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Britax Frontier Review

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CPSDarren
Admin - CPS Technician

Join Date: Jan 2003
Location: Illinois
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Britax Frontier Review

Introduction

This review is for the Britax Frontier. This is a "Harness-2Booster" or combination (combo) forward-facing child restraint and belt-positioning booster seat. Using the harness forward-facing, it is for children over 2 years, weight from 25 to 80 pounds and from 30 to 53 inches tall. As a booster, it is rated for children starting at a minimum of 40 pounds and 42 to 60 inches tall. In booster mode, there is no official maximum weight limit. If a child can otherwise meet the height limits and be properly positioned, it is possible to exceed 100 pounds for booster use.

Features and Advantages

Side Impact Protection- Most child restraints are quite effective in frontal crashes when used properly. Side impacts are gaining attention because they can be very dangerous, even to properly restrained passengers. Britax is one of the industry leaders with innovative side protection features and in-house side impact crash testing. The relatively deep wings for the torso and head provide added protection from intrusion. In addition, the wings around the head are padded with energy absorbing foam. My youngest son just turned 3 years old, is about 36 pounds and 39" tall. The wings provide decent coverage from the side (see photo).

5-point Harness to 80 pounds- Among the best features of the Frontier is the 5-point harness that is rated to 80 pounds. Many combination models have a 40 pound limit on their harness system, though some newer models also go beyond 40 pounds. While most kids above 40 pounds can use a booster, some may not be mature enough to remain seated properly in a lap and shoulder belt. In other cases, parents may prefer to keep their child in a 5-point harness beyond 40 pounds because it may offer somewhat more protection in side impacts and rollovers than a 3-point lap and shoulder belt. After 40 pounds, the harness may be removed and the Frontier can be used as a belt positioning booster. This is a big safety advantage compared to some combination models that allow booster mode to be used at 30 pounds, in part because the harness system will simply not fit some taller children anywhere close to 40 pounds.

Multiple Harness Slots- The harness height can be adjusted to eight settings to fit children of varying height. The slot at the level of the child's shoulder or slightly above is the correct one to use. The top slot is over 18" above the seating level, a bit higher than almost all convertible carseats and most other combination models, too. A child will outgrow this seat by height if their shoulders are above the level of the top slots, or if the top of the child's ears are above the top of the headrest. The height adjustment is accomplished by a handle on the back of the seat and is very easy to do with one hand, once the harness is loosened. Though no rethreading of straps is necessary, in most cases, the Frontier would have to be removed from the vehicle to adjust the harness height.

Harness Adjuster and Use- The Frontier has a one-hand-pull front adjustment to tighten the harness. It is similar to the type found on many carseats and is relatively easy to use. The one-pull strap to tighten the harness comes through a slot in the front of the seat. The release lever is hidden under the pad on the top of the seat. This allows for easy adjustments to make the harness tighter or looser. It works smoothly. The buckle clicks when each buckle tongue is inserted, unlike some earlier Britax models that would only click once both tongues were correctly inserted. Various Britax convertibles have a Velcro fastener to hold the harness out of the way while the child is placed in the seat. On the Frontier, the armrests are convenient place to loop the harness system out of the way when not in use.

LATCH- The Frontier includes a single flexible strap to attach to the lower anchors found in newer vehicles. Each side has an individual adjuster and push-button release mechanism. The helps make LATCH installations easier to install and remove than more basic setups with a single adjuster and simple hook type attachments. Convenient slots on the side of the seat are provided to store the LATCH attachments when not in use. Unlike some other combination models, Britax allows you to use the lower anchors and the top tether when this model is used as a belt positioning booster. This can help keep the booster in place while loading, unloading, during turns or when the booster is not occupied. An energy absorbing Versa-Tether top tether strap is also included and use is recommended at all times. Most vehicles on the road today have top tether anchors or can have them fitted at a dealership. The top tether strap **MUST** be used when the harness is used for children 65-80 pounds or anytime the lower LATCH attachments are used. When not in use or when used in booster mode, a storage clip at the bottom of the recline block keeps it securely fastened.

Quote:

Note: Britax advises that the LATCH system may only be used until 40 pounds, unless the vehicle manufacturer gives a higher limit. This is an issue with almost all child restraints that have a harness rated above 40-50 pounds. At some point, it will be necessary to use the seatbelt for installation. Seatbelt installations are just as safe as LATCH, providing that you can get a good install. Also, when LATCH is used in booster mode, please make sure the seatbelt system is correctly aligned with the LATCH anchors. In a few vehicles, the shoulder belt may not be positioned in a location to allow it to fit correctly on children using LATCH boosters.

Base and Crotch Strap Adjustment- The crotch strap has three adjustments. Changing it requires the seat to be removed from the vehicle. A metal clip is threaded through the base and reinserted into the another slot. Most older kids will be using the outermost slot. The inner two slots may be more appropriate for kids closer to the minimum age and weight limits. Select the slot closest to, but not under the child. The Frontier is also reasonably deep and may accommodate kids with longer legs a bit better than shorter models.

Padding and Comfort- The Frontier is very well padded all around and seems very comfortable. My cover is "Red Rock" solid black, grey and red. The breathable, red mesh fabric is down the middle. The very soft black and grey fabrics are like a micro-fiber velour and are on the wings and edges. The harness system is black with grey "HUGS" and black comfort pads to keep the harness straps from irritating the child's neck. The chest clip should be positioned at the level of the child's armpits. Adjustable armrests are also included and have a rubber coating. The armrests must be down during travel. A large comfort pad is also attached to the crotch strap to keep the buckle and strap off the child. This is handy if the buckle is hot from being in the sun.

Belt Guides- When converted to booster mode, a red shoulder belt guide positions the shoulder belt right under the head restraint. This guide is open and should allow free movement of the shoulder belt in most vehicles. A red lap belt guide indicates the routing of the lap belt, under the armrests.

9 Year Expiration- Other models that may claim to be the only seat your child will need may actually have 6 year expiration dates! Starting at 2 years, this will indeed be the last seat most kids will ever need. Even if you stopped using it at 8 years old for a child who is tall and mature enough to sit without a booster, you could still use it for another child up to 3 more years! If the seat is involved in a moderate or severe crash, it may be unusable. Please contact Britax for guidance.

Cupholders- On today's shelves of child seats that all have cupholders, the ones on the Frontier deserve a mention because they are deeper than those on many other models. They can actually be used for drinks and some smaller water bottles, too! When not in use, they both fold into the base of the seat. When installed tightly into a vehicle seat that has high side bolsters (like some bucket seats or captain's chairs), the cupholders may be more difficult to fold all the way down.

Crash Indicator- The top tether has a special stitching indicator that will break free if subjected to forces in a moderate or severe crash. The manual shows how to inspect the seat to determine if the Frontier is no longer acceptable for use. How cool is that?! It is still possible that the Frontier could be involved in a moderate or severe crash and not break the stitching, for example, if the top tether wasn't attached or tightened correctly. That is only one example, there are other possible crashes that may not cause the stitching to rip, so caregivers should refer to the NHTSA guidelines on re-use of crashed child restraints or contact Britax for guidance on using the Frontier after a crash.

Airplane Certification- The Frontier can be used on aircraft, but only with the harness. It may not be used on aircraft as a booster. The top tether is not used on airplanes.

Value- With a 9-year expiration date, you won't need to buy two separate seats for your 2 or 3 year old! It's feature packed and well built, so you will get your money's worth.

Construction- Like all Britax models, the Frontier feels well constructed. Nothing seems flimsy or cheap at all. The armrests wobble a bit, but appear to be securely attached. I would not want to allow a bigger kid to sit on them or use them as leverage to climb into a vehicle, though. While it's not inexpensive, it IS made in the USA (!) and not in China (like many newer child restraints).

Comments and Installation

The Frontier is a very nice combination seat for kids above 2 years old who are no longer rear-facing. It's also ideal for parents who are moving one child out of a convertible seat so they can re-use the convertible for a younger sibling.

It can be installed with LATCH, a lap belt or a lap/shoulder belt. Using seatbelts, there are two options: a typical "short" belt path and a "reverse" belt path. Like the Britax Regent, there are no built-in lockoffs on this model.

LATCH installation in our 2006 Odyssey was easier than average in difficulty. Parents will find it beneficial to pull the loops that tighten the LATCH straps through the belt path slots and cover, into the front of the seat before pulling to tighten. The adjusters on the LATCH attachment straps may actually be inside the belt path slot in the plastic shell of the Frontier when the installation is secured tightly. This is shown in a photo in the manual, but not clearly discussed. If you attempt to pull the straps from the side of the seat as is typical on narrower carseats, you may find that you cannot get a good angle to tighten the LATCH attachments adequately.

Using the reverse belt path (see photos), installation was average. It takes a little more time to route the seatbelt, especially the first few times you try it this way. It takes practice to keep the seatbelt from twisting as you route it behind the Frontier. Having a second person hold the shoulder belt while it is fully extended may help. The result was a very solid fit in both our vehicles. The seatbelt may ride up on the red lap belt guides with the reverse belt path, extending partially into the gap under the armrest. According to Britax, this is not a problem. In a few vehicles, the seatbelt may not be long enough for a reverse belt path installation. Please note that when installing with the reverse belt path, the shoulder belt is NOT routed through the red shoulder belt guide under the head restraint wings that is used in booster mode. The shoulder belt should lay against the shell of the seat.

Using the short belt path routing, it was more difficult than average in our minivan but about average in our wagon that has different seatbelts. With the short belt path, it was quicker to route the belt initially, but took more effort to get it installed in an acceptable manner. In particular, the seat moved from side to side more in both vehicles until I did a few iterations of making it tighter. Ultimately, I was able to get an acceptable installation in all cases, but the reverse belt path was superior in our cars- especially the minivan. In some vehicles with longer stalks for the seatbelt buckle, the buckle may actually be up against or go into the long belt path slot in the shell of the Frontier. That is not only acceptable, but it may be necessary when you have the Frontier pushed into the seat cushion adequately. Another tip in some vehicles is to recline the vehicle seat back first, then install the child seat as tight as possible. When you have finished, bring the vehicle seat back upright to secure the Frontier a bit better. Finally, keep in mind that an acceptable fit does not have to be rock solid! The seat is installed correctly when it cannot be moved back-to-front or side-to-side more than one inch, when given a modest tug at the seatbelt path.

The owner's manual is large, clear and has good diagrams (http://www.britaxusa.com/support/doc...P241400_R1.pdf). An addendum is available with instructions for the reverse belt path installation (<http://www.britaxusa.com/documents/F...lationTips.pdf>). The manual is conveniently attached to the seat with an elastic cord. The cord could have been a few inches longer, though!

Conversion to a booster requires removing the harness system. This is outlined in the manual. A small screw is also removed from the back of the headrest, allowing a second adjustment of the head restraint for booster mode only. It is important to note that this

second height adjustment cannot be used in harness mode. Save the screw; it will be needed to convert the seat back to harness mode. In booster mode, the seating position MUST have a lap and shoulder belt system. A lap-only belt system cannot be used safely with any booster.

When using the Frontier as a booster, the head restraint is adjusted so that the shoulder belt guide is above the child's shoulders. The shoulder belt should then move freely and the lap belt should be routed over the red guides under the armrests. Fit on my 9-year old son was very good.

The official recommendation is that children should be in a booster until they are 8 years old, unless they are already 4' 9" tall. This is only a rough guideline. Because both kids and vehicles differ, the best way to know if your child is ready to move out of a booster is by fit. Children are not ready to move from a booster to a regular lap/shoulder seatbelt until.

- 1) They are tall enough so that their legs bend at the knees at the edge of the seat; and
 - 2) They are mature enough to remain seated with their backs flat against the back of the seat and not slouch; and
 - 3) The lap belt sits high on the thighs or low on the hips (NOT on their tummy!); and
 - 4) The shoulder belt crosses the shoulder and chest (NOT on their arms or neck!); and
- Each passenger must have their own lap AND shoulder belt and remain seated properly for the entire trip! Never allow children to share a seatbelt!

Disadvantages

Most of these issues are not really disadvantages, but I list them here to alert parents about specific issues that pertain to the Frontier.

Price- This is the only major disadvantage I can find. At \$279, it is expensive up front, but is reasonable when value is considered. Like any type of product, you pay more for premium features. Britax is known for safety, so there is also their reputation for thorough crash testing and customer support that will justify the price for many parents.

Weight and Bulk- The Frontier is not small and light. It has to be among the larger and heavier models to accommodate older kids. It weighs over 20 pounds and measures roughly 20" by 22" x 26". The width may be an issue for fitting three child seats across one row of seating, so you would have to choose the other restraints carefully. Like most harnessed seats for bigger kids, it's not an easy model to be lugging through an airport. The Frontier cannot be carried by the harness system. Hold it by the shell and/or the tether strap for carrying.

Harness Slot Height- The top slots should accommodate many kids beyond 50 pounds, more than many other models. Some kids will be able to use it even longer, to 60 pounds or beyond. So, while I list it as a disadvantage, it's only because the added utility of the 80 pound harness limit may not be useful for older kids or those in well above-average height percentiles for their age. So, be aware that most kids will probably outgrow the harness by height before they reach 70 or 80 pounds in weight. For example, my daughter is nearing the limit of the harness height at the maximum setting (see photo). She is almost 8 years old, 50" tall and 54 pounds. My son is almost 10, nearly 80 pounds and 56" tall. He is far too big for the harness, but still fits in the seat in booster mode at a high head restraint setting. The Frontier is designed to allow kids to remain in a harness longer than many other combination seats, but the biggest and oldest kids will use the Frontier as a booster. For parents wanting a harnessed seat that will accommodate taller kids 7-10 years old, there really is no substitute for a model like the Britax Regent that is designed to restrain bigger kids longer in a harness. Despite some rumours on the internet, Britax has confirmed to me that the Regent is not being discontinued at this time. The benefit is that the Frontier is somewhat smaller and lighter than the Regent, because it isn't intended to fit all of those taller kids in a 5-point harness.

Installation in some vehicles- If your vehicle's seatbelts are too short for the "Reverse Belt Path", you will be limited to the "Short Belt Path" installation. This will work fine in many models, but like any child restraint, there is always a possibility that it will be incompatible with a few vehicles. As with all child seats, various types of vehicle seats and seatbelts systems may not be used at all. These are clearly indicated in the manual.

Limited Recline Setting- The recline block on the base can be moved forward or back for two recline positions. In harness mode, the recline block **MUST** be in the forward position (i.e. more reclined). In booster mode, the recline block **MUST** be rotated to the back (more upright). While it does snap into place, you need to make sure it doesn't accidentally rotate to the incorrect position. This setup should be flexible enough for most kids, but for those who want every possible type of adjustment, the Frontier does not have multiple recline settings.

Fabric Care- Removing the cover takes a little effort, as is the case on most harnessed seats. It is hand wash and line dry only. Best to avoid spills that might stain the seat!

Conclusion

The major advantages far outweigh the few minor disadvantages I listed. The Frontier is a great choice if your "baby" is already a big toddler! It fills a nice niche between models like the Britax Boulevard and the Britax Regent. Choose a model like the Decathlon or Boulevard if your child still is under 2 years old and 25 pounds. Older babies should still be rear-facing for safety. While other combination seats may seem more appealing with a 1-year and 20 pound minimum on forward-facing, children in that range are safest facing the back! Kudos to Britax for having sensible minimum age and weight limits with safety in mind. For parents who want to keep their kids in a 5-point harness beyond 6 years, the Britax Regent may be a more suitable choice. For kids in between, like my son who just turned 3 years old, the Frontier really is last carseat they will need! It really is well worth consideration if it meets your needs and those of your child.




The webpage for the Britax Frontier is
<http://www.britaxusa.com/products/pr...ail.aspx?ID=15> .

For more information on child passenger safety, please visit:

<http://www.car-safety.org>

<http://www.seatcheck.net>

Attached Images

-  [frontier.JPG](#) (131.9 KB, 20 views)
-  [frontier3.JPG](#) (179.9 KB, 24 views)
-  [frontier4.JPG](#) (177.7 KB, 23 views)

Darren



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