Timeline—Development of car safety features

1950-1960: car manufacturers, safety research institutions and medical advisories created head restraints with the purpose of adding length to a seatback.

1920: Vehicle occupant compartments were built from wood panels and steel brackets, as it was believed the stronger the car’s structure, the safer it would be. However, it was found that this caused greater injury to passengers because of the force of the impact during a crash.

1959: the first car to have three-point seatbelts (a seatbelt that goes over the shoulders and chest, as well as across the pelvis) in both of its front seats was made. This was a Volvo P544

1964: The South Australian government passed a law that seatbelt mounting points were to be fitted to all outboard positions within a vehicle. Victoria also enacted this law 4 months later.

1967: The Mercedes Heckflosse was the first car made with a crumple zone. The front of the car had been made approximately 50% bigger compared to other cars at the time.

1969-1981: 79% of cars sold during this period had adjustable head restraints. However, 29% of cars sold in this time still had head restraints that could not be adjusted.

1970: Victoria became the first place to decree the compulsory wearing of seatbelts.

1972: the wearing of seatbelts became mandatory throughout all of Australia.

1975: inertia-reel seatbelts were included in the front seats of all new cars made and sold in Australia. These ensured that passengers would stay in place during an accident. However, they were found to be ineffective if a car were to roll over in an accident.

1980s: The first commercial airbags were included in vehicles.

Mid-1990s: It became standard for most cars to have at least two airbags.

1987: Traction control was first introduced in selected car models.

1998: All cars sold in the United States were officially required to include airbags in the front seats.

1999: Parking Assist was developed by the Toyota Motor Corporation.

2003: The first version of Parking Assist was included in the Prius Hybrid sold in Japan.

2004: The average safety rating of cars in Australia was 4 stars.

2006: An updated version of Parking Assist was developed. This new version featured automatic parking technology and rear view sensors.

2009: The average safety rating of cars in Australia had increased to 4.5 stars.

2011: Inflatable seatbelts were included in Ford’s explorer model.

Today:

* Airbag manufacturers are trying to develop airbag systems that determine whether there is a passenger in the front seat or not and whether it is safe to deploy the airbag based on the passenger’s height and weight.
* Traction control is available in any car that also has an Anti-lock Braking System (ABS).
* Crumple zones and strong occupant compartments are mandatory in all cars made throughout the world.
* Many modern cars have a safety cage surrounding the occupant compartment to help it hold its shape in the event of a crash.