

# Simple Stuff

## Getting the “Hot Seat”

by Bob Vitrikas

The Winter is (hopefully!!) past and we are all looking forward to warmer Spring weather. If you are like me, you probably have heated seats in your modern ride. Not so much with older classics. I remember the first time I had a car with heated seats. I think it was a Volvo. “Why do I need this?” I asked rhetorically. It didn’t take long for me to welcome them into my cushy world of modern conveniences! Some cars even turn on the heated seats when the temperature goes below a certain threshold. Wow, talk about living in the lap (seat) of pampered luxury! Whose bright idea was this? Let’s discuss.

We Americans love to make our tushes comfy so it should come as no surprise that the first electrically heated car seats were patented in 1951 by Robert Ballard, a GM engineer. The rationale was to relieve chronic back pain during cold winter drives. American cars of this era also had a cabin heater as an option. Impressive! For reasons unknown it took another 15 years for GM’s luxury division Cadillac to offer them on the top of the line 1966 Fleetwood model. Hmm. The heating pads were made of fiberglass and used carbon yarn/fiber to conduct the electricity used to heat the pads. Non-electric heated seats were introduced in 1955 using a complicated system of heated engine coolant and fans to warm the tuckus. Can you imagine the consequences if this sprung a leak!



Was the 1966 Cadillac heated seat the first use of carbon fiber in car construction?

It didn’t take long for the Swedes to enter the heated seat sweepstakes when innovation leader (oh how I miss them!) SAAB incorporated heated seats as standard

equipment on their 1972 models. They followed this with ventilated seats in 1997. Did you know that SAAB stands for Svenska Aeroplan Aktiebolaget which translates to Swedish Airplane Company. They began making airplanes in 1937 for the Swedish Air Force. Their headquarters was in Trollhatan and no they were not made by trolls, but that's an intriguing thought isn't it? SAAB introduced a line of cars in 1949 when their first production car, a Model 92, hit the snowy streets of Stockholm. Sadly the SAAB story ended in 2014 when the last gasps of this interesting automobile company went toes up. But wait there's more. SAAB continues to make airplanes, most notably the Gripen fighter.



Is this an awesome looking SAAB or what? The SAAB JAS 39 Gripen  
Thanks for the pic Adobe Stock.

Let me see, where was I ? Oh yes heated car seats. British cars joined the heated seat craze in the early 1970s with Rolls-Royce leading the charge. (See what I did there?) On the American side of the "Pond" the Corvette first made heated seats available on the C6 2005 models, 39 years after Cadillac. Better late than never...