

# No-exception rule hits below the safety belt

Jon Garvey  
looks forward to  
hiring a  
chauffeur with  
his exemption  
cert returns

SEAT belts become compulsory on January 31, and the powers that be have gone out of their way to ensure that few will be exempted.

In fact, the advisory booklet which all of us have been sent can be summed up in three words: 'Nobody is exempt'.

I read it fascinated, enthralled to learn how pregnant mums can slip their waist restraint below the bulge, how short people can prevent neck chafing with a strategically placed clothes-peg, and how claustrophobic passengers can be taught that the seat belt is only an extension of the car, and therefore of no danger to them (just as a dagger is only an extension of a warm hand, I suppose).

I have been beguiled into regarding any possible seekers after an exemption certificate in the same way I would regard a wily malingerer after an extension of his Med.3.

I have been mentally rehearsing my spiel: 'Before I examine you, Mrs Overstrap, I must tell you that medical authorities consider there are virtually no grounds for granting exemption.

'However, if you insist, I will willingly examine you, though I must charge a fee of £19 for doing so.'

Patient capitulates. Another victory for road safety.

But this week, I did indeed have a patient come to me to seek exemption from the seat belt regulations. And when I heard his story, I could do

nothing but write him a certificate.

This elderly gentleman had been given an ileostomy for ulcerative colitis in 1956, when cars relied on their metal facias to take the impact of the decelerating driver, and safety belts were just a gleam in some enthusiast's eye.

In those days, siting the stoma to suit a lap-strap was the last thing on the surgeon's mind, and I'm not sure *this* surgeon even considered that a bag would have to be worn, for the orifice was sited somewhere down in the right groin.

My patient had once tried wearing a seat belt, in the accepted way, and had not only found the inertia-reel belt chafing his stoma, but had realised, too late, that it was compressing the neck of his bag.

Only when he got out of the car did he realise he had a lapful of intestinal juice.

Not an experience to be repeated, road-safety laws notwithstanding.

I've got enthusiastic about these certificates now — preserving personal freedom and all that.

Perhaps I could set up as a sort of Dr Robert for cingulophobics whose own GPs pursue the orthodox line.

At 19 quid a time, I'd soon be able to afford a chauffeur, and you don't need belts in the back seat.