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Making a move for air bag safety

The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) in the U.S. credits air bags with saving more than 2600 lives through November 1, 1997. They have also prevented a large number of serious head and chest injuries.

But air bags deploy at great speed and with considerable force. That is why it is so important for vehicle occupants to give the air bag room to deploy. If you are used to sitting close to the steering wheel you should move the vehicle seat back as far as possible while still being able to safely drive the vehicle. You may also want to tilt the seat back slightly.

On the driver side, you should be at least 25 centimetres (10 inches) back from the air bag cover, measured from the centre of the steering wheel to your breastbone. Wear your seat belt correctly with the lap belt as low as possible over your hips—not the abdomen. Make sure the shoulder belt lies on your chest and over your shoulder. Don't leave any slack in the belt.

Front seat passengers should follow the same advice. Children who are 12 years and younger are safer correctly buckled up in the back seat. They rarely sit still in cars and frequently lean forward or slip out of their shoulder belt. This could place them in danger if the air bag deploys. Child restraints, correctly installed and appropriate to a child's size, weight and physical development, should always be used.

If young passengers absolutely must sit in front, make sure they are correctly buckled up in their child car seat or the vehicle seat belt and move the vehicle seat all the way back. This will reduce the risk of injury from the air bag, but for optimum protection—the back is where it's at for children 12 and under.

And remember, never place a rear-facing child restraint in front of an activated air bag.

A deploying air bag will strike the back of the child car seat with force and could seriously injure a child.

Air Bag Temporary Deactivation

In February 1998, Transport Minister David Collenette announced that the federal, provincial and territorial governments and vehicle manufacturers had reached agreement on a national program enabling certain Canadians to have air bag switches installed in their vehicles. This program will be administered for most provinces by Transport Canada and in the Province of Quebec, by the Société de l'assurance automobile du Québec.

Beginning in March, motorists will be able to apply for an on/off switch for air bags. To get government approval for switch installation, motorists must complete a form self-certifying that they meet at least one of the following criteria:

- They have a rear-facing child restraint that must be used in the front passenger seat, as is the case in pickup trucks and sports cars;

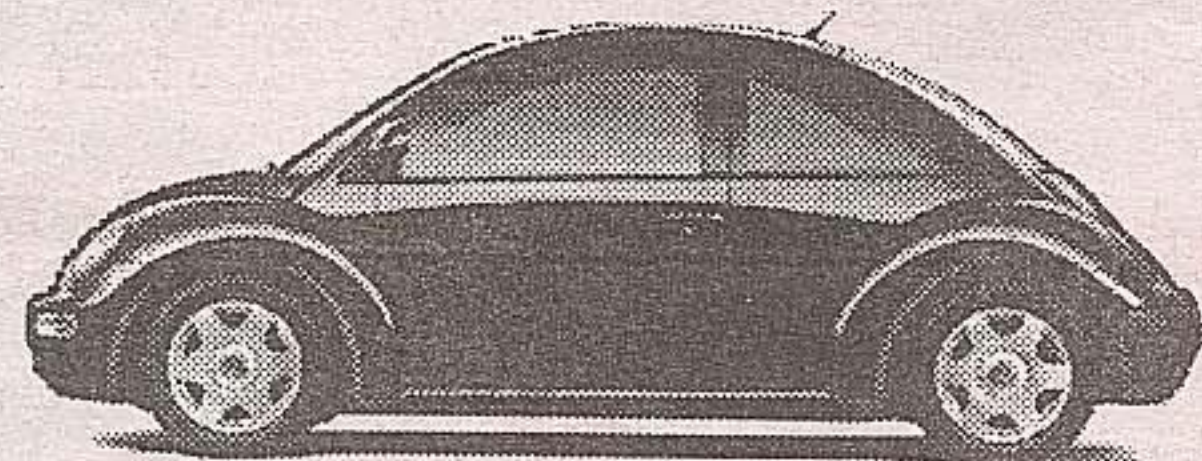
- They must routinely place children in the front passenger seat, as is the case in car pools;

- They cannot ensure a driver's seating position with at least 25 centimetres of clearance between their chest and the steering wheel; or

- They have a good medical reason to deactivate the air bag.

CAA urges people to carefully consider all their options before electing to have an on/off switch installed. Air bags and seat belts save lives. Those motorists who have the switch installed should check the status of the air bag every time they ride in the vehicle. Anyone who is not at risk from air bag deployment should always make certain the switch is in the "on" position.

—Canadian Automobile Association



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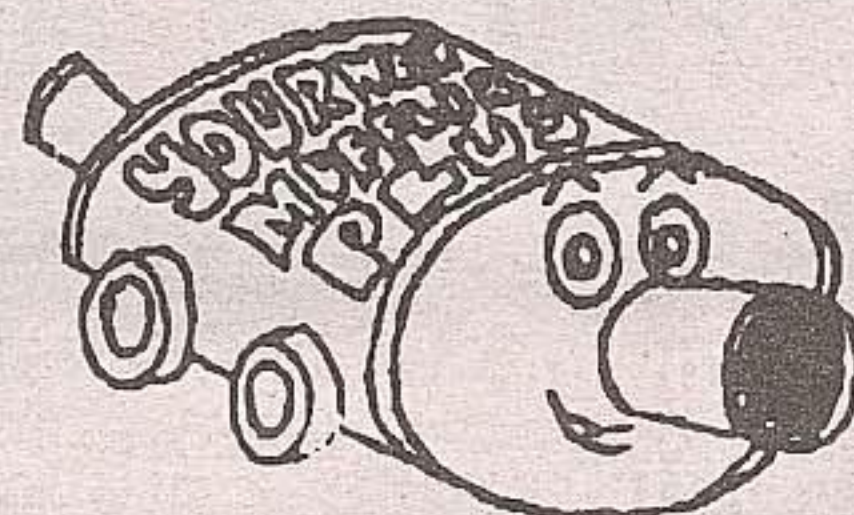
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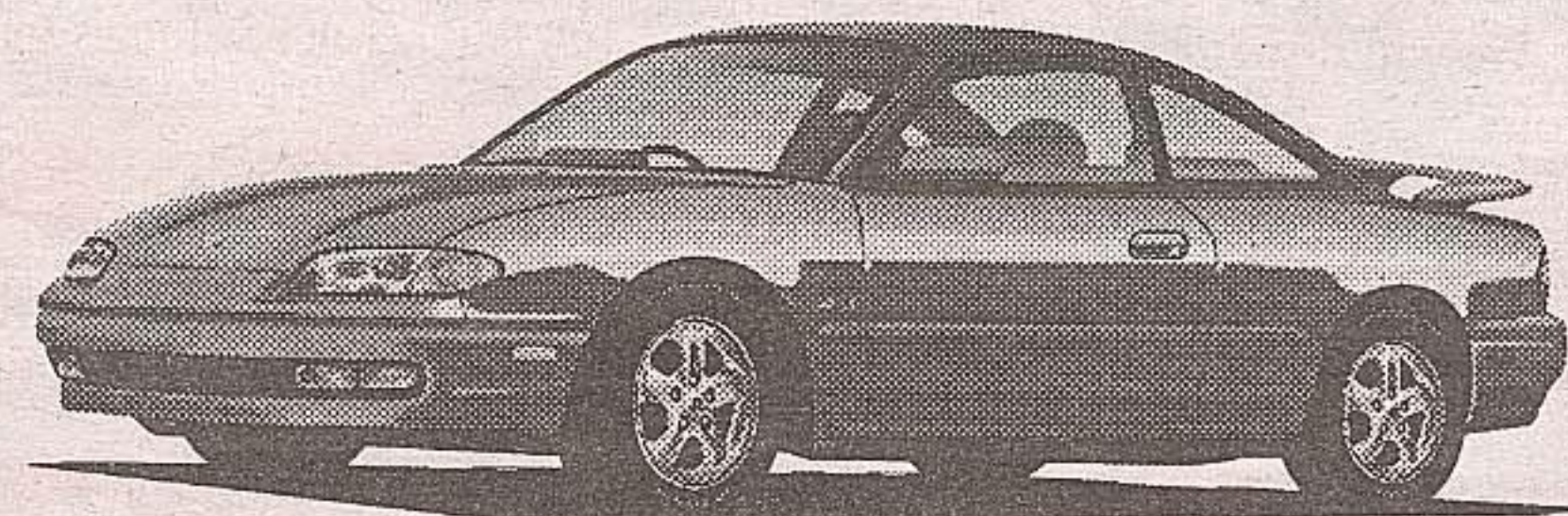
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