CHILD VEHICLE SEAT HAVING RETRACTABLE COUPLING APPARATUS

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Appl. No.: 11/251,248
Filed: Oct. 14, 2005

Related U.S. Application Data
Provisional application No. 60/619,182, filed on Oct. 15, 2004. Provisional application No. 60/718,458, filed on Sep. 19, 2005.

Publication Classification
Int. Cl. B60R 22/34 (2006.01)
U.S. Cl. .............................................................. 280/807

ABSTRACT

A child vehicle seat includes a first shell portion defining a first aperture and a second aperture, and a second shell portion including a seat portion, the second shell portion being positioned in relation to the first shell portion so as to define a space therebetween. The child seat further includes a first strap extending within the space and out of the first aperture defined in the first shell portion, and a second strap extending within the space and out of the second aperture defined in the first shell portion. In addition, the child seat includes a first retractor assembly positioned within the space and configured to receive portions of the first strap, the first retractor assembly being operable to bias the first strap toward the first retractor assembly, and a second retractor assembly positioned within the space and configured to receive portions of the second strap, the second retractor assembly being operable to bias the second strap toward the second retractor assembly. Moreover, the child vehicle seat includes a first actuator positionable between (i) a first position in which the first actuator prevents payout of the first strap from the first retractor assembly, and (ii) a second position in which the first actuator allows payout of the first strap from the first retractor assembly, and a second actuator positionable between (i) a third position in which the second actuator prevents payout of the second strap from the second retractor assembly, and (ii) a fourth position in which the second actuator allows payout of the second strap from the second retractor assembly.
FIG. 23
Color Coding Of Instructions, Labels, And Child Restraint

This instruction manual, product labels, and portions of the child restraint itself have been color-coded to help users further understand proper use of the SafeGuard Child Seat.

This key outlines the color-coding:

- **Yellow** = Retractable harness features/instructions
- **Gray** = Lower LATCH features/instructions
- **Red** = Vehicle seat belt instructions

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**FIG. 32**
CHILD VEHICLE SEAT HAVING RETRACTABLE COUPLING APPARATUS

[0001] This application claims the benefit of both (i) U.S. Provisional Application Ser. No. 60/619,182, filed Oct. 15, 2004, and (ii) U.S. Provisional Application Ser. No. 60/718,458, filed Sep. 19, 2005. The disclosure of both of the above-identified provisional patent applications are hereby totally incorporated by reference in their entirety.

BACKGROUND

[0002] This invention relates to the field of child seats for motor vehicles.

[0003] Child seats for motor vehicles are widely used by operators of motor vehicles to protect children from harm in the event of an accident. Child seats generally include a plastic shell with a cushioned seat formed over the shell. A harness is provided on the seat to restrain the child and retain the child in the seat in the event of an accident. Harness systems typically include a shoulder harness with belts designed to extend over the shoulders of the child and a buckle harness with a crotch belt designed to extend between the legs of the child.

[0004] It is desirable to provide a coupling device configured to releasably couple a child vehicle seat to an anchor member of a vehicle. A challenge for designers of child vehicle seats having such a coupling device is to arrive at a design that is simple and convenient to use, easy to manufacture, and arranges components of the coupling device in an ergonomic and visually pleasing manner.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

[0005] In accordance with one embodiment of the present invention, there is provided a child vehicle seat that includes a first shell portion defining an aperture therein, and a second shell portion including a seat portion, the second shell portion being positioned in relation to the first shell portion so as to define a space therebetween. The child vehicle seat also includes a strap extending within the space and out of the aperture defined in the first shell portion. Moreover, the child vehicle seat includes a retractor assembly positioned within the space and configured to receive portions of the strap in a wound configuration, the retractor assembly being operable to apply a bias to the strap to urge the strap toward the retractor assembly. Further, the child vehicle seat includes an actuator positionable between (i) a first position in which the actuator prevents payout of the strap from the retractor assembly, and (ii) a second position in which the actuator allows payout of the strap from the retractor assembly.

[0006] In accordance with another embodiment of the present invention, there is provided a child vehicle seat that includes a first shell portion defining a first aperture and a second aperture, and a second shell portion including a seat portion, the second shell portion being positioned in relation to the first shell portion so as to define a space therebetween. The child seat further includes a first strap extending within the space and out of the first aperture defined in the first shell portion, and a second strap extending within the space and out of the second aperture defined in the first shell portion. In addition, the child seat includes a first retractor assembly positioned within the space and configured to receive portions of the first strap, the first retractor assembly being operable to bias the first strap toward the first retractor assembly, and a second retractor assembly positioned within the space and configured to receive portions of the second strap, the second retractor assembly being operable to bias the second strap toward the second retractor assembly. Moreover, the child vehicle seat includes a first actuator positionable between (i) a first position in which the first actuator prevents payout of the first strap from the first retractor assembly, and (ii) a second position in which the first actuator allows payout of the first strap from the first retractor assembly, and a second actuator positionable between (i) a third position in which the second actuator prevents payout of the second strap from the second retractor assembly, and (ii) a fourth position in which the second actuator allows payout of the second strap from the second retractor assembly.

[0007] In accordance with yet another embodiment of the present invention, there is provided a child vehicle seat that includes a first shell portion defining an opening, and a second shell portion including a seat portion, the second shell portion being positioned in relation to the first shell portion so as to define a space therebetween. The child vehicle seat further includes a strap extending within the space and out of the opening defined in the first shell portion. In addition, the child vehicle seat includes a retractor assembly positioned within the space and configured to receive portions of the strap, the retractor assembly being operable to bias the first strap toward the retractor assembly. Moreover, the child vehicle seat includes a buckle connected to the strap and being configured to attach to a vehicle anchor.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

[0008] FIG. 1 shows a partial cutaway perspective side view of a child vehicle seat and restraint system;

[0009] FIG. 2 shows a perspective view of a frame of the child vehicle seat of FIG. 1;

[0010] FIG. 3 shows a front perspective view of the child vehicle seat of FIG. 1 with the seat cover and foam shell removed;

[0011] FIG. 4 shows a rear perspective view of the child vehicle seat of FIG. 1 with the headrest and seat cover removed;

[0012] FIG. 5 shows a rear view of the child vehicle seat of FIG. 1;

[0013] FIG. 6 shows a front perspective view of the foam shell of the child vehicle seat of FIG. 1;

[0014] FIG. 7 shows a front perspective view of the child vehicle seat of FIG. 1 with a seat cover and headrest foam removed and the headrest in a down position;

[0015] FIG. 8 shows a front perspective view of the child vehicle seat of FIG. 7 with the headrest in an up position;

[0016] FIG. 9 shows a front perspective view of the headrest support of the child vehicle seat of FIG. 1 with the headrest removed from the headrest support;

[0017] FIG. 10 shows a fully assembled front perspective view of the child vehicle seat of FIG. 1;
FIG. 11 shows a rear perspective view of the child vehicle seat of FIG. 10;

FIG. 12 shows the harness arrangement in relation to the frame for the child vehicle seat of FIG. 1;

FIG. 13 shows a front perspective view of the harness of the child vehicle seat of FIG. 12 with the harness unbuckled;

FIG. 14 shows a top perspective view of the child vehicle seat of FIG. 13 with a crotch strap in an extended position;

FIG. 14A shows a top perspective view of an alternative embodiment to the arrangement shown in FIG. 14 in which a tether belt is utilized to limit upward movement of the front buckle, and showing the crotch strap in an extended position;

FIG. 15 shows a top perspective view of the child vehicle seat of FIG. 13 with a crotch strap in a retracted position;

FIG. 15A shows a top perspective view of the alternative embodiment of FIG. 14A in which the crotch strap is shown in a retracted position;

FIG. 16 shows a front view of the headrest support of the child vehicle seat of FIG. 1, and showing the adjustment bar;

FIG. 16A shows a front view of an alternative embodiment of a headrest support of the child vehicle seat, and showing an alternative embodiment of the adjustment bar in relation to that shown in FIG. 16;

FIG. 17 shows a partial cutaway top perspective view of the child seat of FIG. 1 exposing the retractor and latch mechanism;

FIG. 18 shows a front perspective view of the retractor mechanism of FIG. 17;

FIG. 19A shows across-sectional view of the belt retractor of FIG. 17;

FIG. 19B shows a rear elevational view of the belt retractor of FIG. 19A;

FIG. 19C is a cross-sectional view of the belt retractor taken along the line A-A of FIG. 19A;

FIG. 20 shows a bottom perspective partial cutaway view of the child vehicle seat of FIG. 1;

FIG. 21 shows a top front perspective view of an alternative embodiment of the child vehicle seat of FIG. 1 with a removable seat cover;

FIG. 21A shows an alternative embodiment of the headrest cover in relation to the headrest cover shown in FIG. 21;

FIG. 22 shows another top front perspective view of the child vehicle seat of FIG. 21 with the seat cover partially removed;

FIG. 23 shows an alternative front perspective view of the shoulder belts of the child vehicle seat of FIG. 13;

FIG. 24 shows a front perspective view of the shoulder belts and shoulder pads of FIG. 23;

FIG. 25 shows a rear perspective view of the child vehicle seat of FIG. 1 including a carrying strap;

FIG. 25A shows a rear perspective view of an alternative embodiment of the child seat in relation to the embodiment shown in FIG. 25, with the alternative embodiment including an anti-skid material adhered or otherwise affixed to the bottom surface of the bottom portion of the base shell of the child seat;

FIG. 26 shows a rear perspective view of the child vehicle seat of FIG. 25 with the carrying strap hooked to the vehicle seat;

FIG. 27 shows a perspective view of the child vehicle seat of FIG. 25 being carried by a user;

FIG. 28 shows a top view of the child vehicle seat of FIG. 21;

FIG. 29 shows a top perspective view of the child vehicle seat of FIG. 28 with the instruction flap pulled back;

FIGS. 30A and 30B show perspective views of two separated locking pieces of a fastener for the child vehicle seat of FIG. 21;

FIG. 31 shows a perspective view of the locking pieces of FIG. 30 in an engaged position; and

FIG. 32 shows a page of an instruction manual for the child vehicle seat of FIG. 1.

DESCRIPTION

Overview

With general reference to FIG. 1, a child’s vehicle seat and restraint system 100 comprises a seat portion 104 and a headrest 102. The seat portion 104 of the child seat 100 includes a base shell 118 which is secured to the posterior side of a rigid frame 122. A foam shell 120 is secured to the base shell 118 and covers the anterior side of the rigid frame. The headrest 102 is attached to an adjustable headrest support 130 which is slideably retained upon the frame.

As shown in FIG. 12, the child seat 100 also includes a harness 110 which is designed to secure an occupant within the seat. The harness 110 includes a plurality of straps that form a web 200 used to secure a child in the seat. The harness 110 also includes a front buckle 112 and a front clip 114 used to properly position the harness straps upon the child. A central belt retractor 300 is secured to the rigid frame 122 and is operable to remove slack in the harness once a child occupant is positioned in the child seat 100.

Frame

With reference to FIG. 2, the frame 122 of the child seat includes two L-shaped members 126 separated by a plurality of metallic cross members 128 that extend between the L-shaped members 126. The cross members 128 extend through holes defined in the L-shaped members 126 and are fastened to the L-members using means commonly used in the art, such as welding or nuts and bolts. Each L-shaped member includes a short leg 132, a curved portion 134, and a long leg 136. Two parallel support bars 138 are also included in the frame. Each support bar 138 includes a first end connected to the short leg 132 of one of the L-shaped members 126 and a second end that extends toward the top
of the long leg 136 of the same L-shaped member 126. An S-shaped plate 140 connects the second end of each support member to the long leg 136 of the L-shaped member 126. One of the cross members 128 extends through the first end of the support bars 138 to secure the support bars to the short legs 132 of the L-shaped members 126. An additional metallic cross member 129 is provided that extends between the support bars 138 and through the S-shaped plates. The rigid frame 122 is made of a lightweight metallic material, such as aluminum.

The frame 122 generally provides a strong skeletal structure for the child seat 100 to which all load bearing components on the child seat are attached. Because the frame 122 is comprised of a metal material, the frame provides a stable support that resists cracking and/or breaking. With this arrangement, force is directed away from the occupant of the child seat in the event of a crash.

Base Shell

With reference to FIGS. 1 and 3, the base shell 118 cradles the frame 122 about the posterior side of the frame 122. To this end, the profile of the base shell 118 is generally L-shaped, similar the L-shaped members 126 of the frame 122. The base shell 118 is made of a relatively stiff plastic material, such as polypropylene. The base shell 118 includes a bottom portion 150 designed to receive the short legs 132 of the frame 122, and a back portion 152 designed to receive the long legs 136 of the frame 122. The frame 122 is secured to the base shell 118 in any means commonly used in the art such as rivets, nuts and bolts, or other fasteners.

As shown in FIGS. 4 and 5, the back portion 152 of the base shell 118 includes a recessed angled panel 156 positioned between two rear heels 158. A window 160 is formed in the back portion 152 above the recessed angled panel 156. The window 160 is flanked by two side wings 162. A top panel 164 is formed above the window 160 and extends between the two side wings 162. Two columns 166 extend from the top panel 164 down to the heels 158. The two columns 166 partially surround the long legs 136 of the L-shaped members 126 of the frame 122. Triangular openings 168 are formed between the wings 162, columns 166 and heels 158, as shown in FIG. 4.

The bottom portion 150 of the base shell 118 includes a generally flat portion designed to provide a surface for the base shell that rests upon the vehicle seat. The bottom portion 150 of the base shell is best seen in FIGS. 25 and 26. Anti-skid material may be adhered or otherwise affixed to the bottom surface of the bottom portion 150 of the base shell to discourage the base shell from moving when it is placed in a vehicle seat as shown in an alternative embodiment depicted in FIG. 25A. The anti-skid material is generally a resilient material such as rubber or soft plastic and is textured to provide additional gripping ability on a vehicle seat.

The two rear heels 158 also blend into the bottom portion 150 of the base shell and provide additional support for the base shell when it is placed in the vehicle seat. The bottom portion 150 of the base shell 118 is cupped by the two side wings 162 which extend down from the back portion 152 and into the bottom portion 150 of the base shell. The short legs 132 of the frame 122 are located in the cupped bottom portion. As shown in FIG. 14, the bottom portion 150 of the base shell 118 also includes a central channel 154 through which a harness belt passes.

Foam Shell

With reference now to FIG. 6-8, the top foam shell 120 is generally a single integral component. The foam shell generally comprises a seat 170 and a backrest 172. Two arm rests 174 flank the seat 170, and a recess 176 is formed in the front of the seat, as shown in FIG. 6. The arm rests flow into two sidewalls 178 that flank the backrest 172. An opening is formed in the backrest for receiving the adjustable headrest support 130. The foam shell 120 is made of a dense foam material, such as ethylene propylene copolymer, with a density ranging between 20 g/l and 180 g/l. In one preferred embodiment, the dense foam material is ethylene propylene copolymer with a density of 30 g/l. Such foam material is sold by JPS International under the trademark ARPRO® expanded polypropylene beads. The foam shell is relatively flexible compared to the more rigid portions of the child seat 100, and is designed to cradle the occupant of the child seat in the event of side impacts. The foam shell is soft to the touch and is configured to absorb a significant amount of energy in the event of a crash. In addition, extreme temperatures have relatively little effect on the foam shell so that cracking of the foam shell does not occur in the event of a vehicular accident. The foam shell is designed and configured to cushion the occupant and protect the occupant in the event of an accident.

As described above, the foam shell is positioned over the anterior sides of the frame 122 and base shell 118. The frame 122 is thus generally enclosed by a two-part shell which includes the base shell 118 on one side and the foam shell 120 on the other side. The foam shell 120 is secured to the frame 122 and/or base shell 118 using any of various fastening methods known to those of ordinary skill in the art. For example, the foam shell 120 may be secured to the base and frame using hook and loop type fastener strips, such as those sold under the trademark VELCRO®, or nuts and bolts or other fasteners.

An exemplary fastener 360 which may be used to secure the foam headrest 102 to the headrest support 130 is shown in FIGS. 30A, 30B, and 31. The fastener 360 includes two complementary molded locking pieces 362 and 364. Each locking piece includes a circular anchor 366 with an extending post 368. The extending post includes two opposing tines 370 and 372. Each tine 370, 372 includes a first plurality of teeth 374 axially positioned along one interior side and a second plurality of teeth 376 axially positioned along another interior side such that the first plurality of teeth 374 are 90° offset from the second plurality of teeth 376. When the posts 368 are mated, the tines 370, 372 from one locking piece 362 slide along the tines 370, 372 of the opposite locking piece 364, and the teeth 374, 376 on the tines act in a ratcheting fashion, such that the posts 368 can only become further engaged, and are locked from disengagement. When the posts 368 are fully engaged, the locking pieces 362, 364 are fastened and cannot be pulled apart without destruction of the locking pieces. When used on the seat 100, the circular anchor 366 from one locking piece 362 is embedded in the foam shell with its post 368 extending through a hole 363 defined in the foam headrest 102 (see, e.g., FIG. 1). The post 368 of the other locking piece 364 extends through a hole 365 defined in the headrest.
support 130 (see, e.g., FIGS. 7 and 8). When the two posts 368 are engaged, the ratcheting action on the teeth locks the posts together, thereby securing the foam headrest 102 to the headrest support 130.

Headrest Support

With reference to FIGS. 1 and 7-9, the headrest support 130 is generally rectangular in shape and is adjustably mounted on the parallel support bars 138 of the frame 122. The headrest support 130 includes a front face 182 and a rear face 184. As best seen in FIG. 9, u-shaped channels 190 are positioned along the edges of the headrest support. The u-shaped channels 190 are designed to curve around and receive the support bars 138, thus guiding the headrest support 130 as it slides up and down along the support bars 138. The headrest support 130 includes a forward portion 131 (see, e.g., FIGS. 7 and 8) and a rear portion 133 (see, e.g., FIG. 9). The forward portion 131 and the rear portion 133 are secured together, and thus, move in unison during adjustment of the headrest support 130.

As discussed above, the headrest is mounted directly on the headrest support 130. For example, fasteners 360, such as those shown in FIGS. 30A, 30B, and 31 may be used to secure the headrest 102 to the headrest support 130. In an alternative embodiment, a resilient foam material is interposed between the forward portion 131 of the headrest 130 and the rear portion 133 of the headrest 130. The resilient foam material provides cushioned support for the headrest.

The front face 182 of the headrest support 130 also includes two belt guides 186. The two belt guides 186 extend from the front face 182 and provide for passage of the harness straps 200 through the headrest support. The headrest 102 includes holes designed to allow the belt guides 186 to extend through the foam cushion of the headrest. As explained in further detail below, the belt guides 186 also properly position the harness straps at various vertical heights as the headrest support 130 and headrest 102 are moved to account for children of different sizes in the child seat 100. A slit 198 is also defined in the headrest support 130 to provide an additional passage from the front face 182 to the rear face 184. As explained in further detail below, the slit 198 is designed to receive the end of one of the harness belts, and secure it to the headrest support 130, thereby assisting in automatically adjusting the harness as the headrest support 130 and headrest 102 are moved.

Also included on the front face 182 of the headrest support 130, behind the headrest 102, is a panel adjustment mechanism 148. With reference to FIGS. 9 and 16, the panel adjustment mechanism includes a horizontal center track 191 defined in the headrest support 130. Two pins 193 are positioned in the horizontal center track 191. The two pins 193 are biased toward the outer edges of the track 191 by a center spring 192. Each pin 193 includes a locking post (not shown) designed to extend out of an end of the track 191 and into one of a plurality of holes 149 in the support bar 138 of the frame. However, each of the two pins 193 are slideable within the track 191 such that the locking posts may be removed from the holes 149 in the support bar if the pins 193 are moved a sufficient distance toward the center of the track 191 against the bias of center spring 192. A knob 194 is provided on each pin 193 to facilitate movement of the pin within the track 191. As best seen in FIG. 16, each knob 194 extends out of the track and contacts an angled cam surface 146 on the end of an adjustment bar 144 that is slideably mounted to the front face 182 of the headrest support 130. The angled cam surface 146 is defined by two angled slots 187 (see, e.g., FIG. 16A) such that opposing sides of the surface are further apart near the bottom than at the top. The opposite end of the adjustment bar 144 includes a handle 142 (see FIGS. 7-8). The handle 142 is spring biased in a downward position.

According to the above arrangement, when a user pulls up the handle 142, the adjustment bar 144 slides upward and the angled surface 146 of an angled slot also moves upward. As the angled cam surface 146 slides upward, the knobs 194 on the pins 193 ride along the angled cam surface, forcing the pins 193 closer together, toward the center of the track. When the pins 193 are moved to the center of the track, the locking posts on the pins are removed from the holes 149 in the support bar 138. Accordingly, the headrest support 130 and connected headrest 102 are free to slide along the support bar 138. When the proper position for the headrest 102 is found, the user releases the handle 142 and the handle returns to a downward position. As the handle 142 returns to the downward position, the adjustment bar 144 and angled cam surface 146 also move downward, allowing the knobs 194 on the pins 193 in the track 191 to move further apart. The spring 192 then forces the pins apart, thereby forcing the locking posts into the holes 149 in the support bar 138 when the locking posts are properly aligned with the holes 149. FIG. 16 shows an alternative embodiment of an adjustment bar 144' possessing an alternative camming arrangement configured generally to possess an inverted U-shape or inverted V-shape. With such an alternative arrangement, the operator would push down on the handle 142 in order to remove the pins 193 from the corresponding holes 149 defined in the support bar 138 so that the headrest support 130 could be adjusted.

With reference to FIGS. 1, 10 and 11, the headrest 102 is mounted on the top portion of the headrest support 130. The headrest 102 is comprised of the same material as the foam shell 120. In particular, the headrest is comprised of a dense foam material, such as ethylene propylene copolymer. Such foam material is commercially available through JPS International under the trademark ARPRO® expanded polypropylene beads.

The headrest 102 includes a central portion 101 that is secured to the headrest support 130. The central portion 101 includes two shoulder harness slots 105 that are aligned with the harness guides 186, allowing straps to pass through the headrest support 130 and headrest 102. The central portion 101 of the headrest 102 is integral with two flexible sidewalls 103 having generally curved perimeters. Each sidewall 103 extends about 6 to 12 inches outward and away from the location where the central portion 101 is attached to the headrest support 130. Each sidewall 103 also curves around the base shell 118 as it extends away from the central portion 101. While the central portion 101 is securely fastened to the headrest support 130, the sidewalls 103 are free to bend in relation to the central portion 101. In particular, the sidewalls 103 of the headrest 102 are free to pivot near the point where the headrest 102 is fastened to the headrest support 130 and toward an occupant’s head sitting.
in the child seat 100 in the event of an accident. This provides a significant amount of protection for the occupant of the seat 100 in the event of a side impact to the vehicle or a rollover. The dense foam material that forms the headrest 102 not only cradles the occupant’s head in the event of an accident, but also serves as a cushion for sleeping.

Any number of different types of fasteners may be used to secure the headrest to the headrest support. For example, the fasteners 360 described above with two locking pieces 362, 364 may be used to secure the foam of the headrest 102 to the headrest support 130. Alternatively, loop and hook fastener material, such as VELCRO®, may be positioned on the back side of the headrest 102 and used to secure the headrest 102 to the headrest support 130. Low density foam cushioning 124 may be attached to the headrest and headrest support to provide comfort padding for the back and head of the occupant of the child seat.

Seat Cover

As shown in FIGS. 10 and 11, a seat cover 108 covers the seat portion 104, and a headrest cover 109 covers the headrest 102. Foam cushioning 124 is placed on the foam shell, under the seat cover 108, to make the seat 100 more comfortable for the occupant. The seat cover 108 and headrest cover 109 provide a comfortable feel to the seating surface of the child seat 100 and also provide an aesthetically pleasing and desirable look to the child seat. The seat cover and headrest cover may be constructed from any material that is conventionally used with seats in the automotive vehicle industry, such as leather, vinyl, cloth, or the like, or any materials used as cover materials in the juvenile furniture industry, such as polyester, terry cloth, or the like.

In one embodiment, the seat cover 108 is designed for removal from the foam shell 120 and base shell 118 without the need to remove any straps from the harness of the child seat 100. This embodiment is generally shown with reference to FIGS. 21 and 22. In this embodiment, the seat cover 108 and headrest cover 109 include a plurality of slits 380-384 and a plurality of flaps 390-394. The slits and flaps allow the seat cover 108 and headrest cover 109 to be manipulated around the harness straps. For example, slit 384 allows the buckle 112 of the buckle harness system 211 (described below) to pass through the slit 384, and flap 394 may be opened to re-insert the buckle through the slit when reattaching the cover to the seat. The backrest flaps 390 and 392 and slits 380 and 382 are other slits that may be manipulated when removing or attaching the cover. Seat cover fasteners, for example hook and loop type fasteners such as VELCRO®, are used to connect the slits and flaps and secure them in place on the seat while also providing a smoother more uniform appearance to the seat. The periphery of the seat cover 108 is designed to overlap the edges of the base shell 118. The periphery 198 of the seat cover 108 is lined with an elastic material that helps retain the seat cover 108 on the base shell 118.

Harness System

The harness system 110 is generally shown with reference to FIGS. 12-16. The harness system 110 includes a web 200 comprised of a plurality of belts/straps as well as several buckles. As shown in FIG. 12, the harness system 110 may be considered a two-part system, including a shoulder harness system 201 and a buckle harness system 211. The configuration of the plurality of harness belts in relation to the frame are described for both the shoulder harness system and the buckle harness system with reference to FIG. 12. Thereafter, features of the harness system are described in relation to other portions of the child seat 100.

Shoulder Harness System

With reference to FIG. 12, the shoulder harness system 201 includes a shoulder belt 202 that includes a first end 204 fastened to one port of a Y-connector 250 and a second end 206 fastened to another end of a Y-connector 250. Starting with the first end 204, the shoulder belt moves up from the Y-connector 250, over the cross member 129, and down under the frame 122. After passing under the two short legs 132 of the L-shaped members 126, the shoulder belt 202 is passed back up to the cross member 129 on the other side of the frame 122. The shoulder belt 202 then loops over the cross member 129 on the opposite side of the cross member from where it originally looped over, and follows back down to the Y-connector 250, where the shoulder belt 202 terminates and is again fastened to the Y-connector (also see FIG. 4). The other belt fastened to the Y-connector 250 is a retraction belt 208. The retraction belt moves down along the angled panel 156 of the base shell and, after making turn, passes into the central channel of the base shell. A dotted line 118 is provided in FIG. 12 to represent this portion of the base shell 118 in relation to the frame 122. After passing through the central channel of the base shell, the retraction belt 208 feeds into the retractor (represented by dotted line 300). In particular, the end of the retraction belt is fastened to the feed bar 302 of the retractor. The feed bar may be turned in the direction of arrow 232 using knob 234 (also see FIG. 1) to wind the retraction belt 208 in the retractor 300, thereby tightening the shoulder belt 202 and helping to secure an occupant in the child seat 100. Conversely, the knob 234 and feed bar 302 may be turned in the direction opposite arrow 232 to pay out additional portions of the retraction belt 208 from the retractor, thereby providing additional slack for the shoulder belt when a larger occupant is seated in the child seat 100.

Referring now to FIGS. 13-16, the shoulder harness system is shown with respect to the frame 122, base shell 118, and headrest support 130. As shown in FIG. 13, the shoulder belt 202 passes through both belt guides 186 on the headrest support 130 as the shoulder belt 202 winds over cross bar 129 and under the bottom portion of the base shell 118. Although the shoulder belt 202 passes through the belt guides 186 on the headrest support 130, the shoulder belt only slidably engages the belt guides and does not connect to the belt guides. This allows the headrest support 130 and attached headrest 102 to move up and down upon the frame 122 and move to various positions, as discussed above, without the need for removal, loosening or other adjustment of the harness 110, including the shoulder belt 202. Accordingly, the headrest 102 and associated mechanism is independent of the harness 110. Furthermore, this arrangement of the harness shoulder belt 202 passing through the belt guides 186 means that the headrest is not a load-bearing component of the child seat 100. The arrangement of the shoulder belt 202 upon the frame 122 means that most of the load is applied to the frame in the event of a crash. The headrest may be adjusted to any position without loosening the harness.
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Referring again to FIG. 12, the harness belts 200 of the child seat further comprise belts in a buckle harness system 211. The buckle harness system 211 includes a crotch adjustment belt 214 and a crotch belt 220. A first end 216 of the crotch adjustment belt 214 is inserted through the slit 198 in the headrest support 130 (represented by dotted lines 130 in FIG. 12) and is fastened to a buckle 260. The buckle 260 secures the first end 216 to the headrest support 130, since the buckle is prevented from passing through the slit 198 to the headrest support 130 (as shown in FIG. 16). The crotch adjustment belt 214 extends up from the buckle 260 and over the center portion of the cross bar 129. Then, the crotch adjustment belt 208 passes down to the cross bar 128c and turns toward cross bar 128b. After passing under cross bar 128b, the crotch adjustment belt 208 is fastened to crotch adjustment bar 128a. An adjustable connector 240 is looped around the crotch adjustment belt 208 between the cross bars 128a and 128b such that the adjustable connector 240 is free to slide upon the crotch adjustment belt 214. One end of a crotch belt 220 is securely fastened to the adjustable connector 240. Another end of the crotch belt 220 is connected to the buckle 112. As the headrest support 130 and associated first end 216 of the crotch adjustment belt 214 move up, slack is provided in the crotch adjustment belt 214. This slack allows the buckle 112 connected to the crotch belt 220 to extend further away from cross bars 128a and 128b. Conversely, when the headrest support 130 and associated first end 216 of the crotch adjustment belt 214 move down, the crotch adjustment belt 214 is tighten and less of the belt is available across cross bars 128a and 128b. With less belt available between these cross bars, the connector 240 and buckle 112 are pulled downward toward the cross bars 128a and 128b.

Referring now to FIGS. 14-15, the crotch adjustment belt 214 is shown in two different positions. In FIG. 14, the crotch belt 214 is in an extended position. In this extended position, the headrest support 130 and headrest 102 are moved fully up, providing slack in the crotch adjustment belt 214 that allows the adjustable connector 240 and attached crotch belt 220 to move to the extended position. In FIG. 15, the crotch adjustment belt is in a retracted position. In this retracted position, the headrest support 130 and headrest 102 are moved fully down, taking up slack in the crotch adjustment belt 214 to move the crotch belt 220 to its retracted position. In this retracted position, a spacer 222 is shown encouraging the adjustable connector 240 more rearward. The spacer 222 is a plastic material that prevents the adjustable connector from contacting the portion of the belt 214 covered by the spacer 222. Therefore, when little slack is available in the belt 214, the adjustable connector and associated crotch belt are encouraged toward the back of the seat. Accordingly, as the headrest 102 is moved up for taller (and larger) occupants, the buckle harness available to the occupant reduces in length and moves toward the rear of the seat. Accordingly, a child seat is provided that includes a buckle harness system 211 that automatically adjusts to the size of the occupant, based on the location of the headrest 102. In an alternative embodiment shown in FIGS. 14A and 15A, the front buckle 112 is not slidable along the crotch adjustment belt 214 as is the case in the embodiment shown in FIGS. 14 and 15. Rather, the front buckle 112 is attached to one end of the belt 214 as shown in FIGS. 14A and 15A. A tether belt 221 is added to limit upward movement of the front buckle 112. To this end, one end of the tether belt 221 is secured to the cross bar 128b while the other end of the tether belt 221 is secured to the one end of the belt 214 as shown in FIGS. 14A and 15A.

Altogether, the disclosed harness system 110, including the shoulder harness system 201 and buckle harness system 211 provide means of adjusting the shoulder and crotch strap heights to better fit with ideal belt positioning for children of various ages. Together, the shoulder harness system 201 and the buckle harness system 211 provide an integrated child restraint system that can be adjusted to ideally restrain children of various weights and sizes. In one embodiment, the integrated child restraint system is designed for restraining children from 22-65 lbs. The restraint system includes a means to adjust shoulder belt heights while simultaneously positioning the crotch belt height and fore and aft position.

Central Belt Retractor

With reference to FIGS. 1, 17-20, a central belt retractor 300 is provided on the front portion of the base 118. As shown in FIG. 1, a decorative and protective covering 330 generally shields the central retractor 300 when the seat is assembled. Removal of the protective covering 330 exposes the retractor 300.

As best shown in FIG. 18, the central retractor 300 includes a spool 306 and latch 116 that cooperate in a ratchet fashion to wind the retraction belt 208 on the spool. The spool 306 is retained within a retractor housing 304 that is secured to cross bar 128a. The spool 306 is mounted onto an axle 302 that extends through the housing 304. As shown in FIGS. 19A, 19C, a wound power spring 320 connects the spool 306 to the axle 302 and biases the spool toward clockwise movement, in the direction of arrow 350, which will wind the retraction belt 208 on the spool. The spool 306 includes two circular sidewalls 308 with ratchet teeth 310 formed on the circular sidewalls. As shown in FIGS. 17 and 20, a handle 324 is fixed to the end of the axle 302 to allow for manual rotation of the axle 302 and spool 306. In particular, manual rotation of the handle 324 by a user will cause the retraction belt 208 to be wound upon the spool. As described previously, because the retraction belt 208 is connected to the shoulder harness system 201, winding the retraction belt 208 upon the spool will tighten the retraction belt 208 and shoulder belt 202 and generally tighten the shoulder harness on an occupant of the seat.

Returning to FIG. 18, the latch 116 is provided for locking the spool 306 in place. The latch 116 includes a front handle 318 and two pawls 312 that extend rearwardly from the front handle 318. Each pawl 312 includes a plurality of pawl teeth 310 designed to engage the spool teeth 310 in a ratchet fashion. The latch 116 includes two pivot posts 316 that connect the latch to the retractor housing 304. The latch 116 also pivots within the housing 304 on the pivot posts 316. The front handle portion 318 of the latch 116 is biased downward by two springs 326. Because the latch 116 is biased downward, the pawl teeth 314 are encouraged toward engagement with the spool teeth 310.

Rotation of the spool 306 in the clockwise direction, as noted by arrow 350 in FIG. 18, results in the
The vehicle connection straps 270 extend horizontally from the spools of the retractor 290 along the bottom portion of the base shell 118. At one of the cross members 128 of the frame 122, the straps 270 make a perpendicular turn and extend vertically along the base shell. Thereafter, the connection straps pass through 45° slots 282 in the base shell 118. The 45° slots 282 redirect the straps 270 in a generally horizontal direction such that the straps 270 extend sideways relative to the upright child seat 100. The straps terminate in connection buckles 280 operable to connect to anchors in the vehicle seat.

In addition to the above method for connecting the vehicle seat to an automobile, the vehicle seat may also be secured to an automobile by passing the shoulder belt of the automobile through the triangle-shaped openings 168 in the posterior portion of the base shell 118 and frame 122. After passing the shoulder belt through the openings 168, the belts may be buckled to the shoulder belt anchors of the vehicle seat belt and tightened, thus securing the child seat 100 to the vehicle seat.

Proper Harness Position Indicators

The vehicle connection straps 270 are provided with both a clip position indicator and a shoulder slot position indicator. The clip location indicator 396 is provided on the clip itself. The clip position indicator 396 includes a design, icon, wording, or other indicia to show the proper position of the clip relative to the child. For example, as shown in FIG. 23, the clip position indicator includes the words, “Adjust to armpit level.” As also shown in FIG. 23, shoulder pads 395 in the form of TPE pads are slideably positioned on the shoulder belts to provide shoulder padding for the child. As shown in FIG. 24, the shoulder pads 395 include a textured surface designed to provide friction against a child’s clothing, and thus prevent the TPE pads from slipping on the child when the child is secured in the seat by the harness.

In an alternative embodiment shown in FIG. 21A, the shoulder slot position indicator is provided on the headrest cover 109. The shoulder slot position indicator includes a design, icon, wording, or other indicia to show the proper position of the shoulder slot relative to the child. For example, as shown in FIG. 21A, the shoulder slot position indicator 398 includes a dotted line with words “Adjust this line above shoulders.” Together with the automated adjustment features of the child seat, the clip location indicator and the shoulder slot position indicator help the consumer with proper positioning of the seat harness on the child.

Carrying Strap/Tether Combination

With reference to FIG. 25, the child seat 100 includes a tether 500. One end of the tether 500 is secured to an upper posterior cross member on the frame 122 (see FIG. 12). The other end of the tether 500 is connected to a tether clip 502 that may be used to secure the tether 500 to a tether anchor in an automobile. The tether clip includes a hook portion 504 and a buckle portion 506.

Conveniently, the tether 500 may also serve as a carrying strap. To this end, the child seat 100 includes a tether clip connection slot 510 on the posterior side of the base shell 118. The tether clip connection slot 510 is dimensioned to receive the hook portion 504 of the tether clip. Adjacent to the tether clip connection slot is a buckle groove 512 dimensioned to receive the buckle portion 506 of the tether clip 502.

Connection to Vehicle Seat

Returning to FIGS. 1, 3-5, 13, 17 and 20 a system is provided for mounting the child seat 100 in a vehicle. In particular, vehicle connection straps 270 are provided that are connected to vehicle connection buckles 280. The connection straps are partially wound on retractable spools of retractors 290 (see FIG. 20) located under cross bar 128a. The retractors 290 for the vehicle connection straps 270 operate in a similar fashion to the retractor 300 for the retraction belt 208 and connected shoulder belts 202 (as described above with reference to FIGS. 17-20). For example, similar to retractor 300, the retractors 290 for the vehicle connection straps 270 are spring biased and automatically tighten the vehicle connection straps 270. The retractors 290 may be released by pressing the buttons 284 located next to the retraction latch 116 on the bottom portion of the seat. Depressor of one of the buttons 284 rotates a lever that releases a pawl from engagement with teeth on the retractor 290. When the pawl is otherwise engaged with the teeth, the pawl locks the retractor 290 from rotating in a direction that would pay out the vehicle connection strap 270. When the pawl is released from the teeth by depression of the button 284, the retractor 290 is allowed to rotate and pay out the vehicle connection strap 270. In one embodiment, the buttons 284 are connected by a connecting bar such that depression of either button 284 will release both of the retractors 290. It should be appreciated that the retractors 290 and the vehicle connection buckles 280 may, respectively, be constructed and operate in the same or similar manner to any of the retractors and vehicle connection buckles disclosed in Patent Publication No. US 2004/0084939, the disclosure of which is hereby totally incorporated by reference in its entirety.
FIG. 25 shows the tether clip connection slot with the tether clip 502 removed from the slot 510. FIG. 26 shows the tether clip connection slot 510 with the hook portion 504 of the tether clip 502 hooked in the slot 510 and the buckle portion 506 of the tether clip positioned in the groove 512. As shown in FIG. 27, when the tether clip 502 is hooked in the slot 512, a user may grab the tether 500 and place it over his or her shoulder as a means for conveniently carrying the child seat in back-pack fashion. The length of the tether/strapping 500 may be conveniently adjusted at the buckle portion 506, to accommodate the size of the user.

Instruction Manual Storage

With reference to FIGS. 28 and 29, the child seat 100 includes a pouch 530 built into the headrest cover 109. The pouch 530 in the headrest cover 109 is generally rectangular in shape and is dimensioned to receive the instruction manual for the child seat 100. The pouch 530 is positioned on the top portion of the seat and the opening to the pouch is covered by a flap 532. The flap 532 includes one edge that is fixed to the headrest cover, and an opposing edge that connects to the headrest cover using a fastener, such as a hook and loop fastener. As shown in FIG. 29, pulling the edge of the flap back exposes the opening to the pouch 530 in the headrest cover.

When the headrest cover 109 is properly positioned on the headrest 102, the pouch 530 is situated in front of the foam headrest 102 and behind the exterior surface of the headrest cover 109. Padding may be added between the pouch 530 and the headrest cover 109. The pouch 530 provides a convenient location for storage of the instruction manual, allowing a user of the seat 100 to quickly and conveniently access the instruction manual when needed. This convenient location for storage of the instruction manual also helps the user avoid losing the instruction manual.

Color Coded Parts and Instruction Manual

The instruction manual, seat labels, and various parts of the child seat 100 are all color coded to help the user identify and properly operate different parts on the seat. With reference to FIG. 32, a page 550 from the instruction manual is shown. This page 550 shows the child seat 100 along with various component parts of the child seat. As noted by this page 550 of the instruction manual, portions of the manual and seat 100 color coded in yellow refer to the retractable harness 110 and related components. Other portions of the instruction manual and seat 100 color coded in gray refer to the vehicle connection buckles 280 and related components. Still other portions of the instruction manual and seat 100 color coded in red refer to the vehicle seat belt and components for attaching the seat 100 to the vehicle seat belt. Of course any other color may be substituted for the colors described above such as substituting the color black for the color gray.

As noted above, numerous text references in the instruction manual are highlighted in yellow to indicate to the reader that the text being read is in reference to the retractable harness system 110 of the seat 100. Likewise, numerous parts on the seat 100 are yellow to help the user easily identify and understand proper operation of the retractable harness system when reading about the retractable harness system in the manual. For example, with reference to FIG. 32, the knob 234 and the retraction latch 116 (color not shown) are both yellow in color. Thus, when the reader identifies yellow text in the instruction manual, he or she may easily identify the component parts to which the instruction manual refers for operation of the retractable harness system.

Additional Embodiments Anticipated

The child vehicle seat and restraint system disclosed herein is designed for use in any moving vehicle, including, without limitation, cars, vans, trucks, airplanes, etc. Although the present invention has been described with respect to certain preferred embodiments, it will be appreciated by those of skill in the art that other implementations and adaptations are possible. Moreover, there are advantages to individual advancements described herein that may be obtained without incorporating other aspects described above. Therefore, the spirit and scope of the invention should not be limited to the description of the preferred embodiments contained herein.

What is claimed is:

1. A child vehicle seat, comprising:
   a first shell portion defining an aperture therein;
   a second shell portion including a seat portion, said second shell portion being positioned in relation to said first shell portion so as to define a space therebetween;
   a strap extending within said space and out of said aperture defined in said first shell portion;
   a retractor assembly positioned within said space and configured to receive portions of said strap in a wound configuration, said retractor assembly being operable to apply a bias to said strap to urge said strap toward said retractor assembly; and
   an actuator positionable between (i) a first position in which said actuator prevents payout of said strap from said retractor assembly, and (ii) a second position in which said actuator allows payout of said strap from said retractor assembly.

2. The child vehicle seat of claim 1, wherein:
   an access opening is defined between a first front portion of said first shell portion and said second shell portion, and
   said actuator is positioned within said access opening.

3. The child vehicle seat of claim 1, wherein:
   said retractor assembly includes a spool and ratchet teeth formed on said spool, and
   said actuator includes a pawl configured to engage said ratchet teeth.

4. The child vehicle seat of claim 3, wherein:
   said pawl is engaged with said ratchet teeth when said actuator is positioned in said first position, and
   said pawl is spaced apart from said ratchet teeth when said actuator is positioned in said second position.
5. The child seat of claim 3, wherein:
said actuator includes a lever that includes said pawl, and
said lever is pivotable to cause said actuator to move
between said first position and said second position.
6. The child vehicle seat of claim 1, wherein:
said first shell portion includes an angled surface which
defines in part said aperture,
said angled surface is arranged at about 45° in relation to
vertical, and
said strap is positioned in contact with said angle surface
when said strap extends out of said aperture.
7. The child vehicle seat of claim 1, further comprising a
buckle configured to attach to a vehicle anchor, wherein:
said strap includes a first end retained within said retractor
assembly and a second end connected to said buckle.
8. The child vehicle seat of claim 7, wherein said buckle
and said aperture are sized in relation to each other such that
said buckle is prevented from advancing through said aperture.
9. The child vehicle seat of claim 8, wherein said buckle
is located outside of said space defined between said first
shell portion and said second shell portion.
10. A child seat, comprising:
a first shell portion defining a first aperture and a second
aperture;
a second shell portion including a seat portion, said
second shell portion being positioned in relation to said
first shell portion so as to define a space therebetween;
a first strap extending within said space and out of said
first aperture defined in said first shell portion;
a second strap extending within said space and out of said
second aperture defined in said first shell portion;
a first retractor assembly positioned within said space and
configured to receive portions of said second strap, said
first retractor assembly being operable to bias said first
strap toward said first retractor assembly;
a second retractor assembly positioned within said space
and configured to receive portions of said second strap, said
second retractor assembly being operable to bias said
second strap toward said second retractor assembly;
a first actuator positionable between (i) a first position in
which said first actuator prevents payout of said first
strap from said first retractor assembly, and (ii) a second
position in which said first actuator allows payout of said first
strap from said first retractor assembly; and
a second actuator positionable between (i) a third position in
which said second actuator prevents payout of said
second strap from said second retractor assembly, and (ii) a fourth position in which said second actuator
allows payout of said second strap from said second
retractor assembly.
11. The child vehicle seat of claim 10, wherein:
an access opening is defined between a first front portion
of said first shell portion and second front portion of
said second shell portion, and

said first actuator and said second actuator are both
positioned within said access opening.
12. The child vehicle seat of claim 10, wherein:
said first retractor assembly includes a first spool and first
ratchet teeth formed on said first spool,
said second retractor assembly includes a second spool
and second ratchet teeth formed on said second spool,
said first actuator includes a first pawl configured to
engage said first ratchet teeth, and
said second actuator includes a second pawl configured to
engage said second ratchet teeth.
13. The child vehicle seat of claim 12, wherein:
said first pawl is engaged with said first ratchet teeth when
said first actuator is positioned in said first position,
said first pawl is spaced apart from said first ratchet teeth
when said first actuator is positioned in said second
position,
said second pawl is engaged with said second ratchet teeth
when said second actuator is positioned in said third
position, and
said second pawl is spaced apart from said second ratchet
teeth when said second actuator is positioned in said
fourth position.
14. The child seat of claim 12, wherein:
said first actuator includes a first lever that includes said
first pawl,
said first lever is pivotable to cause said first actuator to
move between said first position and said second
position.
said second actuator includes a second lever that includes
said second pawl, and
said second lever is pivotable to cause said second actuator
to move between said third position and said fourth
position.
15. The child vehicle seat of claim 10, wherein:
said first shell portion includes a first angled surface
which defines in part said first aperture and a second
angled surface which defines in part said second aperture,
both said first angled surface and said second angled
surface are arranged at about 45° in relation to vertical,
said first strap is positioned in contact with said first angle
surface when said first strap extends out of said first
aperture, and
said second strap is positioned in contact with said second
angle surface when said second strap extends out of said
second aperture.
16. The child vehicle seat of claim 10, further comprising a
first buckle and a second buckle, wherein:
said first strap is connected to said first buckle, and
said second strap is connected to said second buckle.
17. The child vehicle seat of claim 16, wherein:
said first buckle and said first aperture are sized in relation
to each other such that said first buckle is prevented from
advancing through said first aperture, and
said second buckle and said second aperture are sized in relation to each other such that said second buckle is prevented from advancing through said second aperture.

18. The child vehicle seat of claim 10, further comprising a connecting member extending between said first actuator and said second actuator, wherein:

movement of said first actuator from said first position to said second position causes movement of said second actuator from said third position to said fourth position.

19. A child vehicle seat, comprising:

a first shell portion defining an opening;

a second shell portion including a seat portion, said second shell portion being positioned in relation to said first shell portion so as to define a space therebetween;

a strap extending within said space and out of said opening defined in said first shell portion;

a retractor assembly positioned within said space and configured to receive portions of said strap, said retractor assembly being operable to bias said first strap toward said retractor assembly; and

a buckle connected to said strap and being configured to attach to a vehicle anchor.

20. The child vehicle seat of claim 19, further comprising an actuator positionable between (i) a first position in which said actuator prevents payout of said strap from said retractor assembly, and (ii) a second position in which said actuator allows payout of said strap from said retractor assembly.

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