

# POR AMOR

## COSTA RICA'S SEAT BELT CAMPAIGN



FIA Foundation  
for the Automobile and Society

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# Introduction

Wearing a seat belt is the single most effective technical road safety measure a car occupant can take. It is estimated that 300,000 lives have been saved and 9 million injuries prevented by seat belts in the industrialized world since 1980. In low and middle income countries, however, the use of injury prevention devices such as seat belts, child restraints and motorcycle helmets is very low. It is in these countries that 80% of the estimated 1.2 million people killed on the roads worldwide each year die, including many car occupants. It is a major objective of the FIA Foundation to increase seat belt wearing rates worldwide among drivers and passengers alike.

From the autumn of 2003 until the summer of 2004, the FIA Foundation supported a nationwide campaign to promote seat belt wearing in Costa Rica in conjunction with the Costa Rican Ministry for Transport, the National Road Safety Council, the National Insurance Institute and the Costa Rican Automobile Club.

This campaign was a pilot project based on the principles of 'best practice' developed in the FIA Foundation seat belt toolkit, which identifies the best methods to raise levels of seat belt use. The toolkit, prepared by international experts at the UK Transport Research Laboratory (TRL) is especially targeted at emerging countries that are confronted with an escalating number of road traffic accidents, injuries and fatalities as a result of increasing motorization.

In the 1990s compulsory seat belt legislation in Costa Rica was challenged by a group of radical libertarians. As a result the law was overturned and seat belt wearing rates fell to only 24%. The principle aim of the seat belt campaign in Costa Rica was to reinstate a seat belt law. This objective was achieved in May 2004 when the successful passage of new legislation once again made seat belt use compulsory for front and back seat car occupants.

The target was to achieve a seat belt wearing rate of 70%. However, a national seat belt survey conducted after the campaign in August 2003 confirmed that, owing to a combination of the compulsory seat belt legislation, traffic police enforcement and a media campaign, this target had been exceeded and seat belt wearing rates for drivers actually jumped from 24% to 82%.

This evaluation report aims to share the lessons that the FIA Foundation and our campaign partners have learned and to act as a practical tool advising future campaigns. We hope that the positive results in Costa Rica will encourage other countries to undertake similar initiatives.



**David Ward**  
Director General  
FIA Foundation



## Objective and criteria of the seat belt project

In 2002 the FIA Foundation identifies Costa Rica as a candidate country to pilot test its new seat belt toolkit.

The objective of the pilot project was to put into practice the guidelines of the FIA Foundation seat belt toolkit to promote seat belt use through legislation, police enforcement and awareness raising campaigns. It was considered that the ideal testing ground was a small developing or emerging country with a stable political regime and a government and traffic police that are committed to promoting seat belt use. The candidate country was also to have an active FIA automobile club with good networking skills to represent the FIA Foundation locally.

### Costa Rica meets criteria

Costa Rica was identified as a potentially suitable candidate. It is a democratic country with a strong record of social and economic development. It is a small country with a population of 4 million of which a majority live in the capital city area of San José.



Costa Rica

It has a per capita GDP of US \$ 4,300 and an annual growth rate of 1%. Although Costa Rica is still largely an agricultural country with coffee and banana plantations, it has expanded its economy to include technology and tourism, and it has become an attractive destination for outsourcing, especially in software. The standard of living is relatively high in comparison with its neighbouring countries. Costa Rica eliminated its military spending when it dismantled its army in 1949 and invested in education and health instead. One of the former Presidents, Dr Oscar Arias, received the Nobel Peace Prize in 1987 for his work in ending the Nicaraguan civil war.

Following the national elections in the spring of 2002, the Automobile Club of Costa Rica approached the new government to consider embarking on a national seat belt wearing campaign. President Dr Abel Pacheco of the Social Christian Party appointed a young and dynamic team at the Transport Department: Transport Minister Javier Chavez and Vice-Minister for Transport Karla Gonzalez, who were joined towards the end of 2002 by Ignacio Sánchez as the Director of the National Road Safety Council and Head of the Traffic Police.

### **Assessment of the road safety situation in Costa Rica**

Costa Rica is a recently motorized country that saw vehicle fleet growth of 62.32% from 1981-1990 and 132.78% between 1990 and 2001. The vehicle park in 2003 was estimated at 790,000 units, of which an average of 60% is more than 12 years old.

Costa Rica's road network consists of 30,000 km of roads, of which approximately 7,000 km are paved. According to figures from the National Road Safety Council, 49% of the road infrastructure is in poor condition. The roads also mix fast and slow traffic and this is a particular problem on semi-motorways with maximum speed limits of up to 100 km/h that run through communities. Though pedestrian bridges have been built in places, they are not systematically used.

The most common road traffic risk factors as identified by the National Road Safety Council are drink driving, speeding, not respecting traffic lights and dangerous overtaking. Casualty rates among pedestrians are very high. Road traffic statistics for the period 1998-2000 show that car drivers were fatalities in 40% of fatal crashes, followed by pedestrians at 26%. Costa Rica has lacked a road safety culture. The motorisation of the country only began in earnest around 30 years ago and many people belong to the first generation of car drivers, with no previous family role models from whom to learn road skills and behavior. Driver training remains poor.

Since the 1970s, Costa Rica has been confronted with a rapidly increasing number of fatalities and injuries as a result of road traffic crashes. Road traffic injuries became the fourth cause of death and the first cause of violent death.

Although the risk of dying in a car traffic crash decreased from 20.8 per 100,000 population in 1970-1972 to 17 per 100,000 in 2000-2002, the downward trend was not consistent. The National Road Safety Council, which was established in 1979, decided that a new approach was required when the number of road traffic casualties increased by 60.67% over the period 1996-2000. Traffic police reported a rise in serious injuries of 71.26% in the year 2000 in comparison with 1996, and a 61% rise in the number of minor injuries between 1997 and 2000. It became evident that there was no mechanism in place to begin to reduce these numbers or even to maintain the status quo.

The government decided to work with the Global Road Safety Partnership (GRSP) and a five-year road safety plan was developed which set a target to reduce the mortality rate from 17.01 per 100,000 population in baseline year 2000 to 14.14 per 100,000 by 2005. Between 1998-2004 the Road Safety Council received technical assistance in road safety from SweRoad, a consultancy subsidiary of the Swedish National Road Administration.



# Timeline of seat belt legislation in Costa Rica

## 23 October 1986 – first seat belt legislation

Introduction of the first compulsory seat belt legislation by Ministerial Decree N° 17726-MOPT, which makes seat belt wearing compulsory for front and rear seat vehicle occupants.

## 21 April 1989

Second Ministerial Decree N° 18957-MOPT

Requirement for all vehicles to have front and rear seats equipped with seat belts and anchorages in compliance with international standards and regulations. The Decree does not set sanctions for non-compliance but refers to article 105 of Road Traffic Act N° 5930: "Road traffic offences, for which no specific sanctions are defined, will carry a fine between 40 and 300 colones."

## 12 December 1990: Seat belt legislation repealed

Constitutional Court Ruling N° 1877-90 declares that article 105 of the above mentioned Road Traffic Act Law is in contradiction with article 29 of the Constitution because it does not define the nature of the criminal offence.

## 22 April 1993: Second seat belt legislation

New Road Traffic Legislation is introduced to restore police enforcement for non-compliance with seat belt wearing in Article 132, § f. The traffic offence is defined this time and the fine for non-compliance is set at Colones 2,000.

## 9 July 1996:

Legal actions against the seat belt legislation are taken by two lawyers after they are given a ticket for not wearing their seat belts. They argue that the legislation contradicts article 28 of the Constitution, which says that individual behaviour that does not disturb public order or moral values and does not cause damage to third parties is outside the remit of legislation.

## 19 August 1997: Seat belt legislation repealed

Decision Constitutional Court Decision N° 4713-97 Article 132, § f is considered unconstitutional after a heated debate during which three "dissident" judges claim that it is the duty of the State to introduce laws to protect the lives of Costa Rican citizens and that this justifies the compulsory seat belt legislation and a system of sanctions for non-compliance.

However, the Court does not accept this argumentation and rules that:

- Costa Ricans are free citizens and should be left a choice;
- Wearing a seat belt should remain an individual's choice as choosing not to buckle up does not harm other people or disturb public order;
- criminal law sanctions should be reserved only when it is the most efficient way to achieve the objective of legislation and in the case of seat belt wearing, less intrusive means exist to convince people.

The Constitutional Court maintains the requirement to use seat belts for children under 12 and to restrain babies in child seats.

## 1997: comparative studies into effects of seat belt wearing

The first study conducted by the National Road Safety Council compares the number of in-situ road traffic fatalities, the type of injuries sustained and the type of crash before and after the judgment of the Constitutional Court in August 1997. The study reveals that from September to October 1997, the number of in-situ fatalities increased by 58.36 % compared with the two months preceding the judgment.

The second study compares the number of in-situ fatalities in frontal impact car crashes that occurred during the six months preceding (January – August 1997) and six months after (September – December) the judgment of the Court. Again a significant difference is noted.

## **1 February 1998**

The Road Safety Council holds the first nationwide seat belt wearing survey which reveals a wearing rate of only 19% among drivers and 18% among front seat passengers.

## **Feb-March 1998 – Third seat belt legislation**

Ministerial Decree N° 26717-S introduced by Health Minister Herman Weinstock and the Road Safety Council presents seat belt wearing as an intervention to address a public health problem. The objective is to reduce one of the most important causes of injuries and fatalities on a national level and to protect the health of the motor vehicle driver, the passengers and of other drivers and road users. The Decree states that the serious nature of the injuries sustained by the victims traveling without a seat belt in motor vehicles requires priority medical attention at the expense of other patients; and the economic costs of medical care to the victims is a burden to the Costa Rican State and its citizens. Traffic police officers are considered “health officials” of the Minister for Health and article 2 sets a sentence of 5 to 30 days for non-compliance.

## **2 March 1998:**

A seat belt survey conducted by the National Road Safety Council to measure the effects of this seat belt legislation under a health label reveals a 65% wearing rate among drivers and 60% among front seat passengers.

## **3 June 1998:**

The positive trend is confirmed in another seat belt wearing survey with seat belt wearing levels of 62% among drivers and 61% among front seat passengers.

## **1999: Legislation repealed by the Constitutional Court**

The Health Decree is challenged by Constitutional Court decision 5330-99.

## **October 1999:**

A third seat belt wearing survey reveals that following the latest repeal of legislation wearing rates have plummeted to a mere 23% among drivers and 20% among front seat passengers.

## **28 June 2001**

Constitutional Court defines that only minors of age and disabled persons are legally required to be restrained and that drivers who do not comply with this requirement will be given a fine of Colones 2,000.





## Preparatory campaign phase

The FIA Foundation works with the Government of Costa Rica and other road safety stakeholders to develop a strong campaign.

The first mission visit to Costa Rica took place in September 2002 and the key preliminary tasks were set:

- Carry out an initial assessment of the current situation regarding seat belt use in Costa Rica;
- Identify the lead agency in Costa Rica that would take overall responsibility for implementing the campaign;
- Identify potential external partners from leading companies or other donors involved in Costa Rica;
- Draw up an overall optimal budget for the campaign with a breakdown of the contributions by partner;
- Establish a Project Partnership with Steering Group to take forward the campaign implementation.

Initial contacts were made with the Minister of Transport Javier Chavez, Head of Road Safety projects Roy Rojas at the National Road Safety Council, and Germán Serrano Pinto, Director General of the National Insurance Institute (INS). The National Insurance Institute is a semi-governmental body that holds a monopoly position in the insurance sector and is required by law to commit 10% of its income to road safety campaigns. The INS is also a funding agency for the fire brigade and the traffic police.

It was evident that there was a lot of interest in a seat belt wearing promotion campaign, but it was Dr Pinto who identified where the main challenges lay. Costa Rica had lost its compulsory seat belt legislation and despite several attempts to revive it, efforts remained fruitless. The FIA Foundation discussed the possibility of reinstating seat belt legislation and the Minister of Transport committed himself to starting the necessary legislative process.

During the mission visit, agreement was reached on the requirements for a seat belt campaign funded by the Foundation:

- The seat belt campaign was to be based on the best practice guidelines of the FIA Foundation seat belt toolkit;
- Compulsory seat belt legislation and police enforcement were to be put in place;
- In order to measure the impact of the campaign, seat belt use was to be evaluated as a minimum requirement before and after the campaign, and a mid-term survey was recommended;
- Only a long-term campaign is effective in changing seat belt wearing habits. It was therefore recommended that 'reminder' campaigns should reinforce the effects and that police enforcement should be sustained;
- The timetable of the campaign was flexible but the Foundation's recommendation was to either conclude the campaign on World Health Day on 7 April 2004, the first World Health Organisation (WHO) annual public health campaign day dedicated to road traffic safety, or to present mid-term results on that day;
- The resources offered by the FIA Foundation consisted of its best practice seat belt toolkit, the campaign literature featuring a crash test dummy family, the donation of a seat belt slide to simulate the protection that seat belts offer in low speed impact crashes and the use of a crash test dummy suit. The FIA Foundation also made available funding of \$370,000 and the Costa Ricans were asked to find additional funding among the government or corporate partners.



FIA Foundation seat belt toolkit



Seat belt toolkit interactive demonstration



## **Second mission visit to Costa Rica - December 2002**

In December 2002, a second FIA Foundation mission was undertaken to consolidate contacts and to meet the newly appointed Director of the National Road Safety Council, Ignacio Sánchez, who had also been made Head of the Road Traffic Police.

During this visit it became clear that the Costa Rican Ministry of Education was preparing a National Values Campaign to teach Costa Rican school children civic rights and duties, a key element of President Pacheco's election platform. The Ministry's proposal was to incorporate seat belt wearing into the values campaign. The Ministry of Education benefits by law from free aerial time for educational and awareness raising campaigns but did not have enough funds to produce TV slots. It therefore proposed to make available 20% of its broadcast time to the FIA Foundation for TV slots on seat belt wearing in exchange of funds for the production of the National Values TV campaign.

The FIA Foundation saw some attraction in working with the Education Ministry to guarantee some air time for road safety adverts. However there was a concern that the road safety message could lose its impact if it was just one element in a wider 'values' campaign. There was a danger that this could result in a lessening in the Transport Ministry's commitment to initiate seat belt legislation.

It was proposed by the Costa Rican authorities that four road safety TV spots would focus on courtesy on the road and respect for authority (i.e. the road traffic police), in line with the Education Ministry's Values Campaign. It was also proposed that a dedicated Values magazine would be produced and distributed in exchange for the inclusion of the seat belt campaign and production of handbooks on road safety for use in schools. However, on evaluation, there were questions about the cost effectiveness of these school education materials.

The FIA Foundation was concerned that this mix of messages could potentially weaken the central objective of the campaign: to restore seat belt legislation. This concern was shared by some of the Costa Rican officials and the Education Ministry decided not to participate as a main partner in the campaign.

## **FIA Foundation conference "Sharing Responsibility for Safer Roads" - February 2003**

On 11 February 2003, the FIA Foundation hosted an international road safety conference in London.

"Sharing responsibility for safer roads" called for international political action to reduce the dramatic global increase in road traffic casualties. The conference was attended by government ministers, UN agencies, international organizations, NGOs and road safety groups. Costa Rica's Vice-Minister for Transport, Karla Gonzalez, spoke at the event about her country's experience and it was during side meetings that the FIA Foundation finally concluded a partnership with the Transport Ministry. It was agreed that the Road Safety Council, COSEVI, would take the lead in organising the campaign by preparing a strategy document and a campaign budget and beginning its search for partners in Costa Rica.



Costa Rican Transport Minister Karla Gonzalez speaking at the *Sharing Responsibility* conference

## **Campaign partnership and funding**

A core campaign steering group was established consisting of the Transport Ministry, the National Road Safety Council (COSEVI), the National Insurance Institute (INS), the Costa Rican Automobile Club and the FIA Foundation. Campaign activities were planned with entities such as the renowned National Children's Hospital in San José which has a lineage of Directors with a strong road safety connection; the Costa Rican Social Security Organisation, and the local Pan American Health Organisation (PAHO) representation.

COSEVI initially took on the coordination of the campaign because of its technical expertise in road safety and resources.

The FIA Foundation was able to participate in the campaign through the Automobile Club of Costa Rica. The ACCR became the recipient of the FIA Foundation grant of \$370,000, which was designated for campaign development and operation (including materials). The club also appointed a dedicated campaign coordinator and hired a PR agency to focus on getting the media to write about the campaign.

The objective was to use free media to inform the public of the benefits of the seat belt; to rally support from the public for a compulsory seat belt legislation; fuel debates on whether individual freedom should take precedence over protecting human life; to publish testimonials of well known public figures who were saved by a seat belt; and, ultimately, to put serious pressure on politicians.

Although Costa Rican private companies became interested when the campaign was in full swing, there was no initial involvement or funding in the campaign from private sources. Local funding came exclusively from COSEVI and the INS. The role of these organisations was particularly important in securing funds for a paid media campaign. Because the Education Ministry was no longer involved and its air time offer no longer available, there was no initial budget to purchase air time. \$ 500,000 was raised by the National Insurance Institute and \$ 250,000 by COSEVI, mainly for this purpose.

## Development of the campaign

The campaign strategy document prepared by COSEVI in consultation with the FIA Foundation set increasing the use of seat belts as a general objective which would then contribute to a reduction in the number of fatalities and seriously injured as a result of road traffic crashes.

In view of the failed attempts in the past to restore the seat belt legislation, the means to achieve this goal were cautious:

- Quantitative and qualitative seat belt wearing surveys before, during and after the campaign;
- a mass media awareness campaign based on a mix of emotional and rational messages;
- demonstrating the effectiveness of the seat belt by means of the FIA Foundation's low impact crash seat belt slide;
- to lobby the Constitutional Court and the Parliament, and seek public endorsement from the President of Costa Rica for a rehabilitation of the seat belt legislation.

The target indicators were defined as follows:

- An increase in the seat belt wearing rate to 40% among drivers and passengers of motor vehicles as a result of a mass media campaign;
- An increase in the seat belt wearing rate to 70 % as a result of a combination of compulsory seat belt legislation, police enforcement and a mass media campaign;
- A 50 % reduction of the number of fatalities and seriously injured as a result of frontal road traffic crashes.

The COSEVI also laid out a basic campaign schedule consisting of a:

**Pre-campaign:** to include conducting a pre-evaluation seat belt wearing survey; developing campaign materials and initiating political lobbying for new seat belt legislation.

**Campaign:** To launch the campaign and involve the mass media; to seek the support of the President of the Republic; to distribute campaign materials; to begin 'soft' police enforcement involving distribution of campaign materials and providing road safety advice to motorists; to use all the above tools to influence and persuade Parliament to introduce new seat belt legislation.

**Post-campaign:** Evaluation of the campaign by means of a seat belt survey; and, in the event of successful approval of legislation, high profile police enforcement through traffic penalty notices.

In its strategy paper, COSEVI set out that sustained campaign activities would be required to change human behaviour over the longer term, and confirmed its commitment to continue monitoring seat belt use over an initial period of four years.



## Campaign communication

The central message of the campaign is based on the concept of love and responsibility; the campaign icon a heart secured by a seat belt.

A further FIA Foundation mission to Costa Rica followed in May 2003 to discuss progress on the seat belt campaign and to finalise the campaign's communication tools

The FIA Foundation endorsed a proposal from COSEVI which included two TV spots on seat belt wearing and two on the role of the traffic police to demonstrate to Costa Ricans their role in road safety. Public opinion research had revealed a lack of public trust in the road traffic police arising from perceptions of fraud and inefficiency, a problem which was being addressed by the newly appointed Head of Police Ignacio Sánchez. The seat belt campaign was seen as an excellent opportunity, through 'soft' enforcement of the seat belt message and through TV advertising, to present a more positive image of the police.



At the time of this mission visit, the FIA Foundation had finalized the campaign materials which were to act as a supplement to the Foundation's seat belt toolkit. These materials are based around a family of crash test dummies who illustrate the facts about seat belt wearing.

The Costa Rican campaign team decided to produce their own TV spots with a human and emotional message, but they adopted the FIA Foundation's crash test dummy character as the campaign's ambassador.

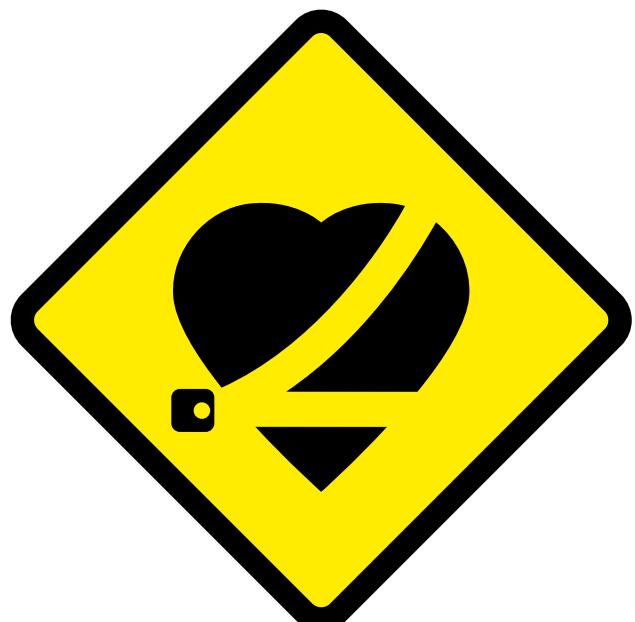
The central human and emotional message of the campaign was based around the concept of love and responsibility, with a campaign icon featuring a traffic sign with a heart secured by a seat belt. The campaign slogan "Por Amor Use el Cinturón" (For love use your seat belt) deliberately did not demand that Costa Ricans "obey an order", something which had proved so disastrous in the past, but asked them to make the choice to wear a seat belt for the sake of family and friends.

TV spots were produced on seat belt and child seat use, backed up by dramatic radio testimonials of people who survived a car accident because they were wearing a seat belt at the time of the crash or the tragic stories of those who never recovered from the injuries they sustained.

In addition to the core seat belt messages, additional TV spots on dangerous overtaking, speeding and jay walking were produced. These adverts portrayed the police in a positive, friendly and helpful light, making clear that achieving improved road safety was not a question of 'them and us' but a shared endeavour. The adverts always concluded with the same signature slogan "Por Amor Use el Cinturón", representing seat belt use as being at the heart of all sensible road safety behaviour.



Elliot Coen, ACCR; Karla Gonzalez and ACCR President Carlos Macaya discuss strategy





Data released by the Traffic Police clearly showed the need for legislation: 92% of the people who died in a car traffic accident were not wearing a seat belt when the crash occurred. The results of the seat belt survey held in July 2003 were also presented to the press: only 24% of the drivers, 16% of the passengers and 8% of the children were found to be restrained.

## Presidential support

Although the President of Costa Rica, Dr Abel Pacheco, was unable to attend the launch event, he endorsed the seat belt campaign a week later in his annual "state of the Nation" and he made an appeal to the Costa Ricans to support seat belt wearing. In his speech he said the following:

*"... but there are other actions that the vehicle drivers themselves must take: avoid drink driving, drive cautiously and wear their seat belt and ensure that their passengers belt up as well. According to the most recent data, 92% of the drivers who died in car traffic accidents were not wearing their seat belt. The use of the seat belt would have prevented 40% of these fatalities and up to 50% of injuries sustained by the survivors of car crashes.*

*This week we have launched a seat belt campaign and we have introduced a proposal for compulsory seat belt legislation. This is not a coincidence because there is evidence that the seat belt saves lives. I hope that the General Assembly will approve, among the other reforms to the road traffic legislation, the compulsory use of the seat belt as well as the reform that will make it a traffic offence to drive under the influence of alcohol or drugs. Many lives in Costa Rica will be saved if legislation is stricter and drivers show a better sense of responsibility.*

*I am making an urgent request that we keep our vehicles in good condition, that we use the seat belt and that we drive carefully. This is a matter of saving human lives, which is the most important mission in a lifetime that we could possibly achieve".*



The campaign is supported with TV, newspaper and roadside advertising

**NO PIERDA TODO  
EN UN SEGUNDO.  
POR AMOR, USE EL CINTURÓN.**



FIA Foundation  
for the Automobile and Society



## The campaign on the ground...and in the air

Advertising, education and enforcement combine as the campaign hits the streets - and debating chambers - of Costa Rica.

Following the launch, the campaign began in earnest during October 2003.

The FIA Foundation had donated a seat belt simulator to the Automobile Club of Costa Rica, and this toured shopping malls, festivals, fairs and schools throughout the country to give people the opportunity to experience the benefits of the seat belt in low speed crashes.

The heart icon of the campaign became ubiquitous, with the campaign's advertising present on road side billboards, on traffic signs and on bumper stickers. Hundreds of thousands of stickers, leaflets, goody bags and badges were distributed.

The traffic police were enthusiastic partners in the campaign, developing their positive relationship with motorists through 'soft' enforcement advice stops where they encouraged car occupants to wear their seat belt and handed them campaign advice literature.

The Costa Rican campaign team also created a real personality in the crash test dummy character developed by the FIA Foundation. The dummy was given the name (in English) "Sir Hard Crash", assumed a professorial air and was featured on leaflets recommending seat belt use that were distributed during the campaign. A life size crash test dummy suit was made available by the FIA Foundation, so Sir Hard Crash was able to join the seat belt simulator in person and even accompanied politicians on the campaign trail to pass on the seat belt message.

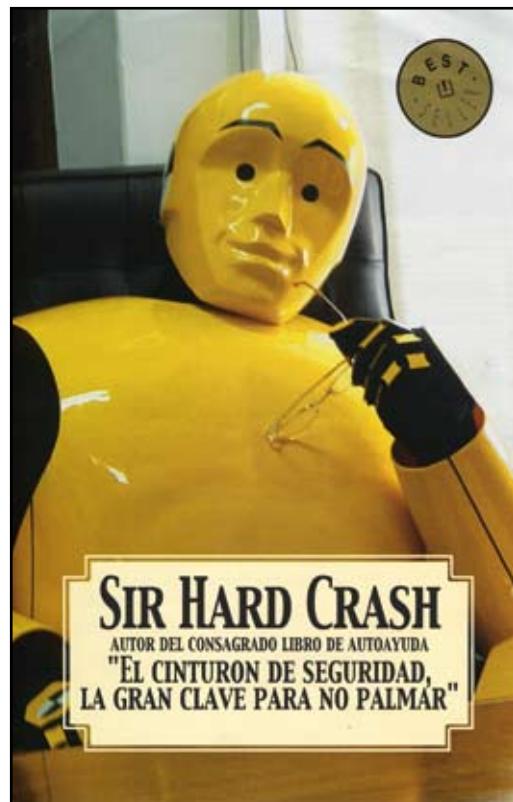
While the campaign was visible on the streets, it was also unavoidable on TV and radio. The highly professional TV and radio adverts, with their carefully crafted positive messages of shared respect, love and responsibility, established the ‘personality’ of the campaign in a way that roadside and community activities alone could not. The paid media campaign was complemented by the free media campaign, which achieved significant quality press and media coverage, including positive editorial.

### **Breaking parliamentary deadlock**

At the outset of the campaign the government pledged to introduce a reform of the road traffic legislation and urged the Parliament and the members of the Constitutional Court not to unnecessarily delay the seat belt legislation with amendments.

However by December 2003, more than two months after the launch and despite the sophisticated awareness campaign, the reform of the road traffic legislation had still not been presented in Parliament. This would soon change. In the second week of December, independent filmmaker Richard Stanley visited Costa Rica on behalf of the FIA Foundation to gather footage for a film on road safety advocacy. The Automobile Club arranged interviews with the key players of the campaign and the seat belt simulator was filmed during its demonstration tour. Stanley also visited the Trauma Department of the National Children’s Hospital in San José and met with the Head of the Department, Dr Vargas, who eloquently described the grief and guilt of parents whose unsecured children had been killed or maimed in a crash.

Richard Stanley then went to interview Mario Redondo, the President of the Parliament. On hearing about the delay in the legislative process, Mr Redondo immediately decided that he would be prepared to submit an own initiative bill to speed up the process. With compulsory seat belt use being just one of the amendments in the new road traffic legislation, the legislative process would take too long. Mr Redondo agreed with the Transport Minister Javier Chavez to table the most urgent articles of the road traffic legislation for a first debate before the Christmas holidays: Articles 79 on compulsory seat belt wearing and Article 137 on drink driving. As a result of this intervention, Mr Chavez agreed with the proposal and in a matter of a few minutes the seat belt legislation was released from its deadlock.



# How Costa Rica got its seat belt legislation: timeline

## Friday, 19 December 2003:

Two articles to be modified in the road traffic legislation are tabled for debate: Article 79 on compulsory seat belt wearing imposing a fine of 20,000 colones for non-compliance; and article 137 that enables traffic police to suspend a driver's license for a year if the driver is caught drink driving. In the past the license lost its validity for 6 months but the driver was allowed to keep it on the vehicle and exploiting this loophole drivers had continued to use their vehicle.

The Libertarians submit 25 amendments and make a vote on the seat belt wearing article impossible. However, the Government refuses to let MPs go into recess until this piece of legislation is voted on. MPs are unable to gather enough votes to overrule the Government's decision because the People's Action Party refuses to support the recess for "ethical reasons". The first debate and vote are referred to an exceptional session on Monday.

## Monday, 22 December 2003:

The debate starts at 3 p.m. and the Minister and Vice-Minister for Transport attend to support the legislation. During negotiations, the text of the seat belt legislation has been slightly amended reducing the fine from 20,000 to 8,000 colones. But the Libertarians still offer fierce resistance and at 10.30 p.m. they maintain three amendments, which according to the rules allow their three representatives fifteen minutes speaking time on each. This would inevitably take the debate well past midnight, contrary to regulations. The Libertarians' obstructive behaviour provokes fierce reactions in the Congress and one of the MPs shames the Libertarians for "having to live with the responsibility for all the road traffic accident deaths that will occur in the future" if they continue to block the legislation. The Libertarians have to give in to the immense pressure.



Traffic Police Director, Ignacio Sánchez, debates a Libertarian MP

At 11.44 p.m., article 79 on compulsory seat belt legislation is approved with 43 votes in favour and five votes against. Also approved is article 137. The second vote is scheduled after the Parliament returns from recess on 19th January. The Transport Minister declares to the press that even if this first vote is only the first step to legislation, it arrives just in time for the holiday season when the road toll is highest. The positive legislative developments, informative traffic police actions and the ongoing media campaign will help the habit of wearing a seat belt to take hold.



Transport Ministers Javier Chavez and Karla Gonzalez at a campaign press conference

## 26-28 December:

The exodus to the beaches and other holiday destination has begun. Five hundred traffic police officers take to the main access roads to ensure that traffic is fluid and at the same time they promote the information campaign on seat belts. Vice-Minister Karla Gonzalez, eight months pregnant at the time, campaigns on the national roads accompanied by "Sir Hard Crash", the FIA Foundation's crash test dummy. Together the unusual pair distribute information leaflets on the merits of seat belts to car drivers



## **19 January 2004:**

The Libertarians consult the Constitutional Court to give its verdict on whether the compulsory seat belt legislation violates the principle of personal freedom.

In a letter to Karla Gonzalez the FIA Foundation offers to rally political support from international road safety forums and to provide technical evidence of the benefits of the seat belt to provide arguments to the Constitutional Court.

## **17 February 2004:**

The Constitutional Court decides in judgment 2004-01603 that making seat belt use compulsory for drivers is not unconstitutional. However, it judges that the proposed fine imposed on the driver if passengers are not buckled up is unconstitutional because it considers that the driver has no direct responsibility over the passengers.

The Parliament's Transport Committee discusses the Court judgment and decides to disregard it and to maintain the original text of the legislation.

The Automobile Club steps up efforts to boost support from the public and gathers 160,000 signatures from school children which children then hand over in person to the President of the Parliament.

## **13/14 April 2004:**

The legislation requiring compulsory seat belt use for both drivers and passengers is approved in the second debate.



MP's celebrate passage of legislation

## **15 April 2004:**

Deputy Transport Minister Karla Gonzalez makes a statement announcing the seat belt campaign's victory at a United Nations Stakeholders event in New York, the day after she has addressed the first ever UN General Assembly debate dedicated to road safety.

## **5 May 2004:**

The seat belt legislation comes into force with the publication in the Official Journal La Gaceta. The traffic police announce that there will be a grace period of two weeks, to allow Costa Ricans to adjust to the new legislation. In the meantime, they continue their 'soft' enforcement activities.



## **19 May 2004:**

Police enforcement of the seat belt legislation starts officially. From the early morning hours major police checkpoints are organised, attracting huge media coverage. The traffic police have only 450 officers available for control activities, but roads are blocked and exits closed to create a sense of omnipresence. In his statement to the press, Head of Police Ignacio Sánchez explains that the police will issue a ticket "each time you are caught even if it is two or three times a day" and that he will not rest "until everybody is wearing a seat belt". By the end of the day 625 tickets are issued for non-compliance with the law. By 5 August, this number will increase to 14,975 tickets.



## Post-campaign evaluation

Any campaign is only as good as its results..in this case increasing seat belt use and reducing fatalities.

Although it was initially agreed that a mid-campaign seat belt evaluation survey would be held on a national level, this did not happen because COSEVI had to divert resources to the advertising budget.

An intermediate seat belt survey in February or March would have allowed the effects of the advertising campaign and of the ongoing debates in newspapers and on TV in the run-up to compulsory legislation to be measured.

Most important was to hold a survey once the seat belt legislation and police enforcement came into force to measure the combined effects of all the elements of the campaign. COSEVI and the automobile club joined forces to carry out the survey in August 2004. The survey results showed a sharp increase in seat belt wearing rates from the first survey held in July 2003, prior to the start of the campaign.

Seat belt wearing rates increased as follows:

	July 2003	August 2004	% Increase
Drivers	24%	82%	+58%
Front seat passengers	16%	76%	+60%
Back seat passengers	10%	48%	+38%
Child seats	08%	37%	+29%

The survey also included interviews with drivers to understand why people do not wear seat belts; whether they know what the risks are of not wearing seat belts; what they believe to be the most efficient measures to increase seat belt use; and what messages or images they remember from the awareness campaign.

This led to some interesting results:

- The longer the journey, the more likely drivers are to use their seat belt;
- Reasons given for not wearing a seat belt included the excuses that people find it uncomfortable (they find it hard to move, it bothers them when it is hot or they find that the anchorage of the seat belts is too high) or that they keep forgetting about putting the seat belt on;
- However, people seem to be aware that not wearing a seat belt when you have an accident can cause serious injuries or even be fatal (90.81% of the drivers);
- Of those questioned, 68% remembered seeing or hearing the seat belt awareness campaign on TV or radio;

The survey also studied whether the behaviour of the driver who does not buckle up has an influence on the passengers. The analysis of the data shows that there is indeed a correlation. Front seat passengers are less likely to wear their own seat belts (71%) if the driver is not buckling up. Back seat passengers seem to have even less incentive to put their seat belt on with 87% failing to buckle up. None of the children were found to be properly restrained when the driver was not wearing a seat belt. A clear message came across from the evaluation survey: that a lot of work is needed to get across how vital child restraints are for protection.

### **Juan Pablo Montoya endorses the campaign**

After the conclusion of the formal campaign, the Automobile Club of Costa Rica took the opportunity to invite the Colombian Formula One driver Juan Pablo Montoya for the second time to give his support for the campaign and to maintain the momentum for seat belt use. Montoya agreed to visit in December 2004.

At a press conference in San José, attended by Montoya and the new Transport Minister of Costa Rica, Randal Quiros, the results of the second national seat belt wearing survey were made public. Juan Pablo Montoya was also guest of honour at an awards ceremony hosted by the automobile club to pay homage to the political leaders who supported the new seat belt legislation and the awareness campaign. These were Javier Chavez, the former Minister for Transport; Karla Gonzales, former Vice-Minister for Transport; Ignacio Sanchez, former Head of Road Traffic Police and Director of the Road Safety Council; and Mario Redondo, the former President of the Parliament.



Campaign workers from the Automobile Club of Costa Rica (ACCR)



Child safety was identified as a particular concern



Juan Pablo Montoya supports the campaign, December 2004 (F1 Racing: Darren Heath)



## Conclusions and legacy

### How effective was the campaign in achieving its policy objectives?

The campaign accomplished its mission in terms of restoring seat belt legislation and introducing traffic police enforcement. However, the country's efforts to change the attitudes and behaviour of Costa Rican road users continue. The new Director of the Road Safety Council Roy Rojas is adamant that it will take at least four years before Costa Rica will be able to claim that it has undergone a genuine behavioural change. Police enforcement of the new seat belt legislation is therefore to be maintained. Dedicated enforcement campaigns are held during Easter, summer and Christmas holidays in combination with safety issues such as drink driving and speeding. In 2004, 321 people were reported to have died in a car traffic accident which was 42 fewer than in 2003. COSEVI and the INS dedicated extra funding for additional air time for the TV and radio spots to keep the heart of the campaign beating.



Private funding and support was attracted by the campaign's success

## How effective was the campaign communication?

Post-campaign evaluation suggests that the awareness campaign retained high levels of recognition amongst the public some months after the main media campaign had ended. The key creative elements of the campaign were originated and executed by the Costa Rican campaign team and clearly benefited from local cultural and political expertise.

The heart icon has become so popular that it is now being used in COSEVI's campaign on pedestrian safety. Wherever a pedestrian is hit by a car while crossing the road, a heart with a halo is painted on the road surface. COSEVI is also constructing pedestrian bridges to provide safe crossing of busy roads

COSEVI is also running a campaign focusing on child restraints, 'Por amor, abróchelos' (For love, restrain them) together with the National Children's Hospital, the Debra Foundation – a charity organisation dedicated to supporting children affected by skin diseases – the technical inspections company Riteve and the Automobile Club of Costa Rica. The aim of the campaign is to educate parents on the need for children between 0 and 12 years old to travel in a special car restraint system at all times. At the same time the COSEVI is also lobbying to extend the Costa Rican legislation, which currently only requires restraint systems for children up to four years old, to compulsory use of restraint systems for children up to 12.

The FIA Foundation crash test dummy has subsequently become a global road safety icon, both in the FIA Foundation's own Think Before You Drive campaign and through use of the FIA Foundation seat belt toolkit, which is being used as the basis of seat belt campaigning by organisations across the world. The Costa Rican experience, with "Sir Hard Crash" shows how the crash test dummy can be adopted and adapted to suit different campaigns and circumstances, while the underlying road safety characteristics and message portrayed by the character remains the same.

The FIA Foundation seat belt toolkit also provided a logical and practical framework for campaign planning. The toolkit has subsequently been used as the model for a series of official United Nations manuals on road safety 'risk factors' being produced by the United Nations Road Safety Collaboration.



Costa Rican children campaign for road safety, 2005



The FIA Foundation crash test dummy has become a global road safety icon



## **Lessons from the ‘Por Amor Use el Cinturón’ Campaign,**



### **Political champions are vital**

The support and commitment of the ministers in the Transport department; the President of the Parliament and the President of the Republic were essential in maintaining momentum at key stages in the development and execution of every aspect of the campaign. The Deputy Transport Minister, Karla Gonzalez, was a particularly enthusiastic and active supporter of the campaign;



### **Campaigns need a clear message**

There was a danger at one stage in the development of the campaign that the core issue of seat belt use would be lost in a wider ‘values’ campaign. By refusing to compromise on the campaign content, even at the risk of losing financial support, the campaign steering group achieved clarity of message and developed an extremely powerful and clearly understood campaign which resonated with the public;



### **Campaigns need a simple objective**

The ‘Por Amor Use el Cinturón’ campaign set out a simple objective and a strategy to achieve that objective: compulsory seat belt legislation and a target for seat belt compliance. This gave the partners a clear goal to work towards and provided a rallying point for supporters;



### **Celebrities bring positives but can be unpredictable**

Celebrities can bring immense benefits in terms of media coverage, public awareness and ‘personality’ for a campaign, but can also be an unpredictable element in campaign planning.

## **Costa Rica, 2003-4**



### **Securing funds can be difficult ...the first time**

Finding additional sources of funding to supplement the grant from the FIA Foundation proved very difficult. No private sector donors could be persuaded to participate, despite lengthy discussions in some cases. Since the success of the 'Por Amor Use el Cinturón' campaign, commercial companies have been much more open to working with COSEVI and associating with the heart logo. Success breeds success;



### **The best campaigns work at several levels**

'Por Amor Use el Cinturón' combined a mass media campaign; grassroots activity; police enforcement (initially restricted to distributing advice, not tickets); and political lobbying. Each strand of the campaign complemented the others, ensuring that all target audiences were aware of the campaign, and provided a sense of momentum;



### **Evaluation matters**

Pre and post campaign evaluation was essential for understanding the scale of the seat belt non compliance problem and for measuring the extent of change following the campaign and the introduction of legislation. It would have been desirable to conduct evaluation immediately after the media campaign and before legislation was introduced and enforced, to ascertain the impact of the campaign alone, but budgetary constraints meant that this was not possible. The evaluation data has been extremely useful for targeting further campaigning, for example on the link between parental non compliance and a lack of child restraints;



### **Sustaining activity is essential**

Constant reinforcement of road safety messages coupled with sustained enforcement over many years is vital for the longer term success of any campaign.

# Acknowledgements

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Karla Gonzalez, former Vice Minister of Transport, Government of Costa Rica

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