

Retrofitting Shoulder Belts

In Pre-1990/92 Vehicles with Only Lap Belts in the Back Seat

Buckling Up Saves Lives

Safety belts and child safety seats can mean the difference between life and death. Their use is essential to protect you and your loved ones from injury or death in a car crash. When shoulder and lap belts are used together, they provide much better protection than lap belts used alone. The shoulder belt restrains the upper body, reducing the chance of injuring the head or spinal cord.

Young children should use regular child safety seats until they weigh about 40 pounds. Children who have outgrown child safety seats should use booster seats until they are tall enough to fit properly in vehicle belts. However, booster seats can only be used if there are shoulder belts as well as lap belts.

It is safer for passengers, especially children, to ride in the back seat than in front. In some states, children are required to ride in back. If the back seat of your car has only lap belts, you can improve the protection by adding rear shoulder belts.

Installing Shoulder Belts in the Back Seat

Until the 1990 model year, most cars had only lap belts in the back seat. Shoulder belts have been required in the outboard (side) positions in the back seats of new sedans, station wagons, and hatchbacks made starting in December 1989. The same requirement applies to vans, SUVs, and pickup trucks starting with 1992 models.

Most cars made since 1972 already have designated anchor points to install shoulder belts in outboard (side) seating positions, but they are not visible. Many vehicle manufacturers produced retrofit kits in the 1990s, but relatively few kits are currently available. Based on responses to an inquiry sent by SafetyBeltSafe U.S.A., the following manufacturers state that they will provide retrofit kits for some older vehicle models:

Nissan North America 800-NISSAN-1
Toyota Motor Sales, U.S.A. 800-331-4331
Volkswagen of America 248-754-5096 (Vanagon only)

Installing a Retrofit Kit

Shoulder belts should only be installed if the vehicle has specific anchor points for shoulder belts. If possible, the safety belt kit made specifically for your vehicle should be used. You may be able to install the belts yourself if you have the necessary tools and skills. Otherwise, you will need to find a dealership or mechanic who is willing and able to do the job. The belts must be installed correctly to provide maximum protection.

Shoulder belts cannot be added in the center of the back seat of older vehicles. Most current vehicles have center-rear shoulder belts. New regulations require manufacturers to phase them in for 2006-08 models.

Using a Generic Shoulder Belt Kit

While it is best to use a safety belt made specifically for your vehicle, it may be possible to get and install a generic lap-shoulder belt. Some auto parts stores and catalogs have lap-shoulder belt kits that meet federal safety standards and might fit your vehicle. Shoulder belts should not be added to a vehicle unless the manufacturer confirms the location of strong anchor points. Sources for generic kits meeting federal standards: J.C. Whitney: lap-shoulder belt with retractor (www.jcwhitney.com). E-Z-On Products lap-shoulder belt with retractor, model 48-R (www.ezonpro.com or 800-323-6598) Call for distributor location.

SafetyBeltSafe U.S.A. P.O. Box 553, Altadena, CA 91003 www.carseat.org 310-222-6860, 800-745-SAFE (English) 310-222-6862, 800-747-SANO (Spanish)
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