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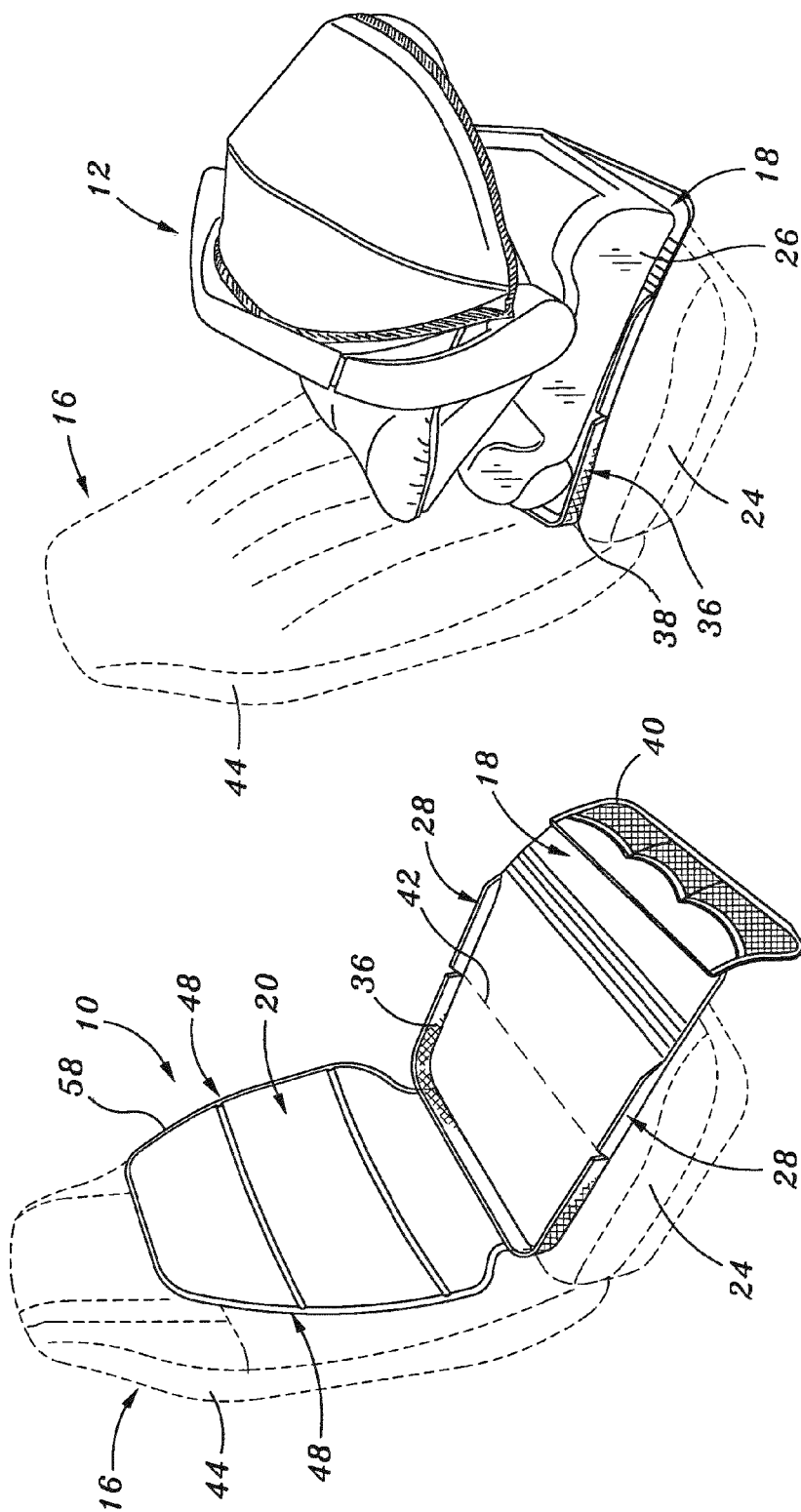
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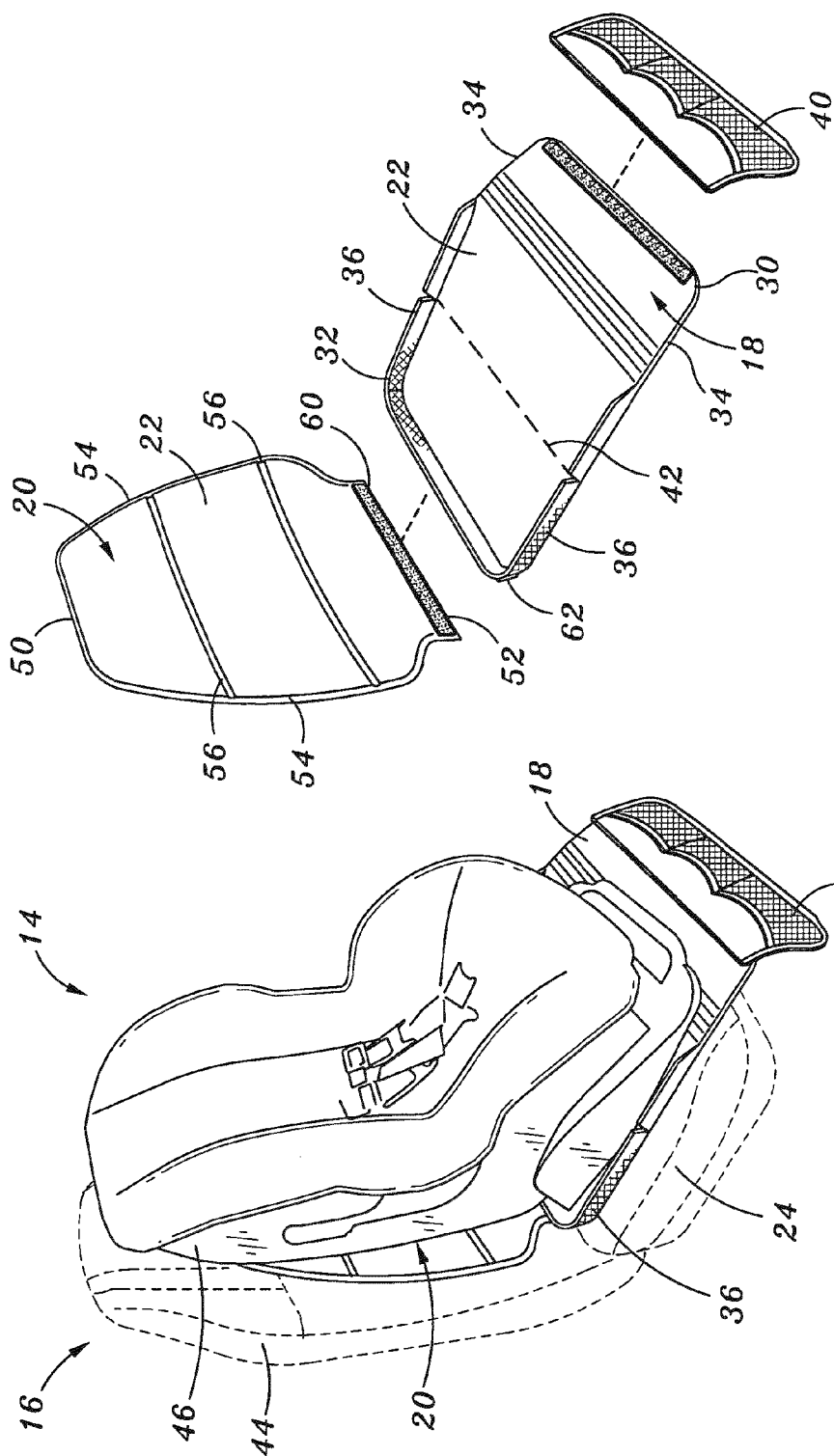
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*Fig. 2*

*Fig. 1*



*Fig. 4*

*Fig. 3*

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# METHOD OF PROTECTING A SEAT FROM A CHILD SAFETY SEAT POSITIONED THEREON

## PRIORITY INFORMATION & CROSS-REFERENCE TO RELATED APPLICATIONS

This application is a continuation application of U.S. patent application Ser. No. 12/729,056, filed Mar. 22, 2010, which is a continuation application of U.S. patent application Ser. No. 11/748,452, filed May 14, 2007, which is a divisional application of U.S. patent application Ser. No. 11/291,431, filed Dec. 1, 2005, now U.S. Pat. No. 7,422,278, which is a continuation application of U.S. patent application Ser. No. 10/818,759, filed Apr. 6, 2004, now abandoned, which is a continuation application of U.S. patent application Ser. No. 10/136,507, filed May 1, 2002, now U.S. Pat. No. 6,786,546, the entire contents of all of these applications being hereby incorporated by reference herein.

## BACKGROUND

The present invention relates generally to seat covers, and more particularly to an improved, two-stage seat cover which transitions from a one-piece system for accommodating a rear-facing child safety chair to a two-piece system for accommodating a forward-facing one to prevent a seat from being soiled and permanently compressed thereby.

Child safety chairs have been marketed throughout the world for many years. It is now mandatory within the United States for parents to employ child safety chairs when traveling in vehicles so that their children are safe in case an unfortunate event such as a car accident should occur.

Child safety chairs on seats are typically positioned in two directions depending upon the age and/or weight of the child using it. The safety chair is typically placed to face toward the vehicle's rear when it is used upon a small infant generally up to six months of age. As the infant matures in age and weight (i.e., six months up to eight years or eighty pounds in weight), the child safety chair is usually turned around so that it faces toward the front of the vehicle.

Existing safety restraints such as lap and shoulder belts are typically utilized to harness the child safety chairs to the vehicular seats. However, a significant problem exists in that the weight of these chairs are continuously applied upon the vehicular seats, thereby often causing permanent compression damages thereto. The degree of permanent compression damage can drastically increase given the fact that the weight of infant or child has to be accounted for in addition to the safety chair's weight. Most parents have found such damage to be simply unacceptable as they permanently deforms the seats of their vehicles.

Further marring to the vehicular seats can occur when infants or children using the child safety chairs inadvertently soil the seats, for example, by diaper leaks on accidental spilling of their drinks and/or food.

To alleviate these problems, many parents resort to using seat coverings such as plastic sheets, rubber mats and foam padded blankets between the vehicular seats and the child safety chairs. Though these seat coverings generally achieve their primary objective of protecting vehicular seats, they possess certain deficiencies which detract for their overall utility.

Perhaps the greatest deficiency of such coverings is their inability to protect the entirety of the vehicular seats. Specifically, plastic sheets, rubber mats and padded blankets are

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essentially tailored to cover only the seating portions of the vehicular seats and may be useful when accommodating a rearward-facing safety chair as it distributes weight solely on the seating portion of the vehicular seat. However, when the chair is repositioned to be forward-facing, these coverings typically cannot prevent the chair from further contacting the exposed seat-back portion of the vehicular seat thereby inevitably dispersing its weight thereto. Although multiple layers of plastic sheets, rubber mats or padded blankets may theoretically be spread over the seats, such arrangement will be aesthetically unpleasing, not to mention being awkward and difficult to maintain as they are not designed for such use.

In view of the above-described shortcomings of conventional vehicular seat coverings, there exists a need in the art for a vehicular seat cover that can optimally accommodate both rearward and forward facing child safety chairs, the directions of which are critical at various stages of a child's growth. More specifically, there exists a need for a vehicular seat cover which can prevent vehicular seats from becoming soiled and permanently compressed irrespective of the orientations that the child safety chairs take.

## BRIEF SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

The present invention specifically addresses and alleviates the above-referenced deficiencies associated with the use of the seat coverings of the prior art. More particularly, the present invention is an improved, two-stage seat cover which may easily alternate between one-piece and two-piece configurations so as to accommodate both rear and forward facing child safety chairs. As will be demonstrated below, the present seat cover's adaptability to transition between such configurations allows an infant and/or child to be safely carried within a vehicle, while preventing the vehicular seats from being damaged by accidental soiling or permanent compressions caused by the weight-bearing child safety chairs.

In accordance with a preferred embodiment of the present invention there is provided a two-stage seat cover for preventing a vehicular seat from being soiled or permanently deformed by a child safety chair which continuously applies its weight thereupon. The seat cover of the present invention comprises a lower rigid/semi-rigid protective member which is disposable upon a seating portion of the vehicular seat. The lower protective member is specifically designed for accommodating a rearward-facing safety chair as it is solely the chair's base section that contacts and thus applies weight to the seat at the seating portion. By using the lower protective member between the safety chair and the seating portion, the weight of the chair is distributed over the entire surface area of the protective member to thereby reduce any force generated by the weight from deforming the seating portion. Hence, the seating portion is prevented from suffering any permanent compression deformation.

The lower protective member additionally includes a lower peripheral edge which forms a ridge-like configuration substantially therearound. This ridge may be formed by shaping the lower peripheral edge in that configuration, or alternatively, by selectively extending an elongate strip around the lower peripheral edge. If the latter step is taken, the strip should be fabricated from a rigid or semi-rigid material (e.g., rubber) so that a configuration of a ridge is maintained at all times. By providing the ridge, any spills such as spilled drinks or diaper leaks originating from the child safety chair are maintained within the ridge and on the top surface of the protective member to prevent them from contacting and soiling any part of the seat and/or vehicular interiors.

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Optionally, at least one pocket may be provided on the lower forward edge part of the lower protective member. Such pocket(s) may be any type which can adequately hold various items (e.g., baby bottles, toys, etc.) therein such as a mesh pocket, for example. The pocket may be attached to the lower forward edge by multiple means such as hook-and-loop strips (commonly called the Velcro) or by simply using permanent fasteners.

In the preferred embodiment of the present invention, the seat cover also features an upper protective member which is selectively attachable to the lower protective member and is disposable against a seat-back portion of the vehicular seat. The upper protective member is specifically designed to be used in combination with the lower protective member for accommodating a forward-facing safety chair as it further applies its weight to the seat-back portion of the seat in addition to the seating portion. By providing the upper protective member when desired, the force generated by the weight of the forward-facing chair may similarly be more evenly distributed thereby so as to replace localized compression forces on the seat-back portion of the vehicle seat. Thus, the seat-back portion, as well as the seating portion, can be protected from becoming permanently deformed by the continuous weight imposed by the child safety chair.

The upper and lower protective members may be releasably attached to each other through one of many known conventional methods. One of such preferred methods is employing the hook-and-loop fastening (commonly called Velcro). More specifically, a hook strip can be formed adjacent the upper bottom edge of the upper protective member, whereas a loop strip can be formed adjacent the lower rear edge of the lower protective member. However, one of ordinary skill in the art will recognize that an alternate arrangement may also be possible where the hook strip is defined adjacent the lower rear edge and the loop strip is defined adjacent the upper bottom edge. By utilizing this hook-and-loop arrangement, the upper protective member can easily and conveniently be attachable and detachable with respect to the lower protective member.

In operation, the present two-stage seat cover is used according to a child's growth progression for the purpose of accommodating a child safety chair upon a vehicular seat. As mentioned above, a parent typically utilizes the safety chair in a rearward-facing direction when his or her child is in the infant stage (i.e., below six months of age). To accommodate the rearward-facing safety chair, the parent may solely lay the lower protective member on the seat's seating portion such that the rearward-facing safety chair can be accommodated thereupon substantially within its formed ridge-like configuration. In this respect, the risk of permanent compression damage to the seating portion is significantly mitigated as the force generated by the chair's weight is more uniformly distributed by the lower protective member. Of course, any spillage originating from the safety chair will be contained within the vertical barrier formed by the lower member's ridge configuration.

When the infant matures in age and weight (i.e., six months up to eight years or eighty pounds in weight), the child safety chair must be turned around so that it now faces the front of the vehicle. In order to further prevent the weight of the forward-facing chair from being directly applied to the seat's seat-back portion, the upper protective member is disposed therebetween. More particularly, the upper member's hook strip can be abutted to the lower member's loop strip for releasable attachment between the upper and lower protective members. By doing so, further weight applied to the seat-back portion by the forward-facing chair is sufficiently dis-

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tributed by the upper protective member so as to protect against permanent compression damage.

#### BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

These as well as other features of the present invention will become more apparent upon reference to the drawings wherein:

FIG. 1 is a perspective view of a two-stage seat cover constructed in accordance with a preferred embodiment of the present invention disposed upon a vehicular seat;

FIG. 2 is a perspective view of a lower protective member of the seat cover shown in FIG. 1 and illustrating its placement on the seat's seating portion to accommodate a rearward-facing child safety chair thereupon;

FIG. 3 is a perspective view of the seat cover of FIG. 1 formed by attaching an upper protective member to the lower protective member of FIG. 2 and illustrating a forward-facing child safety chair which is accommodated thereupon; and

FIG. 4 is an exploded perspective view of the seat cover of FIG. 1 and illustrating its hook and loop strips for releasably attaching the lower and upper protective members together and attaching an optional storage pocket.

#### DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE INVENTION

Referring now to the drawings wherein the showings are for purposes of illustrating preferred embodiments of the present invention only, and not for purposes of limiting the same, FIG. 1 perspective illustrates a two-stage seat cover constructed in accordance with a preferred embodiment of the present invention. As indicated above, the present seat cover 10 can easily alternate between one-piece and two-piece configurations for accommodating both rear and forward facing child safety chairs 12, 14. As will be come more apparent infra, this ability to transition between such configurations helps prevent a vehicular seat 16 such as a car seat from being damaged by accidental soiling or permanent compressions caused by the weight-bearing child safety chairs 12, 14. It is recognized herein that the present seat cover 10 may be utilized with other types of seats other than vehicular seats 16.

Referring more particularly to FIGS. 1 and 4, the seat cover 10 of the present invention is comprised of a lower protective member 18 and an upper protective member 20. Although those figures specifically show the lower and upper protective members 18, 20 as being generally rectangular, it will be recognized by one of ordinary skill in the art that any shapes, configurations, sizes and/or geometries that can substantially accommodate the safety chair 12 or 14 thereupon are contemplated herein. Additionally, the lower and upper protective member 18, 20 may provide a variety forms of textures. However, it is preferred that the lower and upper protective members 18, 20 are each fabricated from a rigid or semi-rigid material that additionally possesses tactile frictionally grip properties, and/or provides at least some degree of cushioning to, the child safety chair 12 or 14. An exemplary material for this purpose is a polymer, foamed polymer and/or foam rubber, but other foamed polymer and/or materials are expressly contemplated herein. Optionally, a washable protective cover 22 such as the one made of a nylon fabric may encapsulate the lower and upper protective members 18, 20 so as to protect their materials from being soiled by a spillage for example.

Referring now to FIG. 2 only, the lower protective member 18 is adapted to be disposed upon a seating portion 24 of the vehicular seat 16. The lower protective member 18 accommodates a rearward-facing safety chair 12 by itself as it is

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only the chair's base section 26 which contacts and thus applies weight to the seating portion 24. By being placed between the safety chair 12 and the seating portion 24, the lower protective member 18 operates to more uniformly distribute the chair weight and infant weight across the surface area of the seating portion 24. Hence, the risk of permanent compression damage to the seating portion 24 is significantly mitigated.

The lower protective member 18 preferably includes a lower peripheral edge 28 which defines the outer boundaries thereof. The lower peripheral edge 28 is generally formed by a lower forward edge 30 (disposed away from the upper protective member 20), a lower rear edge 32 (disposed toward the upper member 20) and two lower side edges 34 interconnecting them. Although not mandatory, the lower peripheral edge 28 forms a ridge-like configuration 36 substantially therearound (i.e. except its lower forward edge 30). However, an alternate configuration forms the ridge 36 around the entirety of the lower peripheral edge 28.

The ridge 36 may be integrally having various heights with the lower protective member 18. Alternatively, an elongate strip 38 may be selectively extended around the lower peripheral edge 28 to form the desired ridge 36. In this latter embodiment, such strip 38 is preferably constructed from a rigid or semi-rigid material (e.g., polymer on rubber) so that the configuration of a ridge 36 can be sustained irrespective of various pressures impacting the same. By providing this ridge 36, any spills such as spilled drinks or diaper leaks originating from the child safety chair 12 or 14 can be contained within the boundary set thereby to prevent them from flowing out and soiling any part of the seat 16 and/or vehicular interior.

Optionally, the lower protective member 18 may have at least one storage pocket 40 which may be extended from its lower forward edge 30. The pocket(s) 40 may be any type of pocket which can adequately hold various items (e.g., baby bottles, toys, etc.) therein. One example of such pocket may be a mesh pocket which defines from one to any number of sufficiently deepened pouches. The pocket(s) 40 may be remarkably mounted to the lower forward edge 30 in any conventional manner such as using hook-and-loop or fasteners and/or snaps or zippers. Furthermore, the lower protective member 18 may optionally include at least one folding line 42 which extends between the two lower side edges 34. This folding line(s) 42 allows the lower protective member 18 to be folded so as to facilitate carrying thereof when it is not in use and further better accommodate any curvature the seat portion 24.

Referring now to FIGS. 1, 3 and 4, the upper protective member 20 is configured to be disposed against a seat-back portion 44 of the vehicular seat 16. The upper protective member 20 is used in combination with the lower protective member 18 so that a forward-facing child safety chair 14 can be accommodated collectively thereby. The upper protective member 20 is adapted to be generally contiguous with the surface of the seat-back portion 44. In this regard, when the child safety chair 14 is placed in the forward-face direction, the chair's top section 46 further contacts and thus applies its weight thereto in addition to the chair's base section 26 applying weight to the seating portion 24.

It is preferred that the upper protective member 20 can be selectively attachable with and detachable from the lower protective member 18. By providing the upper protective member 20 when desired, the compressive force generated by the weight of the forward-facing chair 14 may be more uniformly distributed upon the entire surface area of the seat portion 44 so as to lessen the continuous impact of the chair 14 at the seat-back portion 44. Therefore, the seat-back por-

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tion 44 of the vehicular seat 16, as well as its seating portion 24, can be adequately protected from becoming permanently deformed by the continuous weight respectively imposed by the top and base sections 46, 26 of the forward-facing child safety chair 14.

The upper protective member 20 has an upper peripheral edge 48 defining the outer boundaries thereof. The upper peripheral edge 48 is characterized by an upper top edge 50 (disposed away from the lower protective member 18), an upper bottom edge 52 (disposed toward the lower protective member 18) and two upper side edges 54 interconnecting them. The upper protective member 20 may optionally have at least one folding line 56 that can extend between the two upper side edges 54 which allows it to similarly be folded for ease of carrying and conform to the curvature of the seat portion 44. Further optional is a trimming 58 which may be extended between the upper side edges 54 through the upper top edge 50. Although this trimming 58 may be any type or form, it is preferably a nylon fabric trimming. Moreover, a person of ordinary skill in the art will recognize that a variety of indicia such as company names, designs or logos may be inscribed within the upper peripheral edge 48.

As illustrated in FIG. 4, the upper and lower protective members can be releasably attached to each other by preferably employing the hook-and-loop strips (commonly called the Velcro) formed therebetween. However, one of ordinary skill in the art will realize that such releasable attachment may be accomplished via other known conventional methods (e.g., releasable pins, buttons, etc.). In particular, a hook strip 60 is formed adjacent the upper bottom edge 52 of the upper protective member 20. A loop strip 62 is formed adjacent the lower rear edge 32 of the lower protective member 18. It is easily contemplated, however, that the positioning of the hook and loop strips 60, 62 be reversed such that the hook strip 60 is formed adjacent the lower rear edge 32 and the loop strip 62 is formed adjacent the upper bottom edge 52. By utilizing this hook-and-loop arrangement, the upper protective member 20 can easily and conveniently be attached and detached with respect to the lower protective member 18.

In operation, the present two-stage seat cover 10 is used according to a child's growth progression and accommodates a child safety chair 12, 14 upon a vehicular seat 16 without inflicting any damage thereto. Typically, a parent positions the safety chair 12 in a rearward-facing direction when his or her child is in the infant stage (i.e., below six months of age). In this scenario, the lower protective member 18 is used without the upper protective member 20 and is placed upon the seating portion 24. The rearward-facing child safety chair 12 may then be set upon the lower protective member 18 substantially within its formed ridge-like configuration 36. By doing so, the risk of permanent compression damage to the seating portion 24 is significantly reduced as the force generated by the chair's weight is more uniformly distributed by (i.e. disbursed) the lower protective member 18. Of course, any spillage (i.e., spilled drinks, diaper leakage) coming from the child safety chair 12 or 14 will be contained within ridge 36 as it forms a vertical substantially around the lower peripheral edge 28.

As the infant matures in age and weight (i.e., six months up to eight years or eighty pounds in weight), the child safety chair 14 must be turned around so that it now faces the front of the vehicle. The upper protective member 20 is placed between the chair's top section 46 and the seat-back portion 44 to alleviate the weight of the forward-facing chair 14 from being directly applied to the seat-back portion 44. To accomplish such end, the upper member's hook strip 60 is releasably attached to the lower member's loop strip 62. In this respect,

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weight applied to the seat-back portion **44** by the forward-facing chair **14** can be sufficiently distributed by the upper protective member **20** in order to protect against permanent compression damages. The upper protective member **20** is easily detachable for adaptation toward the rearward-facing chair **12** so that the present seat cover **10** can be reused for other infants (e.g., younger siblings).

Additional modifications and improvements of the present invention may also be apparent to those of ordinary skill in the art. Thus, the particular combination of parts described and illustrated herein is intended to represent only certain embodiments of the present invention, and is not intended to serve as limitations of alternative devices within the spirit and scope of the invention.

What is claimed is:

**1.** A method of protecting an automobile seat from a child safety seat positioned thereon, said method comprising:

positioning a lower protective member of a seat cover on an automobile seat between a seat bottom portion of an automobile seat and a child safety seat;

wherein the child safety seat can be positioned either in a forward-facing orientation or a rear-facing orientation; the lower protective member being adapted to remain disposed on the seat bottom portion of the automobile seat when the child safety seat is the forward facing or the rear facing orientation;

wherein the lower protective member comprises one or more at least partially compressible materials that provide at least some cushioning when the child safety seat is positioned thereon;

wherein the at least some cushioning is accomplished, at least in part, by at least a partial compression of the lower protective member when the child safety seat is positioned thereon;

positioning an upper protective member of the seat cover along the automobile seat between a seat back portion of the automobile seat and a rear portion of the child safety seat when said child safety seat is in the forward facing orientation;

wherein the upper protective member is configured to substantially prevent contact between the rear portion of the child safety seat and the seat back portion of the automobile seat; and

wherein the upper protective member is configured to be disposed adjacent to the lower protective member and to be selectively removable when the child safety seat is a rear facing orientation.

**2.** The method of claim **1**, wherein the upper protective member comprises an upper end that generally extends to a height along a seat back section so as to reduce the likelihood of contact between the seat back portion and a child safety seat positioned in a forward-facing orientation.

**3.** The method of claim **1**, wherein at least one of the lower protective member and the upper protective member comprises a rigid or semi-rigid material.

**4.** The method of claim **1**, wherein the lower protective member comprises a tactile material configured to provide frictional resistance between the lower protective member and an adjacent surface of a child safety seat.

**5.** The method of claim **1**, wherein at least one of the lower protective member and the upper protective member comprises at least one folding line configured to permit the lower protective member or the upper protective member to generally conform to an adjacent surface of an automobile seat which the protective member is positioned.

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**6.** The method of claim **1**, wherein at least one of the lower protective member and the upper protective member comprises a protective covering material.

**7.** The method of claim **6**, wherein the protective covering material comprises nylon fabric.

**8.** The method of claim **1**, wherein the lower protective member comprises a peripheral edge for spill containment.

**9.** The method of claim **1**, wherein the lower protective member comprises a pocket configured to hold at least one item.

**10.** The method of claim **1**, wherein the lower protective member is configured to selectively attach to and detach from the upper protective member.

**11.** The method of claim **1**, wherein at least one of the lower protective member and the upper protective member comprises a foamed polymer.

**12.** A method of protecting an automobile seat from a child safety seat positioned thereon, said method comprising:

providing a seat cover comprising a lower protective member and an upper protective member;

wherein the lower protective member adapted for placement on an automobile seat between a seat bottom of the automobile seat and a bottom portion of either a forward-facing child safety seat or a rear-facing child safety seat;

wherein the upper protective member adapted for placement on the automobile seat between a seat back of the automobile seat and the rear portion of a forward-facing child safety seat;

wherein the upper protective member is configured to substantially prevent contact between the rear portion of the forward-facing child safety seat and the seat back of the automobile seat;

wherein the upper protective member is configured to be generally adjacent to the lower protective member and to be removable when a rear-facing child safety seat is positioned on the protective seat cover;

wherein each of the lower protective member and the upper protective member comprises one or more materials that provide at least some cushioning when a forward-facing or a rear-facing child safety seat is positioned thereagainst;

wherein the at least some cushioning is accomplished, at least in part, by at least a partial compression of the lower protective member and the upper protective member when a forward-facing or a rear-facing child safety seat is positioned against said lower protective member or the upper protective member; and

wherein the lower protective member is configured to at least partially distribute forces from the child safety seat upon the seat bottom of the automobile seat.

**13.** The method of claim **12**, wherein the upper protective member is selectively attachable to and detachable from the lower protective member.

**14.** The method of claim **12**, wherein at least one of the lower protective member and the upper protective member comprises a polymer.

**15.** The method of claim **12**, wherein the lower protective member comprises a ridge that extends at least partially along an outer periphery, said ridge being configured to at least partially contain liquids.

**16.** The method of claim **12**, wherein at least one of the lower protective member and the upper protective member comprises a protective covering material.

**17.** The method of claim **16**, wherein the protective covering material comprises nylon fabric.



**18.** The method of claim **12**, wherein the lower protective member comprises a tactile surface configured to provide frictional resistance between the lower protective member and an adjacent surface of a forward-facing or a rear-facing child safety seat.

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**19.** The method of claim **12**, wherein at least one of the lower protective member and the upper protective member comprises a rigid or semi-rigid material.

**20.** The method of claim **12**, wherein at least one of the lower protective member and the upper protective member 10 comprises a foamed polymer.

\* \* \* \* \*