

Safety. Without safety as “job one” we could not even attempt driving events. Let’s look into some of the mysteries of ratings and the reasons behind them.

HELMETS - WHAT DOES SNELL, ANSI AND DOT MEAN?

Ratings for helmets are in three major categories: Snell, ANSI and DOT. These standards are set to provide acceptable levels of head protection in the event of an accident.

- Snell rated helmets are divided into Special Application Auto (SA) and Motorcycle (SM) ratings. The impact protection for these two ratings is very similar. Many clubs will accept either the Snell SM or SA standard for autocross activities and non-racing track events.

- SA helmets are designed to meet the requirements of an individual who is restrained within a motor vehicle and needs flammability and sharp object impact protection.

- SM helmets are designed to protect individuals who are not restrained inside an auto and may come in contact with many different shaped objects.

- ANSI or DOT ratings are used in high-speed racing events and generally require the Snell SA rating. Check with the event tech coordinator on their requirements and rating year.

Beginning in January 2006, many sanctioning bodies updated their helmet requirements to the SNELL SA 2000 rating. The message is: If you’re still racing with a SNELL SA 1995 or older helmet, it’s time for a new helmet. The SNELL SA 2005 helmets are now available. In most cases, these new helmets contain significant safety advances over their predecessors.

FIVE POINT VS. THREE/TWO POINT SAFETY BELTS

We are all used to the two-point belts for early Mustangs and the three-point belts for the newer cars from about ‘68-’69 and beyond. Mustangs produced later had the inertia belt so you can move around in comfort and relative safety. Relative safety is key; the three-point belts are fine for street use and for the type of events we offer at MCA. The five-point belt is recommended for increased safety; but for those of you who have never been in a car and had the five-point belts on, I am going to attempt to explain what the experience is

like and how you feel in them.

What is five way? There are two basic components:

- The belt between the legs is typically known as the anti-submarine belt. In a rapid deceleration or accident you tend to slide in the seat toward the front, under the wheel. This belt stops that from happening, and helps your bottom stay firmly in place on the seat.

- The two non-inertia shoulder belts attach at your center belt line. This is a big point as they do not move for your convenience like stock belts. The first thing you have to remember is to close your door before buckling up. Why you ask? Because

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with five-point belts you can’t reach the door to close it when tightened in. Also, in most cases, forget about changing the channels on your radio or adjusting your A/C. These belts are designed to hold you in tight to the seat, so you need to get everything ready before buckling up.

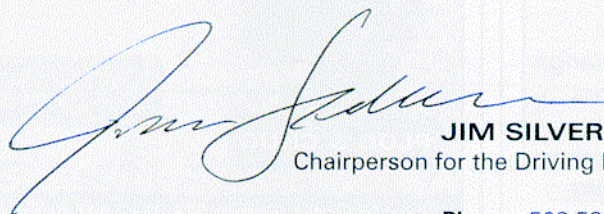
There is another major benefit other than safety to having you tight in the seat. It is called communicating with your car. When driving a car

in a competitive way, understanding what your car is doing, its limits and how close you are to its limits is in many ways felt between your body and the seat. The tighter you are the more you become one with the car and the faster you are able to drive through the track.

Today’s five-point belts are inches wide with two different release systems. Both systems are good. One is the cam lock that releases with a push of a button. The other, older style has a lever. Both do the job. However, one last thing about them; my belief is they are not the best for the normal driving on the road. They do not let you move much or even turn your body for backing up or parallel parking maneuvers. When on the track you’re always looking forward and using every inch of your mirrors—needless to say you will not be backing up or parking!

There is a Certification and date coding for belts, too. As far as MCA events are concerned, the date code is not that important for the belts, thus the three point is fine for most events. Unless you are in the highest levels of competition then SFI is the classification and all belts should have the appropriate label with date of manufacture. For stringent SCCA rules, the belts are only good until the 31st of December of the second year after the manufacture of the belts. They need to be replaced every three years. The belts can be sent back to the manufacturer for re-webbing. Many organizations will let the timeframe slide to five years but that is as far as it goes.

Again for MCA type of events you do not have to worry about this requirement. Our events are driving events and not classified as racing events. With that said, we still adhere to the old statement that most know in the world of competition and racing, “If you can’t afford good safety equipment, you can’t afford to go racing.”



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