Motion

Proposer: Martin Shaw, Chairman, Slaithwaite Motor Club Ltd
Seconded: John Thornton, Secretary, York Motor Club

The MSA should abolish the "five year" lifing rule for seats and belts used in National rallying and either move immediately to an extended period (as, variously implemented, in Australia, Belgium and Ireland) or work urgently towards a different lifing system based on actual usage.

6 December 2013

Background:

SEATS

1. Practical.

Effect on clubmen. Many will have to buy two new seats every 5-10 times they sit in them. Some will not continue, many potential new entrants will be deterred.

Clubmen are already buying the cheapest steel framed seats to replace higher quality but out-of-date seats. This will decrease safety.

Clubmen are fitting "common" seat mountings so that several crews can share seats. This will greatly increase usage cycles per seat and decrease safety.

2. Technical.

EITHER
a) You accept the MSA report as valid. This demonstrates, with very high probability, that 80% or more of seats are unsafe at 5 years old, purely because of their age. In which case, a 5 year life is unacceptable on safety grounds. The MSA and FIA are knowingly exposing the vast majority of competitors to a known and quantified risk of failure. The informal opinion of a forensic accountant is that this could be deemed corporate negligence.

There needs to be a thorough investigation and discussion with seat manufacturers as to why they can't make barely used composite seats last five years when composite boats sit in the sea exposed to the elements for decades and are still seaworthy and composite gliders are still airworthy after years of use.

OR

b) The MSA report is unsound. Nothing has changed since the original extension. No reason has ever been given for a five year life.

In support of b) here is the analysis of the MSA methodology by a senior statistician:

Clearly not a representative sample of the total population - how were these 5 seats chosen?

Section 2 of the report says "A number of composite construction seats that were coming up for 5 years of age and thus due for replacement or seats that were known to have been replaced after 5 years were obtained"
What is the point of including ones that were replaced in the sample – presumably they might have been replaced because they were not fit for purpose, so why include in the testing?
On what basis were the other ones 'coming up for 5 years identified' – no information about who they were obtained from etc etc.
On top of this, a sample as small as this (test results saying only 9 were subject to some test) hardly seems to provide extensive research

Background (cont'd):

BELTS

1. Practical.

Effect on clubmen. Many will have to buy two pairs of belts every 5-10 times they sit in them.

2. Technical.

There is positive evidence that seat belts do not deteriorate with age (below). This is the basis for CAMS decision to extend "life" to ten years.

The Australian Institute for Motor Sport Safety (AIMSS) has succeeded in achieving a major cost-cutting benefit while maintaining optimum safety levels in the area of safety harness life in Australian motor sport.

Following a recommendation by AIMSS, the Confederation of Australian Motor Sport Ltd (CAMS) Board has approved an extension of the validity of FIA racing harnesses in non-international events from five to ten years.

The amendment to CAMS regulations is effective immediately, and will ease a substantial cost burden for most CAMS competitors. Competitors in FIA international competition will still be required to comply with the five-year restriction.

At the suggestion of its National Technical Committee, earlier this year CAMS requested that AIMSS undertake a scientific study of this issue. Previous studies known to AIMSS had raised the possibility that the validity period for non-international CAMS-sanctioned competition might be extended, if justified by its new research.

AIMSS contracted Autoliv, a major FIA-approved crash and equipment test laboratory, to examine and test a wide variety of competition harnesses that could no longer be used as their validity had expired. The ages of harnesses tested ranged from six to approximately thirty years.

The results 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.

19 September 2008