet 9 inches tall. Specific guidelines are in place for different ages and weights, too.

Locally, Madisonville Police Department kindly shared statistics from 2013 with us, showing 17 tickets given for "unrestrained child(ren) younger than 4 years old", 10 tickets for unrestrained drivers, 7 for unrestrained passengers, and 4 for unrestrained child(ren) 5 – 16 years old.

Although this doesn't sound like an abundance of tickets written for lack of seat belt usage, law enforcement is sending a message to all of us about safety. It's just that important to them to possibly save a life.

Maybe next time you get into your vehicle, you will think of Nils Bohlin and his quest for safety in airplanes and vehicles. Upon his death in 2002, Volvo estimated that the seat belt had saved more than one million lives in the four decades since it was introduced. So, click it or ticket, buckle up, and Be Safe Out There!
