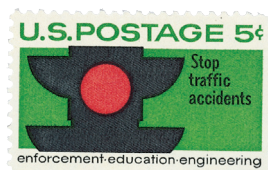


This Day in History... September 9, 1966

National Traffic and Motor Vehicle Safety Act

On September 9, 1966, President Lyndon B. Johnson signed into law the National Traffic and Motor Vehicle Safety Act. This act was a landmark piece of legislation that changed the way Americans thought about cars and driving. What began as a response to a national crisis became one of the most important public safety reforms of the 20th century, proving that laws can make a real difference in protecting lives.



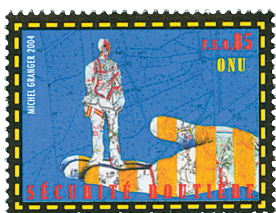
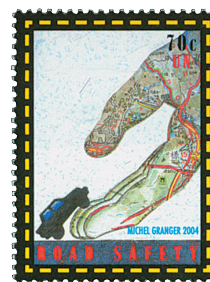
This stamp publicized the importance of traffic safety, the prevention of traffic accidents, and the necessity of lowering the highway death rate.



The World Health Organization made Road Safety the theme for World Health Day 2004. Each stamp had a theme – this one was “Respect Traffic Signs.”

strong leadership from key figures, and the determination of lawmakers to save lives.

Before this law, car safety was not a major focus in the United States. Automobiles were built for speed, comfort, and style, but not necessarily for protecting passengers during accidents. The new law placed responsibility on car manufacturers to build safer vehicles and gave the federal government the authority to create national safety standards. It was the first major step toward modern traffic safety, and it came about because of growing public concern,



“Caution—Pedestrians!”

One of the main reasons the law was created was the alarming rise in automobile accidents during the mid-20th century. By the 1960s, cars had become the dominant form of transportation in America. Highways stretched across the nation, making long-distance travel easier than ever before. However, with more cars on the road came more accidents. In 1965 alone, nearly 50,000 Americans were killed in car crashes, and over 4 million were injured. These numbers shocked the public and highlighted the need for change. Many experts pointed out that while driver error was a factor, poorly designed vehicles made accidents far more deadly than they needed to be. For example, cars often had sharp dashboards, weak door locks, and no seat belts, which led to serious injuries during crashes.

A major influence behind the push for safer cars was consumer advocate Ralph Nader. In 1965, he published a groundbreaking book titled *Unsafe at Any Speed*. The book criticized the automobile

“Courtesy on the Road”



“Safety Seat Belt”

This Day in History... September 9, 1966 continued

industry, especially General Motors, for failing to make cars safer even when the technology was available. Nader argued that car manufacturers prioritized style and profits over human lives. His work gained national attention and pressured Congress to act. The controversy even grew when General Motors tried to discredit Nader by investigating his private life, a move that backfired and only gave him more credibility. Nader's voice became one of the most important in the fight for safer roads.



"Drink or Drive"

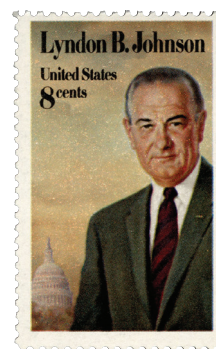


"Speed = Danger"

Congress responded quickly to the growing concern. Lawmakers such as Senator Abraham Ribicoff of Connecticut and Representative Kenneth Roberts of Alabama introduced legislation aimed at improving car safety. They called for the federal government to set minimum safety standards that all car manufacturers would have to follow. These proposals gained strong support from President Johnson, who was already focused on improving the quality of life for Americans through his "Great Society" programs. Johnson believed that protecting citizens from preventable accidents was part of the government's duty. In his statement during the signing of the law, Johnson emphasized that highway deaths were not just numbers, but personal tragedies for thousands of families each year.

The National Traffic and Motor Vehicle Safety Act created the framework for federal regulation of automobile safety. It established the authority to set and enforce safety standards for all new cars sold in the United States. For the first time, features like seat belts, shatter-resistant windshields, and stronger door latches became mandatory. The law also required automakers to recall vehicles that were found to have safety defects, a responsibility they had largely avoided before. This gave consumers new protections and held manufacturers accountable for their products.

The effects of the law were wide-ranging and long-lasting. Within a few years, cars became noticeably safer. Seat belts, which had once been rare, became standard equipment. Steering wheels were designed to absorb impact, dashboards were padded, and improvements were made to brakes and tires. These changes directly saved lives. Over time, as more safety features were added, including airbags and crash-testing programs, the death rate from automobile accidents began to decline. While traffic accidents have never disappeared, the chances of surviving a crash greatly improved thanks to the standards first introduced in 1966.

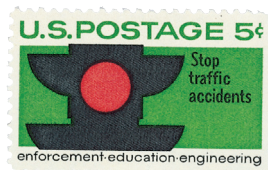


"We are going to cut down this senseless loss of lives. We are going to cut down the pointless injury. We are going to cut down the heartbreak." – LBJ at the Signing Ceremony

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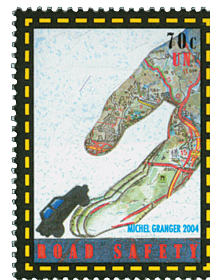


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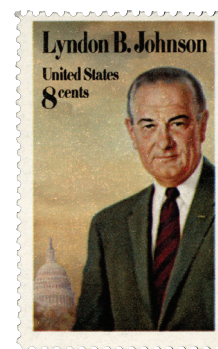


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