

...anted plan to decrease delays this summer, which may turn out to be our summer of discontent," says Air Travelers Association President David Stempler. Air-traffic control equipment failures fell by 79% from June 1999 to 242 last month, the FAA said.

## WorldCom CEO indicates Sprint deal is off

WorldCom CEO Bernard Ebbers indicated the company's proposed merger with Sprint is dead and criticized federal authorities for regulating the industry to the point of hurting U.S. companies. After a speech Tuesday, a meeting delegate asked Ebbers whether he had anything to report on the telecommunications merger, which has been dealt major setbacks by Justice Department and European Union antitrust regulators. "No," Ebbers said. "I don't think there is much left to discuss."

## Disney may buy Toysmart customer list

Walt Disney offered to purchase the customer list from failed Internet retailer Toysmart.com and retire it from future use. The move came a day after the Federal Trade Commission sued to block the Net retailer from selling personal customer data it collected on its site. Disney, the majority owner of Toysmart, was not named in the lawsuit.

## Bidding nears end for book by GE's Welch

The bidding war for the book rights to longtime General Electric CEO Jack Welch's autobiography was expected to be completed today, extending a day longer than originally thought. The extended bidding also was expected to increase Welch's advance beyond the \$5 million he was expected to earn.

## One cellphone number for 100 countries

British Telecommunications and AT&T launched a mobile phone service Tuesday that will let people use the same phone number in more than 100 countries in Europe, the Americas and Asia. The service for the first time allows roaming between the GSM networks used in most of the world and the TDMA system favored in the USA.

## Wholesale inventories, sales rose in May

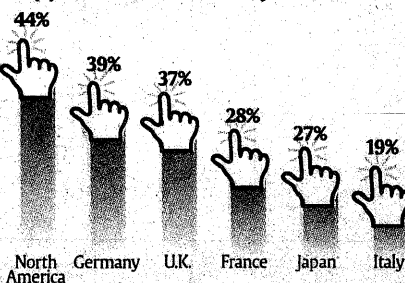
Wholesalers' stockpiles of goods increased for the 16th consecutive month in May, the Commerce Department said. Inventories rose by 0.8% to a seasonally adjusted \$320 billion. Wholesale sales rose by 0.4% in May to a seasonally adjusted \$247 billion.

Written by Sara Nathan from staff and wire reports

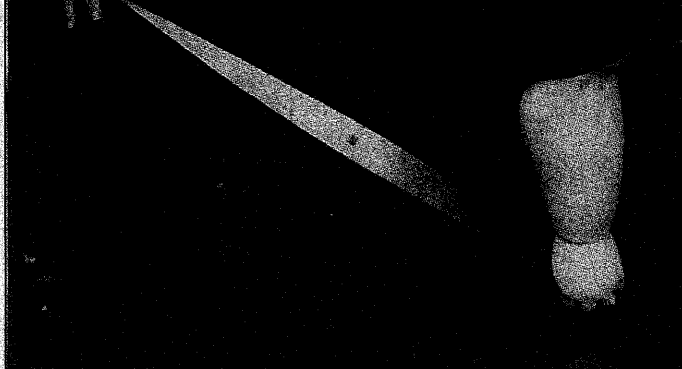
## USA TODAY Snapshots®

### USA leads in small businesses online

About 36% of the 18.6 million small businesses in North America, the United Kingdom, France, Germany, Italy and Japan are online. Those currently online in:



By Anne R. Carey and Alejandro Gonzalez, USA TODAY



By Dave Stueber for USA TODAY

**Safety issue:** Elizabeth Fisher, shown here in the back seat of her Honda Odyssey, has petitioned the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration to review seat belt standards. While experts debate the security of belt extenders, advocates say belts should be large enough for anyone able to get behind the wheel.

## Cover story

# Large drivers demand safety belts fit for all

## Car restraints built on health data 40 years out of date

By David Kiley  
USA TODAY

Most car companies can't get enough customers. But Honda says it "practically begged" Elizabeth Fisher to buy one of its competitors' cars instead of the Odyssey minivan she wanted.

Fisher shopped dozens of new cars and minivans last year looking for one that she would feel comfortable driving. The Baton Rouge computer programmer is a large woman, so fitting comfortably behind the wheel is an important issue.

She opted for the hot-selling Odyssey for its ample room. But when it came to fastening the seat belt, Fisher could barely get it closed. And when she tried out the rear seats where a few of her zaftig friends would be frequent passengers, the belts wouldn't close at all.

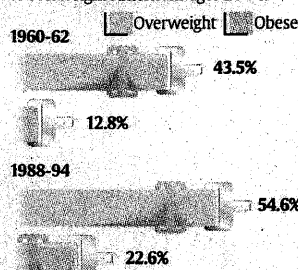
Most carmakers offer seat belt extenders similar to those on airplanes. But not Honda. American Honda Motor spokesman Art Garner says company representatives told Fisher that they can't vouch for the performance of a seat belt extender in a crash and encouraged her to go elsewhere. Volkswagen, Subaru, Isuzu, Porsche, Kia and Hyundai do not offer extenders for the same reason.

Auto safety awareness has never been higher. Forty-nine states have mandatory seat belt laws, and police are increasingly ticketing unbelted drivers.

And Americans are heavier and larger

### Americans put on weight

We've grown more overweight in the past 40 years, but national seat belt standards haven't changed since 1960. Percentage of overweight Americans ages 20-74:



By Marcy E. Mullins, USA TODAY

than ever, so more people are finding belts that meet today's federal standard difficult, if not impossible, to wear.

Fisher bought her Odyssey despite Honda's reluctance. But frustrated by what she views as Honda's and the government's insensitivity to large people, she is crusading to make sure anyone who can comfortably fit behind the wheel of a car has the ability to fasten a factory-installed or otherwise government-tested safety belt.

She gathered signatures and filed a petition with the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration in April, asking it to review standards for seat belts.

"The whole country is pushing seat belt usage, but there are a lot of larger people

Please see COVER STORY next page ►

Shares of several Internet firms, including Yahoo, stormed higher in after-hours trading as the bell-weather Internet firm reported earning 12 cents a share, beating First Call estimates by 2 cents.

"Things are not as bad (with Internet companies) as people had feared," says Paul Noglow, analyst at Chase H&Q. "In fact, they're significantly better."

Such good news will quickly re-new confidence in Yahoo and other Internet stocks, says Ryan Jacob, portfolio manager at Jacob Internet fund. "The fact Yahoo was able to make it through such a tough quarter is heartening for the entire sector," he says.

Worries about weakening online advertising were largely responsible for the \$4.50, or 4%, decline to \$105.50 in regular Nasdaq trading, contributing to a nearly 2% drop in the USA TODAY Internet 100 index.

The story was much different after the earnings report. Shares of Yahoo jumped \$14.50, or 14%, to \$120 in after-hours trading on MarketXT. Yahoo wasn't alone. Shares of online ad firm DoubleClick jumped 9% on MarketXT. Even

# PaineWebber accepts UBS' offer

## \$12 billion deal for USA's No. 4 brokerage to be announced today

By Thomas A. Fogarty  
USA TODAY

UBS, the European banking giant, reportedly will acquire New York investment bank PaineWebber for \$12 billion.

PaineWebber's board voted late Tuesday to accept the \$73.50 a share cash-and-stock offer, *The Wall Street Journal*, citing people close to the talks, reported on its Web site early today. A formal announcement is expected in New York today.

Officials at UBS and PaineWebber couldn't be reached for comment late Tuesday.

PaineWebber, the USA's fourth-largest brokerage, has long been rumored as a target for takeover by a larger financial services company because of its large sales force and upscale client base. But longtime CEO Donald Marron, who turns 66 next week, has resisted.

"This is something that is not necessarily a surprise to us," analyst Amy Butte at Bear Stearns told

Shares of several Internet firms, including Yahoo, stormed higher in after-hours trading as the bell-weather Internet firm reported earning 12 cents a share, beating First Call estimates by 2 cents. "Things are not as bad (with Internet companies) as people had feared," says Paul Noglow, analyst at Chase H&Q. "In fact, they're significantly better." Such good news will quickly re-new confidence in Yahoo and other Internet stocks, says Ryan Jacob, portfolio manager at Jacob Internet fund. "The fact Yahoo was able to make it through such a tough quarter is heartening for the entire sector," he says. Worries about weakening online advertising were largely responsible for the \$4.50, or 4%, decline to \$105.50 in regular Nasdaq trading, contributing to a nearly 2% drop in the USA TODAY Internet 100 index. The story was much different after the earnings report. Shares of Yahoo jumped \$14.50, or 14%, to \$120 in after-hours trading on MarketXT. Yahoo wasn't alone. Shares of online ad firm DoubleClick jumped 9% on MarketXT. Even

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# Belts too small for some to wear

Continued from 1B

who are not being looked after," says Fisher. "That's unacceptable."

NHTSA says belts must fit around the standard crash dummy in the most forward sitting position, plus 4 inches. The dummy, based on 1960 statistics, represents what NHTSA says is the 95th percentile male. In other words, at about 6 feet and 215 pounds, the dummy is supposed to be big enough to represent 95% of American males and 99% of American females.

## Cover story

Data collected by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention from 1988 to 1994 and reported in the National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey show the 95th percentile man is now 244 pounds, while the female is 226 pounds.

NHTSA acknowledges that it hasn't tested extenders. But it sees no obstacle to offering an extender, and says there is nothing preventing automakers from offering longer belts, as many, but not all, do.

NHTSA spokesman Tim Hurd says more recent health statistics have not prompted the agency to change the standard.

Some groups appear to be especially hurt by the old standard. The 95th percentile for non-Hispanic black females, 40-49, is 276 pounds; it is about 250 pounds for black women in their 30s and 50s. The 95th percentile for white males 40-49 is 256 pounds.

Hurd says NHTSA, which has received Fisher's petition, is reviewing the issue and should have comment by the end of August.

## Ticketed for not wearing belt

Lisa Brounstein, an actress and plus-size model in Los Angeles, is eager to see the results. She got a ticket last year from a police officer who scolded her for not wearing the belt in her 1992 Honda Civic. Brounstein, who cannot fasten her belt, fought the ticket, but got no slack from traffic court either. She does not want to be forced to sell her paid-for, otherwise reliable car.

The actual number of people



By Dave Stueber for USA TODAY

**Helping hand:** An extender made by Chrysler can be used to lengthen a standard-size seat belt.

## Seat belt extender policies aren't uniform

### Offer extenders:

- **General Motors brands:** Cadillac, Buick, Oldsmobile, Pontiac, Chevrolet, GMC, Saturn
- **Ford Motor brands:** Ford, Mercury, Lincoln
- **Chrysler brands:** Chrysler, Plymouth, Jeep
- Toyota/Lexus
- Nissan/Infiniti
- Mazda
- Mitsubishi

### Offer extenders with caveat:

- Volvo

### ► Saab

### Offer no extenders:

- Honda
- Subaru
- Kia
- Hyundai
- Isuzu
- Porsche
- Volkswagen/Audi
- Offer only customized longer belts**
- Mercedes-Benz
- BMW
- Jaguar
- Land Rover

who are large enough to be affected is elusive, as is the number of people in the USA who are above a given weight. But J. Baker, the leading retailer of men's big and tall apparel through the Casual Male and Repp chains, says the market for its clothing last year was \$5.6 billion. Of that, 10% of sales were in size 4X and larger, sizes that easily put men into a tight squeeze in a minimum standard seatbelt.

"We can assume that there are tens of thousands of people, if not hundreds of thousands, who fall outside the NHTSA standard and aren't wearing belts because they are too tight or don't fit at all," says Sandie Sabo, spokeswoman for the National Association for the Advancement of Fat Acceptance.

Advocates say the issue isn't the number of people affected, but rather that manufacturers should be required to provide a belt for whoever is capable of riding in their cars.

## Extenders don't please everyone

Sabo, who uses a belt extender in her 1990 Lincoln Town Car, says extenders for all cars will suffice for now but aren't a permanent fix.

"Some large people would simply feel too embarrassed to request an extender from a car dealer — and frankly, they shouldn't have

to," she says.

General Motors, Ford Motor and DaimlerChrysler provide seat belt extenders. And while admitting that the length of seat belts varies from model to model, all three said their engineers are positive that people are better off belted with an extender than going without.

Ford safety spokesperson Sara Tatchio says Ford, Mercury and Lincoln brands exceed the NHTSA standard for seat belt length by 12 inches in some models and more than that in rear seats where belts are configured differently.

Volvo, now part of Ford and historically the industry leader in safety, supplies customers with an extender upon request. But Volvo spokesman Dan Johnston says the company asks its customers to sign a waiver that says they understand that the extender is meant only for the recipient and that it may not perform as well as the factory-installed belt in a crash.

"It is because there has not been any testing done that we know of for belt extenders to see how they affect the belt's performance in a crash," he says. "But we feel confident that people are better off being buckled with an extender than going without."

Mercedes-Benz says it uses a dummy that is larger than the NHTSA standard and offers a mod-

ified belt that is about 12 inches longer than the standard belt for those who request it. "We prefer this approach as there has not been adequate testing done on extenders to suit us," says Mercedes spokesman Fred Heiler.

BMW says it won't supply extenders, but, at the customer's expense, it refits the car with a longer belt. Jaguar has a similar policy, but absorbs the cost. Korea's Daewoo has just completed a series of tests on extenders and is offering them with 2001 models.

Isuzu, like Honda, says that it will not modify a safety system with a device that is not adequately tested.

"That's unacceptable to us," says Isuzu spokesman David Fults. "By putting an extender on a seat belt, you modify both the belt system and the air bag system because of how far the person will be away from the air bag when the belt tightens in a crash."

"I can't see any discernible reason why any manufacturer would not offer an extender," says Phil Hasseltine, president of the Automotive Coalition for Traffic Safety, a group funded by the automakers. "Given the potential numbers of people involved, NHTSA is right to be looking at this."

## A grass-roots movement

Valerie Starrett is helping spread the word about Fisher's petition to a group of several hundred large people she organized in Seattle. In an accident 13 years ago, Starrett's head hit the windshield of her 1970s model Dodge Challenger. She was 230 pounds then and 35 weeks pregnant. She and her unborn baby survived despite the fact that her car's outdated lap belt wouldn't fit.

"I know that I was riding in an old car and that cars are better today, but the experience changed me," says Starrett. "We have these size-acceptance groups because we face a lot of adversity and discrimination."

Safety advocates and the government have acknowledged the need to make sure car safety devices protect children, the elderly, short people and pregnant women. Why haven't large people been part of the conversation? Chuck Hurley of the National Safety Council, who admits his organization has "certainly not had this on our screen yet," says, "Maybe they need a better lobby."

Responds Fisher, "The last person I talked to at Honda said there was literally 'nothing I could do to make Honda change its policy.' ... I took that as a challenge."

► **Complete video report at**  
[www.usatoday.com](http://www.usatoday.com)



Reason to smile: Tuesday with Mar

# Green gains

Analysts like 'devoid of m amid tighten

By George Hager  
USA TODAY

Federal Reserve Greenspan celebrates productivity growth that job insecurity increases, commensurate brief rallies in Friday.

Major stock i Greenspan's comm and headed upward mixed later in the analysts alert for which way the Fed interest rates at i Aug. 22, what Gr say seemed to be as what he did i Governors Association State College, Pa.

Greenspan said creeping consumer or the imbalance and demand, wor repeatedly emphasize interest rates six past year.

"When you're i tightening cycle, any speech by the devoid of negative Crandall, chief Wrightson Association. Instead, Greenspan's familiar comments

## U.S., Mexico sign agreement to team on antitrust issues

By Sara Nathan  
USA TODAY

they could work together on other mergers or the deregulation of Mexico's telecommunications in-

## Suspended drivers in fatal accidents

By Sara Nathan  
USA TODAY

Drivers with revoked or sus

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