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Traffic Safety
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Automatic Safety Belt Systems: Changes in Owner Usage Over Time in GM Chevettes and VW Rabbits

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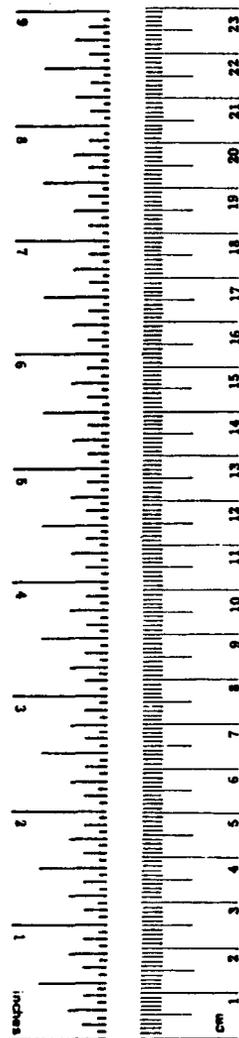
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16. Abstract This study was designed to: (1) determine any decrement in use of the automatic restraint system, and (2) assess any change in owners' attitudes toward the automatic restraint system over a two year period. The information gathered will assist the NHTSA in trying to predict any potential decrement over time of automatic belt usage if these new systems are introduced into the market place. In an earlier study, designed to ascertain usage of and attitudes toward the automatic system, telephone interviews were conducted with owners of 1978-1979 GM Chevettes and with owners of 1978 VW Rabbits. Both makes of cars when purchased had automatic restraint and starter interlock systems. In the present study, ORC conducted follow-up interviews with 417 Chevette owners and with 441 Rabbit owners from the earlier study who still owned the same cars. Findings indicate that over a period of two years there has been a statistically significant decrease in the percent of owners who report that they use the automatic safety belt. Currently, the usage rate among Chevette owners is 62.8% compared with a rate of 73.9% two years ago. The net decline in usage among Rabbit owners is also statistically significant but more modest dropping from 89.1% in 1979 to 83.0% in 1981. The decrement in usage would probably have been even larger had these cars not incorporated a starter interlock and it was possible to obtain usage data from second owners.					
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METRIC CONVERSION FACTORS

Approximate Conversions to Metric Measures

Symbol	When You Know	Multiply by	To Find	Symbol
LENGTH				
in	inches	*2.5	centimeters	cm
ft	feet	30	centimeters	cm
yd	yards	0.9	meters	m
mi	miles	1.6	kilometers	km
AREA				
in ²	square inches	6.5	square centimeters	cm ²
ft ²	square feet	0.09	square meters	m ²
yd ²	square yards	0.8	square meters	m ²
mi ²	square miles	2.6	square kilometers	km ²
	acres	0.4	hectares	ha
MASS (weight)				
oz	ounces	28	grams	g
lb	pounds	0.45	kilograms	kg
	short tons (2000 lb)	0.9	tonnes	t
VOLUME				
tsp	teaspoons	5	milliliters	ml
Tbsp	tablespoons	15	milliliters	ml
fl oz	fluid ounces	30	milliliters	ml
c	cup	0.24	liters	l
pt	pints	0.47	liters	l
qt	quarts	0.95	liters	l
gal	gallons	3.8	liters	l
ft ³	cubic feet	0.03	cubic meters	m ³
yd ³	cubic yards	0.76	cubic meters	m ³
TEMPERATURE (exact)				
°F	Fahrenheit temperature	5/9 (after subtracting 32)	Celsius temperature	°C

* 1 in. = 2.54 (exactly). For other exact conversions and more detailed tables, see NBS Misc. Publ. 286, Units of Weights and Measures, Price \$2.25, SD Catalog No. C13.10-286.



Approximate Conversions from Metric Measures

Symbol	When You Know	Multiply by	To Find	Symbol
LENGTH				
mm	millimeters	0.04	inches	in
cm	centimeters	0.4	inches	in
m	meters	3.3	feet	ft
m	meters	1.1	yards	yd
km	kilometers	0.6	miles	mi
AREA				
cm ²	square centimeters	0.16	square inches	in ²
m ²	square meters	1.2	square yards	yd ²
km ²	square kilometers	0.4	square miles	mi ²
ha	hectares (10,000 m ²)	2.6	acres	
MASS (weight)				
g	grams	0.035	ounces	oz
kg	kilograms	2.2	pounds	lb
t	tonnes (1000 kg)	1.1	short tons	
VOLUME				
ml	milliliters	0.03	fluid ounces	fl oz
l	liters	2.1	pints	pt
l	liters	1.06	quarts	qt
l	liters	0.26	gallons	gal
m ³	cubic meters	36	cubic feet	ft ³
m ³	cubic meters	1.3	cubic yards	yd ³
TEMPERATURE (exact)				
°C	Celsius temperature	9/5 (then add 32)	Fahrenheit temperature	°F

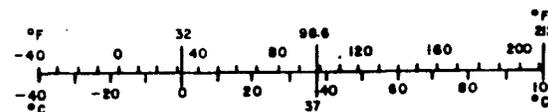


TABLE OF CONTENTS

	<u>Page</u>
Summary and Conclusions	v
Introduction - Research Methodology	ix
Detailed Findings:	1
Trends in Belt Usage (Chevettes and Rabbits Combined)	2
Trends in Usage by Driver Characteristics	3
Trends in Usage - Chevette vs Rabbit	4-6
Defeat of Automatic Belt System	7
Trends in Attitudes Toward Automatic Belt	8
Appendix	A-1
Sampling Tolerance	A-2
Completion Rate Analysis	A-4
Questionnaires	

Summary and Conclusions

Follow-up interviews were conducted with 417 owners of 1978-1979 Chevettes and with 441 owners of 1978 Rabbits. Both makes of cars when purchased had automatic restraint and starter interlock systems.

This follow-up study had the following two basic objectives:

- (1) To determine any decrement in use of the automatic restraint system, and
- (2) To assess any change in owners' attitudes toward the automatic restraint system over a two year period.

Findings from the current study when compared with those from the earlier study are helpful in trying to predict any potential decrement over time of automatic safety belt usage should all cars produced in the future come equipped with automatic restraint systems. It should be recognized, however, that both these earlier model Chevettes and Rabbits have a starter interlock which tends to have a positive effect on belt usage while cars manufactured in the future are not likely to include a starter interlock.

In this report belt usage is based on interviews with the 858 original owners of Chevettes and Rabbits. Had it been possible to contact and interview the second owner (362 cars were traded or sold since the first study), the overall belt usage percentage would probably be lower than the usage percentage for the original owners.

Another point should be kept in mind. In the earlier study,* Rabbit owners were found to be more favorably disposed toward the automatic restraint system than were Chevette owners and more likely to have ordered a car with an automatic belt. Consequently, in trying to predict what the future holds for automatic restraint systems, more weight should be given to belt usage and the attitudes of Chevette owners than to that of Rabbit owners.

A comparison of the findings from the two studies indicate that over a period of two years there has been a statistically significant decrease in the percent of owners who report that they use the automatic safety belt. For the two makes combined, the number of owners who report use of the automatic belt declined 8.5% (81.7% vs. 73.2%). Chevette owners report markedly less belt

* Report No. DOT-HS-805-399, May 1980 entitled "Automatic Safety Belt Systems: Owner Usage and Attitudes In GM Chevettes and VW Rabbits

usage over the two year period than do Rabbit owners. Currently, the usage rate for Chevette owners is 62.8% compared with a rate of 73.9% two years ago. The net decline in usage for Rabbit owners is more modest dropping from 89.1% in 1979 to 83.0% in 1981.

Favorable impressions of the automatic restraint system among Chevette owners have dropped sharply over the past two years. Currently, Chevette owners are about evenly divided between those who describe their impression of the automatic belt as unfavorable (48.7%) and those who describe it as favorable (46.8%). Two years ago the opposite was true with the level of favorability at 55.2% and unfavorability at 39.3%. By comparison, the high level of favorability toward the automatic belt among Rabbit owners noted two years ago is still evident in the current study. In 1979, 84.4% of Rabbit owners were favorably disposed toward the system compared with 82.1% today.

In conclusion, the findings indicate that use of the automatic restraint system among owners of 1978-1979 Chevetttes is declining at an annual rate of 5.6%. If the same rate of decrement continues, the usage rate of the automatic restraint system in these Chevetttes might very well be as low as 40.6% in 1985 and down to under 30% in 1987. Also, one might conclude that the predicted decrement in belt usage would be even more severe had the 1978-1979 Chevetttes not incorporated a starter interlock system and we were able to obtain usage data from second owners.

The annual decrement rate in belt usage among Rabbit owners has averaged about 3% over the two year period. Should this rate continue, automatic belt usage in the Rabbit in 1985 would be about 71% and close to 65% in 1987.

The reasons for the different decrement rates in belt usage among Chevette owners and Rabbit owners are not apparent in this study and are difficult to explain since each car has essentially the same system, i.e., a two-point belt which disconnects at an upper anchor and a starter interlock. The difference may be due in part to comfort and convenience problems which were cited much more frequently by Chevette owners than by Rabbit owners in the earlier study. Also, the earlier study showed demographic differences between Chevette and Rabbit owners which suggests that Rabbit owners, as a group, tend to be more safety belt minded than are Chevette owners.

Another indication that belt usage by drivers declines as automatic belt systems get older is evident in the 19-city observation study. An analysis was made, by model year, of those VW Rabbits that were observed in traffic during 1978-1979. The results below show that belt usage is significantly reduced over the three model years. In this case, however, part of the decline in usage may be attributable to changes in ownership of the cars which were not a factor in the present study.

Observed Safety Belt Usage In VW Rabbits During 1978-1979 1/

<u>Model Year</u>	<u>Percent Using Automatic Belt</u>	
1976	73%	N=103
1977	74%	N=132
1978	87%	N=178

1/ Source: Report DOT-HS-805-398, May 1980 entitled "Safety Belt Usage Among Drivers."

Introduction

Background

In August 1979, Opinion Research Corporation (under contract DOT-HS-7-01736) conducted a telephone interview survey for the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) to assess usage of and attitudes toward automatic safety belts among owners/drivers of 1978-1979 GM Chevettes and 1978 VW Rabbits with automatic belt systems. At that time reported belt usage was 89% for the Rabbit system and 72% for the Chevette System. Accident data from three states furnished NHTSA indicate that belt usage in Rabbits with automatic belts was between 40 and 70 percent. Similar data was not available for the Chevette system. The accident data for Rabbits suggests that usage of the automatic belt is decreasing over time. More information is needed by NHTSA as to the specific extent of this decrement so that the agency can better make estimates of the effectiveness of any standard requiring automatic restraints.

The purpose of this study is to try to predict any potential decrement over time of automatic belt usage if these new systems are introduced into the market place. The 1978-1979 Chevettes and Rabbits incorporated a starter interlock which tends to have a positive effect on belt usage. Thus, usage rates of these restraint systems are expected to be higher than in future systems that will have no interlock and have easily disconnectable belt systems. However, it is believed that any decrement observed over time in the 1978-1979 Rabbits and Chevettes will be helpful in predicting usage rates over time for future automatic belt systems.

Research Methodology

The research design called for the completion of the following tasks:

I Sample Design and Data Collection

In August 1979, ORC under contract with NHTSA, conducted 1,002 telephone interviews with owners/drivers of 1978-1979 GM Chevettes with automatic belt systems and 1,010 owners/drivers of 1978 VW Rabbits with automatic belt systems. In the present study, ORC WATS interviewers conducted follow-up interviews with 417 Chevette owners and 441 Rabbit owners who still owned the same cars with automatic restraint systems.

A summary of the outcome of the 2,012 total contacts is presented in the Appendix on page A-4.

II Data Collection

The follow-up interviews addressed the following:

- Is respondent's current impression of the automatic safety belt favorable or unfavorable?
- Has the automatic belt system been disconnected or removed from the car?
- When driving, how frequently does respondent use the automatic safety belt?

The specific format is included in the Appendix section.

III Data Analysis and Report

A comparative analysis was made to ascertain any changes in belt usage for (1) all existing belt systems studied (2) by vehicle manufacturer and (3) other driver or vehicle characteristics.

Estimate of Safety Belt Usage

In both the current and earlier studies, data on belt usage is based on responses to the following question:

"On most trips where you do the driving in your (Chevette) (Rabbit) would you say that you use the safety belt:

Always or almost always
More than half the time
Less than half the time
Almost never or never

Throughout the report belt usage rates are derived from the number of respondents who report that they use the automatic belt "Always or almost always." Any other response to the above question is not reflected in the usage rates shown.

Sampling Tolerance

Throughout the report, tests of statistical significance (at the 95-in-100 confidence level) have been applied. Thus, any statements to the effect that one group of respondents is larger (or smaller) than another group may be taken as having met the test of statistical significance. In the tables and charts, the symbol(s) is used to identify a given percentage as being significantly larger or smaller than other percentages.

A description of the test for significant differences will be found on page A-2 of the Appendix.

Detailed Findings

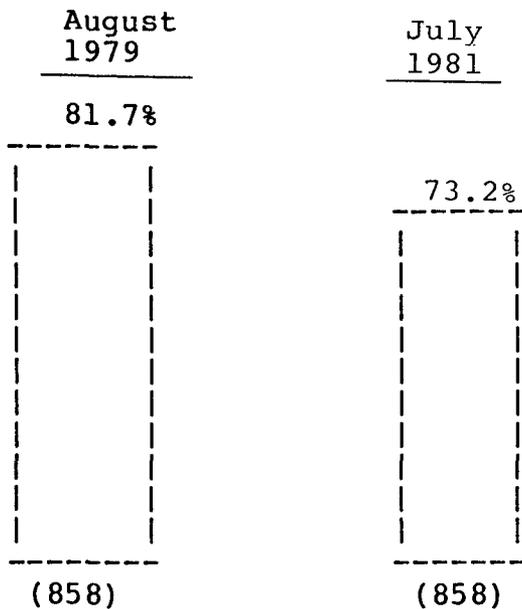
Trends In Usage

The level of usage of the automatic restraint system in 1978-1979 GM Chevettes and 1978 VW Rabbits has decreased significantly over the past two years. In an earlier study conducted in August 1979, 81.7% of owners/drivers of these cars reported that they used the automatic belt "always or almost always." When the same 858 drivers were re-interviewed in July 1981, 73.2% report that they use the automatic belt "always or almost always." Thus, over a period of about two years, the reported usage rate for the automatic restraint system shows a net decrement of 8.5% for the two models combined.

Figure 1

Percent of Drivers Who Report They Wear Automatic Belt
"Always or Almost Always"

Study Conducted



(Chevettes and Rabbits combined)

Trends In Usage By Driver Characteristics

Figure 2 compares usage rates for the two year period by driver characteristics and for 2-door vs. 4-door Chevetttes and Rabbits. In each subgroup, reported use of the automatic belt is lower in July, 1981 than in August, 1979. Largest declines in use have occurred among drivers 50 years of age or over and among those who report the least amount of educational attainment.

Figure 2

Percent of Drivers who Report They Wear Belt
"Always' or "Almost Always"

Study Conducted

		August 1979	July 1981	
	<u>N</u>	<u>Pct.</u>	<u>Pct.</u>	
Total Automatic Belt Owners	855	81.7	73.2	(s)
Male	388	82.7	72.7	(s)
Female	470	80.6	73.6	(s)
Under 30 years	153	83.7	75.8	
30-49 years	434	82.9	76.5	
50 or over	268	78.7	66.4	(s)
High School or less	257	76.3	61.5	
College	404	82.4	75.0	
Graduate School	173	90.2	86.7	
2-Door	396	83.3	75.5	(s)
4-Door	331	81.6	73.4	(s)

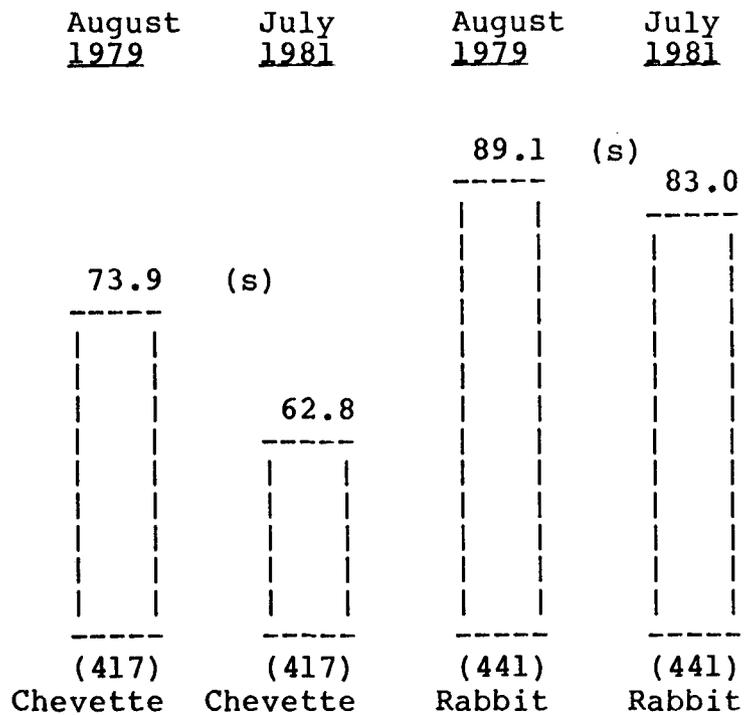
(Chevetttes and Rabbits Combined)

Trends In Usage -- Chevette vs. Rabbits

The data indicate that use of the automatic belt is decreasing at a larger rate in the Chevette than in the Rabbit. Drivers of Chevettes report markedly less belt usage over the two year period than do drivers of the Rabbit. As shown in Figure 3, the current usage rate in Chevettes is 62.8% compared with a usage rate of 73.9% two years ago--a decline of 11.1%. By comparison, the usage rate among Rabbit owners is 6.1% lower today than two years ago.

Figure 3

Percent of Drivers Who Report They Wear Automatic Belt
"Always or Almost Always"



Trends In Usage By Characteristics of Chevette Owners

In each subgroup of Chevette owners, reported use of the automatic belt is lower in the current study (July, 1981) than in the study conducted two years ago. The decline in usage over time, however, is most apparent among owners 50 years of age or over and among those classified as having a "high school or less education." Although the decrement in reported usage is larger among owners of 4-door models than among owners of 2-door models, a special tabulation indicates that the difference is due largely to demographic factors rather than to style of car.

Figure 4

Percent of Chevette Owners who Report They Wear Belt
"Always' or "Almost Always"

	Study Conducted			
		August 1979	July 1981	
	<u>N</u>	<u>Pct.</u>	<u>Pct.</u>	
Total Chevette Owners	417	73.9	62.5	(s)
Male	169	72.8	60.9	(s)
Female	248	74.6	64.1	(s)
Under 30 years	84	73.8	63.1	
30-49 years	195	74.9	67.7	
50 or over	137	72.3	55.5	(s)
High School or less	144	67.4	49.3	
College	209	76.6	68.9	
Graduate School	55	83.6	74.6	
2-Door	128	72.6	65.6	
4-Door	160	71.9	58.1	(s)

Trends In Usage By Characteristics of Rabbit Owners

The decline in automatic belt usage over time among each subgroup of Rabbit Owners is considerably more modest than that for Chevette Owners. Like Chevette owners, however, the decline in reported usage over time is more apparent among owners 50 years of age and over than among those under 50 years and among owners who report the least amount of educational attainment.

Figure 5

Percent of Rabbit Owners who Report They Wear Belt
"Always" or "Almost Always"

Study Conducted

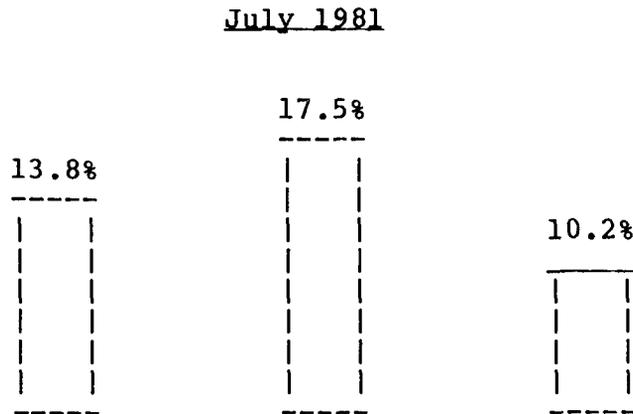
		August 1979	July 1981	
	<u>N</u>	<u>Pct.</u>	<u>Pct.</u>	
Total Rabbit Belt Owners	441	89.1	83.0	(s)
Male	219	90.4	81.7	(s)
Female	222	87.8	84.2	
Under 30 years	69	95.7	91.3	
30-49 years	239	89.5	83.7	
50 or over	131	85.5	77.9	(s)
High School or less	113	87.6	77.0	(s)
College	195	88.7	81.5	
Graduate School	118	93.2	92.4	
2-Door	268	88.4	80.2	(s)
4-Door	171	90.7	87.7	(s)

Defeat of Automatic Belt System

Among the 858 owners/drivers re-interviewed, 13.8% report that the automatic belt in their Chevettes or Rabbit has been fixed in such a way that it can no longer be used. The percentage of drivers who report that the automatic belt is now inoperative range from 17.5% for the Chevette to 10.2% for the Rabbit. This question was not included in the earlier study conducted in August 1979.

Figure 6

Percent of Drivers Who Report the Automatic Belt Has Been Cut Off, Disconnected, Removed, or In Some Way Fixed So That It Can't Be Used



The 13.8% of Chevette and Rabbit owners who report that they have disconnected the automatic belt account for about half of all nonusers. The other half of nonusers indicate either that they never use the belt or use it only occasionally. The latter group have either disconnected the interlock system or have found a way to circumvent the system when they choose not to use the belt.

Trends In Attitudes Toward Automatic Belt

As in the earlier study, the data show marked differences in attitudes toward the automatic restraint system between Chevette owners and Rabbit owners. When asked if their impression of the automatic belt is favorable or unfavorable after owning the car for a few years, 46.8% of Chevette owners say "favorable" compared with 82.1% of Rabbit owners who say this. Today, a few more Chevette owners describe their impression of the automatic belt as unfavorable (48.7%) as describe it as favorable (46.8%) while two years ago the opposite was true with the level of favorability at 55.2% and unfavorability at 39.3%. By comparison, the high level of favorability toward the automatic belt among Rabbit owners noted two years ago is still evident in the current study.

Figure 7

"Now that you have owned your (Chevette) (Rabbit) for a few years, would you describe your impression of the automatic seat belt as favorable or unfavorable?"

	<u>Chevette Owner</u>		
	<u>August</u> <u>1979</u>	<u>July</u> <u>1981</u>	
Favorable	55.2%	46.8%	(s)
Unfavorable	39.3	48.7	(s)
No Opinion	5.5 (417)	4.5 (417)	
	<u>Rabbit Owners</u>		
	<u>August</u> <u>1979</u>	<u>July</u> <u>1981</u>	
Favorable	84.4%	82.1%	
Unfavorable	11.1	13.1	
No Opinion	4.5 (441)	4.8 (441)	

The present study, as well as the earlier study, shows that belt usage and attitudes are highly correlated. Chevette and Rabbit owners who have a favorable impression of the automatic restraint system are more likely to report that they use the belt than are those owners who describe their impression of the belt as unfavorable.

APPENDIX

Sampling Tolerance

Significance of Seat Belt Usage Decline

Of the 858 respondents who drove Chevettes or Rabbits, there were 586 who continued to use their automatic seat-belt systems, 115 who never used these systems, 42 who did not use the system in 1979 but used it in 1981, and 115 who used their seat belts in 1979 but had discontinued use by 1981. Similar results shown separately for Chevette and Rabbit owners are as follows:

<u>Number of Respondents Using Seat Belts</u>	<u>Chevette</u>	<u>Rabbit</u>	<u>All Respondents</u>
Both surveys	232	354	586
Neither survey	79	36	115
In 1979, but not 1981	76	39	115
In 1981, but not 1979	30	12	42
Totals	417	441	858

It is observed that there were $76-30=46$ fewer seat-belt users among the Chevette drivers in the second survey than in the first, or a reduction of $46/417=11.0$ percent. Similar calculations produce the following table:

<u>Reduction in Seat-Belt Usage</u>	<u>Chevette</u>	<u>Rabbit</u>	<u>All Respondents</u>
Number of fewer users	46	27	73
Percentage of fewer users	11.0	6.1	8.5

To test whether these reductions are significant (0.05 level of significance) we can perform the equivalent of a paired-sample sign test. Under the null hypothesis that the number of respondents switching from non-use to use is equivalent to the number switching from use to non-use of seat belts between the two surveys, the ratio

Number of Respondents Using Seat Belts in 1981, but not in 1979

Total Number of Respondents Who Changed Their Seat-Belt Usage Habits

will equal $1/2$, plus or minus the effect of sample selection. The effect of sample selection ("random error") is measured by a multiple of the standard deviation of this ratio, which, under the

null hypothesis, is given by

$$\sqrt{\frac{1/2 \cdot 1/2}{n}} = \frac{1}{\sqrt{n}}$$

where n is the denominator of the ratio given above. For a .05 significance level test of the null hypothesis of no change against the alternative that there was either an increase or decrease in belt usage from the earlier period to the later, we can use the multiple 2 times this standard deviation. Thus, if the ration is less than $1/2 - \frac{1}{\sqrt{n}}$

we would conclude that there was a significant reduction in seat-belt usage; but if the ratio is greater than $1/2 + \frac{1}{\sqrt{n}}$ we would

conclude that seat-belt usage increased. Otherwise, we would have no evidence on which to reject the null hypothesis, and we would go on assuming that there was no change in usage.

The results of applying this test are shown in the following table:

	<u>Chevette</u>	<u>Rabbit</u>	<u>All Respondents</u>
n	106	51	157
ratio	30/106=.283	12/51=.235	42/157=.268
$1/2 - \frac{1}{\sqrt{n}}$.403	.360	.420

In each case we note that the ratio is less than $1/2 - \frac{1}{\sqrt{n}}$ and we can

conclude that there was a statistically significant (p=.05) but small decrease in seat-belt usage.

Completion Rate Analysis

In the earlier study conducted in August 1979, 1,002 interviews were completed with owners of 1978-79 Chevettes with automatic restraint systems, and 1,010 interviews were conducted with owners of 1978 Rabbits with automatic restraint systems. In the current study, an all out effort was made to re-interview each of the 2,012 respondents from the earlier study. The results of this effort are summarized in the table below.

	<u>TOTAL</u>	<u>CHEVETTE</u>	<u>RABBIT</u>
Total respondents	<u>2,012</u>	<u>1,002</u>	<u>1,010</u>
	<u>100%</u>	<u>100%</u>	<u>100%</u>
Completed interviews	43%	42%	44%
Respondent not available after four calls	17	16	18
No longer own car	18	21	16
Phone out of service	9	7	10
Respondent moved	4	4	4
Refused to be interviewed	9	10	8

Rabbit Automatic Belt Study

TELEPHONE () _____ TIME END: _____
 Area Code
 ZIP CODE: _____ TIME START: _____
 BALLOT # FROM LAST SURVEY LENGTH: _____ (MINUTES)
 DATE: _____
 INTERVIEWER: _____ ID# _____

Hello, I'm from Opinion Research Corporation in Princeton, New Jersey. We are conducting a very short follow-up survey of owners or drivers of 1978 VW Rabbits for the U.S. Department of Transportation. Your participation is voluntary, but we would appreciate your cooperation and help. It will take just a minute or two.

Does your family still own a 1978 Rabbit that came equipped with automatic safety belts:

- 1. STILL HAVE RABBIT → CONTINUE
- 2. NO LONGER OWN → TERMINATE

The last time we called, we interviewed a (MALE (FEMALE) driver of the Rabbit who was in the age group _____. May I speak to that person? If selected respondent is now on phone, go to Q. 1.

INTERVIEWER: If selected respondent still resides at telephone number called, but is not at home, arrange for a callback. When that person is contacted, reintroduce yourself and go to Q.1.
 If selected respondent no longer resides at telephone number called, circle code # and terminate interview.

- 1. NO LONGER RESIDES

I'd like to ask you a couple of questions about the automatic safety belt in your Rabbit

- 1. Now that you have owned your Rabbit for a few years, would you describe your impression of the automatic seat belt as favorable or unfavorable?
 - 1. FAVORABLE
 - 2. UNFAVORABLE
 - 3. NO OPINION
- 2. Has the automatic safety belt in the Rabbit been cut off, disconnected, removed, or in some way fixed so that it can't be used?
 - 1. YES-TERMINATE
 - 2. NO (GO TO Q.3)
- 3. On most trips where you do the driving in your Rabbit, would you say that you use the safety belt--(READ CATEGORIES)
 - 1. ALWAYS OR ALMOST ALWAYS
 - 2. MORE THAN HALF THE TIME
 - 3. LESS THAN HALF THE TIME
 - 4. ALMOST NEVER OR NEVER

THANK YOU VERY MUCH.

Record from original questionnaire:

Q.2 _____ months owned

Q.13 1 2 3 Favorability: circle one number

Q.19 1 2 3 4 Belt use: circle one number

Staple last page of old questionnaire to this form.