

GM, Police Work to Get the Word Out on Buckling Up

by Jim Stickford
Special Writer

General Motors and police agencies across Michigan are doing their level best to make it a safe Memorial Day weekend and after by emphasizing the importance of buckling up while driving – using both the carrot and the stick.

The carrot is a public information campaign that is designed to inform the public about how buckling up makes driving a much safer experience if there's an accident.

The stick is local and state police more heavily and visibly enforcing the state's buckle-up laws through the use of seat belt enforcement zones.

The press announcement of this year's buckle-up enforcement efforts was made at General Motors' Heritage Center in Sterling Heights on May 21.

Mike Prince, of the Michigan Office of Highway Safety Planning, talked about how Michigan has a budget of \$28 million to promote driver safety, most of which comes from the federal government.

He said his first car, a 1963 Oldsmobile had seat belts, but at that time they were an aftermarket feature.

"The key to driver safety for more than 40 years has been safety belts," Prince said.

"It's the driver's primary line of defense. Last year, the death rate from auto accidents declined from 937 to 889. In part, this is because of efforts like 'Click it or Ticket' to get drivers to buckle up. Of course, engineers like the ones we have here from GM are building safer cars."

Prince said last year about 200 people in Michigan who died in car accidents were unbelted. Not buckling up can have lethal consequences.

"Belts aren't just safety features, they're the key safety feature of a car," Prince said.

Kay Kent, GM's general director, vehicle safety and crash-worthiness, who works out of the Warren Tech Center, said that safety belts have been required in cars for more than 40 years. But the safety belts of today are far more effective than the ones of four decades ago.

"Safety belts also work in

harmony with airbags and other safety technology," Kent said.

"Design of belts has evolved to make them both safer and more comfortable to use.

"But we can't waver in education. Safety belts are one safety system that relies on the vehicle occupants to use to be effective. They aren't automatic like airbags."

Lt. Mike Shaw, of the Michigan State Police, said safety belt use declined a little bit last year in the state. Usage rates fell to 94.5 percent.

Unbelted drivers remain a safety problem. So as part of the state's Memorial Day traffic safety enforcement efforts, police across the state have started to set up safety enforcement zones.

These zones are set up to catch unbelted drivers. A spotter car will stay by the side of the road and radio ahead to an

enforcement car when the spotter sees an unbelted driver. The enforcement car will then be on the lookout for the spotted car. Last year, a similar enforcement campaign resulted in 9,000 tickets being issued. It also resulted in 100 drunk drivers being arrested.

"The goal of all this effort is to save lives and prevent injuries," Shaw said.

"Last year, during the Memorial Day holiday period, nine Michigan drivers were killed in auto accidents. Three of those people were unbelted. This is not a ticket-writing campaign. Enforcement is a prime motivator to get people to buckle up. This is meant to save lives."

Also on display at the press conference was GM's new center airbag.

Scott Thomas, a senior staff engineer, said the bag is placed in the inboard side driver's seat. If the vehicle receives a

side-hit, the bag deploys and catches the driver as his body is thrust sideways, away from the door where the hit took place. The bag deploys out of the seat and helps prevent injury.

"The inboard side airbag functions as a restraint and as a cushion between occupants and intruding objects," Thomas said.

"The technology is new and will be available beginning in model year 2013 in GM's mid-size crossover vehicles. They are the Chevy Traverse, the GMC Acadia and the Buick Enclave."

Thomas added that Prince and Kent were right. As great as all this new tech is in making cars safer, the best thing car passengers can do to ensure a safe driving experience is to buckle up, he said, adding that it's safer, it's simple and it doesn't take any time to click it.



PHOTOS: JAMES STICKFORD

GM senior staff engineer Scott Thomas with the automaker's new center airbag, which will be available on GM's midsize crossover utility vehicle lineup with the 2013 model year. The Chevy Traverse, GMC Acadia and Buick Enclave will be the first GM vehicles to have the center air bag. Thomas appeared with the device at the press conference held at the GM Heritage Center in Sterling Heights last week, when participants, including GM, the Michigan State Police and the Office of Highway Safety Planning, all discussed seat belt safety with Memorial Day traffic in mind.



PHOTO: GERALD SCOTT

Warren resident Oscar Zamora with his 1960 Buick LeSabre. "The 1960 LeSabre was the last car that GM design legend Harley Earl had an impact on," Zamora said. "He designed the instrument panel." GM's Earl retired in 1959, but what a car he left in the LeSabre that's part of his legacy.

Owner's Cool, Car's Lonnng

by Gerald Scott
News Dept.

If you're looking for a cool car owned by a cool-car guy, look no further than Oscar Zamora's 1960 Buick LeSabre.

Almost as big as the Titanic, Zamora's car is painted bright red and stops traffic everywhere it goes. Built at the height of GM's "landboat" era, the vehicle's Michigan license

plate pretty much says it all – TOOLONG.

Zamora, 55, is retired from the state of Michigan and is a Warren resident. He had the LeSabre on display at the Boy Scouts of America/Troop 390 car show at Warren city hall recently.

"I got it about four years ago out of Arizona. Those cars were notorious for some rust issues, which I had taken care of," he said.

"A lot of the stuff I was able to do (personally) but some you have to have done. You can't do everything yourself unless you're a super-mechanic, which I'm not.

"I've had it about four years now."

Dare we say it, but the car really does look as good or better than it did when it was driven off the Buick assembly line a couple of generations ago.

"Most people ask, is that the longest car they ever made? I say it's close, but the Electra is actually 4 inches longer," he said.

"I don't remember what the wheelbase is, but I've got a full-size Dodge van at home and this is longer."

The LeSabre is distinctive for its flowing exterior lines such that it's the last of the generation of mid-1950s and early-1960s GM cars that were styled with jet aircraft of that era in mind.

"This is 1960. In 1959, the fins were a little different on it, and in 1961 the fins were gone, so it's a one-year body style. It was made in Flint, Michigan.

"It's also one of the last cars that Harley Earl had a hand in designing – he did the dashboard on it, the instrumentation.

"The basic concept of the car was taken from the B-19 bomber. Rocket design, jet plane, that was the rage and that's where they drew a lot of the inspiration for the cars."

He said the taillamps on the car were even styled to look like the afterburners on a jet, all in keeping with the aerospace design theme.

Meanwhile, the original engine is still in there, a 401 cc, but on top of the air cleaner it reads, "Wildcat 445."

"What Buick did, they named their motors after the amount of foot torque at the wheels – but the engine size is actually a



PHOTO: GERALD SCOTT

1960 Buick LeSabre owner Oscar Zamora says the car was styled after the B-19 bomber, including taillights-as-afterburners.

401. You could get the 364 in this one, but this one has the 401, according to the code badge on the firewall," Zamora said.

The odometer reads just "25,000" on it, so Zamora guesses it must have either 125,000 or 225,000 on it.

Asked what kind of ride it offers some 52 years after it was originally built, Zamora said:

"It runs good, it gets on the

highway and just kind of floats you along," Zamora said. "It's a comfortable ride. As a 'cruising car,' it's great."

Zamora, it might be noted, wears a cool "Milner" T-shirt in honor of the John Milner character for the ultra-cruise movie, "American Graffiti."

A true cruiser, he. Did we mention the 1960 LeSabre looks like a jet ready for LeTakeoff? LeCool? You bet.

Flint Introduces Hydrogen Bus

FLINT – The Mass Transportation Authority (MTA) unveiled its new hydrogen fuel cell bus and opened its alternative fuel facility in Grand Blanc Township. The MTA is the first transportation authority in the Midwest with a hydrogen fuel cell vehicle. The vehicles will be stored at the Grand Blanc Service Center and Alternative Fuel Facility location.

"Hydrogen as an alternative fuel for the public transit industry is environmentally friendly, reduces the carbon footprint and is technically feasible for a sustainable future," said Ed Benning, MTA General Manager.

A fuel cell running on pure

hydrogen, like the UTC Power Motion system utilized in the MTA bus, emits zero emissions at the source. In fact, the only thing that comes out of the tailpipe is water.

Fuel cells do not "burn" the fuel they use. Instead, they combine hydrogen with oxygen from the air electrochemically to produce electricity and emit only water vapor.

MTA's new fuel cell bus is hybrid-electric, zero emission and powered by a 120 kW Utc Power PureMotion fuel cell system. When compared to a diesel version, every bus equipped with a PureMotion system reduces nitrogen oxide emissions equivalent to removing 77 cars from the road per year and achieves the same carbon dioxide reductions as planting 31 acres of forest land.

The MTA will be procuring additional hydrogen vehicles in the near future. The Grand Blanc service garage will be expanded to provide storage for hydrogen and CNG vehicle and will offer maintenance.

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