

Safety Innovations

Informed Buyers Can Make Their Vehicles Safer

(NAPSA)—Consumers list safety as one of their top concerns when purchasing a vehicle.

Yet many car buyers—and dealers—are unaware of the different safety features available on today's vehicles. Similarly, many consumers may be unaware that critical safety features are often optional or only available on specific vehicles.

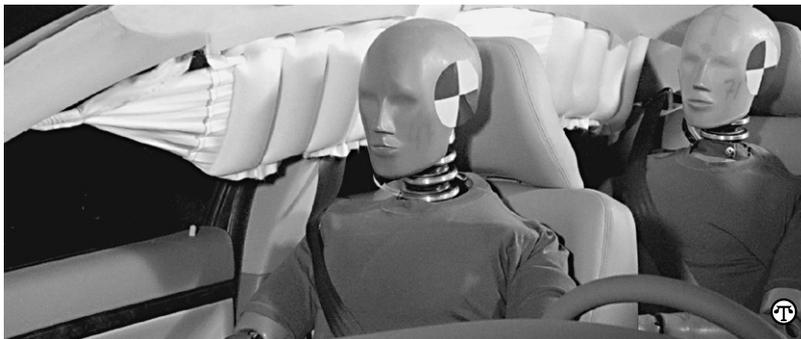
Analysts say that may be because safety features can become a fleeting thought when compared to other, more glamorous amenities available on modern cars. For example, instead of side-curtain airbags, consumers often pay for options such as heated seats or electric moonroofs. Additionally, dealers sometimes pre-order cars without optional safety features. Consumers not willing to order a vehicle and wait for its delivery have little choice but to settle for a less safe vehicle.

So what happens when cars without safety features are driven?

According to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA), every year more than 30,000 people die and nearly three million more are injured in traffic accidents. Consumers often fail to realize that with an ever-expanding list of effective safety features on a vehicle, many of these injuries and deaths could be preventable.

Experts say before buying a car, a consumer should be sure it comes equipped with the following five safety features:

- **Side-Curtain Airbags**—These airbags are positioned above the



The Road To Safety—New auto safety technology, such as side-curtain airbags and seatbelt pretensioners, can help drivers put the brakes on auto-related injuries.

vehicle doors and come down like curtains over the windows in side-impact collisions. The airbags might be the most important safety feature in cars today, as they have been shown to reduce fatal head injury levels to a nonfatal level. NHTSA estimates that nearly 60 percent of the 10,000 side-impact related vehicle fatalities annually are attributed to head injuries.

- **Seatbelt Pretensioners**—Seatbelt pretensioners tighten the seatbelt during the first fraction of a second of a collision. The injury reducing capability of a seatbelt is a function of how snugly it surrounds your body during a crash. Bulky clothes or a loosely worn belt can significantly degrade the performance of a seatbelt if a pretensioner is not used.

- **Side-Thorax Airbags**—These airbags deploy to protect the occupants' midsection from an intruding vehicle. Side-thorax bags deploy within 12 thousandths of a second.

That's four times faster than frontal airbags. They can reduce serious chest injuries by more than 20 percent, according to NHTSA.

- **Anti-Lock Brakes**—Anti-lock braking systems (ABS) prevent car wheels from locking during emergency braking. This lets the driver maintain greater steering control under heavy braking.

- **Frontal Dual-Stage Airbags**—Unlike conventional frontal airbags, these airbags deploy at various lower forces and speed levels based on the severity of the crash. For less serious collisions, the airbag will deploy with a lower force and speed. In more serious accidents, the airbag will deploy more aggressively to restrain the occupant.

Auto specialists say taking advantage of these five innovations will let drivers significantly affect the safety of people riding in their vehicles. They recommend consumers demand safety on their next trip to a dealership.