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Slip and Slide No More

Being firmly planted in your seat helps to control your vehicle.

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Every officer that has been in a pursuit or other precision driving situation has experienced the difficulty of staying firmly planted in the driver seat when the patrol vehicle is being maneuvered through tight turns and the like. Even with a safety belt on--which should always be the case--it's pretty easy to start sliding around. That can really reduce your ability to control your vehicle, and can sometimes cause you to input inappropriate stress into the management of your steering wheel. If your body isn't firmly anchored in the seat, as you shift around, you are likely to put strain on the steering wheel just by trying to brace yourself.

This problem is made worse when your patrol unit has bench seats, or some bucket seats that don't have adequate side bolsters on each side of your hips. That describes many cars on the road, and most patrol vehicles.

Many high performance vehicles, such as racing vehicles, have custom fitted seats that assist the driver in overcoming this issue. Additionally, the same high performance vehicles are often equipped with four-point harnesses which really lock you down in the seat.

There are two problems with trying to use such a four point harness in a patrol vehicle: First--and most important--is the officer safety issue. You don't want any sort of restraint that limits you in moving your upper body. If you need to duck below the level of your dashboard quickly, you don't want a harness that keeps you from doing so. Secondly, the cost of retrofitting patrol units with such a system would be prohibitive for many departments.

So, many officers are faced with being loosely held in their seat with a standard, factory safety belt "three-point" system. That system helps, but it really could do the job better.

Center of Gravity

I've been experimenting with a simple device that helps to reduce unwanted movement while driving--the CG-Lock (CG stands for Center of Gravity). I've had one installed in my personal vehicle for the past few weeks, trying it out.

The CG-Lock is a device that clamps onto the "tongue" portion of your safety belt. Think about that talk the flight attendant gives every time you get on an airplane, "...place the flat metal end into the buckle...". The CG-Lock clamps onto the back edge of the "flat metal end" slider on your safety belt. Once you've mounted it to the trailing edge of that piece of your belt, you add a small slider piece on top of the webbing of the safety belt. This sounds confusing, and the instructions the company provides are similarly obscure, but if you go to the CG-Lock web site and watch the short installation video, it becomes ridiculously simple--it's just hard to describe.

Anyway, once it's mounted on your buckle, you just use your safety belt as you normally would. However, when you want to be snuggled up in your seat, you grab the shoulder portion of the belt and pull upward, tightening the lap belt. The harder you pull, the firmer you are locked down into your seat. This keeps the lap portion of your belt tightened down, but allows your upper body to move just as freely as it normally can.

The CG-Lock manufacturer claims that the lap portion of your belt provides approximately 80% of the stability that a four-point harness would. I don't know about that exact number, but once the CG-Lock has tightened up your lap belt it absolutely keeps you firmly locked into your seat.

In order to release the CG-Lock mechanism, you flip a small lever on the side of the unit. If you want to leave the CG-Lock attached to your belt, but not use it (kind of leaving it in "standby"), you remove the small slider plate from the top, and your safety belt functions just as it normally does.

The CG-Lock web site is loaded with testimonials from professional drivers and race car drivers, attesting to the benefits of the CG-Lock. I had my testing unit installed in my family car, so I didn't get too crazy with it, but I did try some rapid cornering, and other maneuvering that would have normally left me feeling like I was floating in my seat. I absolutely felt more stable, and in better control of my vehicle. I was able to quickly release my belt in order to exit my vehicle.

I also experienced another benefit. As many cops do, I have a sore lower back. With my CG-Lock cinched up snugly, I was pulled tighter into the lumbar support of my seat, which kept my lower back supported. I was able to drive longer distances with much less lower back fatigue and pain. For me, that alone would make the CG-Lock worth the price (about \$42).

I experienced a couple of drawbacks. First, once the CG-Lock is cinched tight, it's not that easy to loosen. You can release it totally by just hitting your safety belt release, but then your belt is all the way off. In order to return the belt to its normal, more relaxed fit across your lap, you really need to release the side lever on the CG-Lock, and I found this a little difficult to do without fumbling with it. In order to remove the slider, thus disabling the CG-Lock during those times you don't want to use it, you need to pull over and use two hands to remove it. That can get to be a hassle after a while.

The second issue, and one that several other reviewers have mentioned, is that the CG-Lock--although compact--does add some weight to the "tongue" portion of your safety belt buckle. If you're in the habit of hitting your belt release and just letting the belt retract on its own, you may experience a difficulty with the same practice while using the CG-Lock. The added weight sometimes makes it necessary to "assist" the belt to its retracted position.

These are minor annoyances though, and once you get used to compensating for them, the added benefit of the CG-Lock far outweighs the hassle. This is especially true if you engage in higher stress driving while on duty.

One caveat: In order for the CG-Lock to fit onto the safety belt of a Crown Vic patrol unit, a slight modification needs to be made to the edge of the safety belt buckle. I didn't get a chance to try this for myself, but clear instructions are posted on the company website, and it looks like a

relatively easy modification to make. If your department administration or risk management people are squeamish about modifying the restraint system of your vehicle--even a little bit--then you may not be able to use the current configuration of the CG-Lock on Crown Victoria patrol vehicles. The company is reportedly working on a Crown Vic-friendly revision of the CG-Lock.

I found the CG-Lock to be a useful addition to my safety belt system, and I'll continue to use it. I would also recommend it for use in driver training vehicles.

Stay safe, and wear your vest (and Buckle Up!)

Web Links:

[CG Lock](#)

[Steve Ashley's Web Site](#)

[Steve Ashley](#) is a retired law enforcement officer who conducts driving and Use of Force training for an academy in Michigan, and works as a risk manager and expert witness. Steve is a certified trainer in many subjects, and has spoken at many state, national, and international conferences. A police officer for 15 years and a risk manager for 16 years, Steve specializes in training officers to manage high risk activity. A prolific author, Steve has published numerous articles, and writes technology related columns for several periodicals.



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