



News Release
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CAR SEAT COVERS ACCOMMODATE SAFETY AIRBAGS

When car companies started fitting airbags into the side of car seats, the country's oldest car seat cover manufacturer faced a problem.

Stretchmaster, which has been making car seat covers on Auckland's North Shore since 1972, needed a seat cover that still offered the benefits of seat protection and durability, but did not interfere with the deployment of the seat airbags.

"The addition of airbags into the sides of car seats presented us with a challenge," says the Managing Director of Stretchmaster Products, Bryce Hill. "We needed to find a solution that allowed people to have the option of fitting seat covers, without compromising the safety or effectiveness of the airbags in any way."

After months of research, testing and liaison with Land Transport New Zealand (formerly the Land Transport Safety Authority), Stretchmaster and its specialist advisors found the solution – a seat cover with a seam that releases as the airbag is deployed.

To demonstrate that the airbags inflated at the same speed with or without a car seat cover, the company carried out tests using a high speed camera. The camera, which can take 50,000 pictures a second, captured the results on film.

"The camera provided us with the visual evidence we needed to satisfy the authorities and ourselves that the new design worked. As a result Land Transport New Zealand has confirmed that Stretchmaster car seat covers do not detrimentally affect side impact airbag performance."

However Hill says it's important for owners of cars fitted with seat airbags to buy custom-fitted, not standard seat covers off the shelf.

"Cars with airbags in the seats require seat covers that are model specific – one size definitely does not fit all."

Hill says that in the past airbags were the domain of the upper end of the market, (a recent model Mercedes comes complete with 11 airbags), but believes in the next five years all cars will be fitted with them.

"This means the majority of cars will need custom-fitted, model specific car seat covers that can accommodate the new seat designs and additional airbags."



From this month Stretchmaster is supplying custom-fitted car seat covers for cars fitted with side impact airbags to Repco and Mitre 10 stores and dealerships around the country.

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The logo for Stretchmaster, featuring the word "Stretchmaster" in a bold, italicized, red font with a white outline, set within a white rectangular box with a thin grey border and a slight perspective effect.