

Discussion Point for SACC Meeting 18 March 2014

Submitted by Graham Couser, Club Secretary, on behalf of Saltire Rally Club

The recently introduced "dumb five year" lifing rule for seats and belts in National rallying is not appropriate and should be urgently reviewed since its impact on grass roots motor sport could be very damaging.

It should be replaced by either an extended period (as, variously implemented, in Australia, Belgium and Ireland) or by a different lifing system based on actual usage.

1. Practical Considerations

- Many clubmen will in practice have to buy two new seats and a set of belts every 5-10 times they sit in them. This may deter new entrants and possibly stop existing competitors.
- Clubmen may tend to buy the cheapest steel framed seats to replace higher quality, but out-of-date seats, knowing that they will have to be junked after only a few events. This will actually decrease safety.
- Clubmen may fit "common" seat mountings so that several crews can share seats which places less control on the usage of seats.

2. Technical Considerations

- The MSA report is seriously flawed.
http://www.msauk.org/uploadedfiles/news/Stage_Rally_seats_report_Sept_2013.pdf
- It is based on a very small sample of seats. This sample consisted of seats which had already been replaced, or were about to be so. By including seats that had been removed, presumably because they were already deemed as not fit for purpose, the results are seriously skewed. In any case the numbers are too small to give a conclusion with any high degree of confidence.
- If however one does accept the MSA conclusion that 80% of (composite) seats are unsafe at 5 years old, purely because of their age, then the 5 year life is actually unacceptable on safety grounds in any case, since the level of confidence of safety demonstrated by the results is much lower than would be acceptable for most legal purposes.
- Composite boats, aircraft and even cars can be safely used for much more than 5 years so why can't a simple structure like a seat be made to safely last much more than 5 years.
- There is no requirement to replace belts or seats on road vehicles except if clearly degraded. Lifing by inspection (As used in the MOT tests) is an inherently better way of ensuring integrity of items.
- An extensive study in Australia commissioned by the Confederation of Australian Motorsport <http://aimss.com.au/full-story-competition-harness-life-extension/> demonstrated that there was no measurable deterioration in webbing or harness component strength for many years after the end of the five-year validity period, and none within a ten-year period.