



U.S. Department of
Transportation

News:

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EXPERIMENTAL SAFETY VEHICLE CONFERENCE
ARLINGTON, VIRGINIA
MAY 12, 1987

I'm delighted to participate in the opening of this 11th International Technical Conference on Experimental Safety Vehicles. On behalf of the American delegation, I bid you welcome to Washington. I'm confident that this will be a worthwhile and informative conference.

Change indeed is in the air, in the halls of Congress as well as the boardrooms of Detroit. But then, I need hardly remind this audience of all that change has brought us since a Rochester, New York, thinker named George Selden experimented with a three ton boiler on wheels which he called his "road locomotive." In the years that followed, the automobile went from a fantasy, to a luxury, to a necessity. At the turn of the century, Barnum and Bailey brothers gave an automobile top billing over a giant, an elephant and a fat lady. And municipal officers in old New York required a "mature male" to walk in front to each car on the city streets, carrying a red flag of warning with which to alert suspicious pedestrians and horse drawn traditionalists. Not long after, the Model T took romance out of the front porch swing and put it in the rumble seat -- leading the international reform bureau to demand that Henry Ford frame legislation "That will stop the use of the car for immoral reasons."

Since your first conference in 1970, tremendous strides have been made in the technology of motor vehicle safety advances toward which all nations have contributed, and from which every nation has benefitted.

The nations which participate in this conference share a common goal -- to increase automobile safety for the traveling public. Since the automobile is the preferred means of transportation throughout the industrialized world, developing ever safer motor vehicles is of paramount importance to all our nations. Motor vehicle deaths transcend national

boundaries; no nation is immune from the tragedies of deaths and crippling injuries due to automobile crashes.

In fact, we inhabit a world where national boundaries are no longer seen as natural barriers, to culture or to commerce. And so we at DOT are deeply involved in a worldwide campaign called harmonization. We seek to harmonize American vehicle safety standards with those in other lands -- not only to lower consumer costs but also to enhance our ability to compete in foreign markets and to ensure that we work to remove all foreign trade barriers to our products. Even now, we are looking for areas where we can coordinate with European governments the adjustment of standards. We've already succeeded in putting common symbols on vehicle control displays; now we are looking to make similar rules for passenger cars and brakes.

That's just the beginning of changes I see on the American road. Even more striking examples come to mind. Who would have thought that the American public would so readily accept mandatory child safety seat laws? The seed was planted in the state of Tennessee, in 1978, with the passage of the first of such law. Today, every state in the Union, along with the District of Columbia, has similar legislation on the books. Usage rates for children under five has jumped from just 15 percent in 1979 to 75.8 percent last year. And our studies show that child seats, when properly installed, reduce the risk of death or serious injury for young children by about 70 percent.

Many European countries have had a long and successful history of mandatory safety belt laws, but it took a great deal of effort to get the ball rolling here. Indeed, the biggest single challenge I faced when arriving at the Department four years ago was to review and settle, once and for all, the U.S. regulation on automatic crash protection for passenger car occupants. Our decision in 1984 has contributed much to a nationwide awakening on occupant protection. Twenty-seven states and the District of Columbia have now passed safety belt laws. And last fall, we officially entered not just another model year -- but also a new era in highway safety -- the year when automatic crash protection became more than just regulatory rhetoric. This year, the auto industry is manufacturing some one million cars which will offer either automatic safety belts or air bags. And by 1990, automatic protection will be standard equipment in all new passenger cars unless states representing two-thirds of the population of the United States have enacted effective mandatory seat belt use laws. While I don't have to tell you the significance of this safety milestone, I can't help but note that for the first time in the long 15-year history of this rule, we're looking at reality -- not just a prototype of the future -- and lives are being saved.

Who would have thought, just a few short years ago, that one would open Time or Newsweek magazine and find two-page advertising spreads touting auto safety initiatives? A nationwide NHTSA survey found over three-quarters of Americans favoring safety belt laws for the driver and front seat passenger.

And in states where mandatory laws have been enacted, an even higher percentage want them to remain on the books.

I've spoken of changed expectations as well as changed designs. Before I leave this subject, may I point to the single most encouraging example of grassroots citizens leading their government toward safer highways. For while engineers were responsible for anti-lock brakes, improved steering columns and anti-lacerative windshields, it was citizens by the millions who changed the way we view the drunk driver in this country. Some of our European friends have had much tougher drunk driving laws, but America is finally beginning to catch up. A decade ago, too many Americans regarded a drunk driver as only a nuisance. Today, we see him or her as a potential killer --and rightfully so. DOT is working hand in hand with aroused groups of citizens and state legislators across the country to change attitudes and laws. And we will not rest until we get every last drunk driver off the roads and highways of this country, nor will we accept toothless laws and lenient judges. This is one change still unfolding, and we have a way to go on this front.

In 1984, we vigorously supported and President Reagan signed into law, a bill encouraging states to set 21 as their legal minimum drinking age. Forty-seven states have now done so. Although we normally defer to the states on traffic law issues, as the President said, a uniform drinking age will do away with "blood borders," where teenagers have a positive incentive to drink and drive, to cross state lines to take advantage of lower drinking age laws and then make the return trip home "under the influence."

Statistics show that setting 21 as the legal minimum drinking age works. While drunk driving remains the leading cause of death for our young people, the proportion of teenage drunk drivers has dropped from 28 percent in 1982 to 20 percent in 1985, a significant and encouraging decrease.

The human factor forms but the first leg of what I call the safety triad for our highways. The second rests on the condition of our highways and bridges. There's progress there as well. Our Interstate highway system -- the safest, most efficient highway network in the world -- is almost complete, and we're rehabilitating and repairing roads and bridges at record rates. We're preserving and protecting the system of highways we depend on so heavily, both for our commerce and our travel.

Then there is the third and final leg in the safety triad -- the one which many of you shape in your daily work. I speak, of course, of motor vehicle design. My Department joins with our auto industry in looking for vehicle safety improvements that are practical and cost effective. One new feature resulting from that search is the high-mounted stop lamp at the base of the rear window, now standard equipment on new cars. I approved that requirement in 1983, after years of research, field testing and careful consideration of costs and benefits. Just last week, we reported that vehicles equipped with the high-mounted stop lamp were 22 percent less likely to be struck in the rear by another vehicle while braking. We are

very pleased that the results so far confirm our earlier determination that this simple, inexpensive safety feature is an effective means of preventing many of the rear-end collisions that occur each year. We estimate that once installed throughout the nation's fleet, the high-mounted stop light will prevent roughly 900,000 accidents a year and save 40,000 injuries and nearly half a billion dollars in property damage.

Meanwhile, research and development continues on a wide array of safety technologies. To date, at least six manufacturers have announced plans to provide air bags as standard or optional equipment on some or all of their lines in the years just ahead. And the automakers are committed to produce millions of air bags by the early 1990s. While the air bag is undeniably useful, it is most useful in conjunction with safety belts. But whatever the final range of systems offered, it is safe to say that consumer demand will play a large part in determining what the future will hold.

And I am delighted to hear that Ford Motor Company announced today it will offer a temporary \$520 incentive on two of its 1987 models equipped with supplemental driver-side air bags. Bringing the cost of air bags to under \$300 can only be good news from a safety standpoint.

Since he first entered office, President Reagan has made plain his allegiance to market forces. For the fact is, that we in the Reagan Administration look upon transportation -- which contributes \$800 billion to our GNP -- as the engine of the American economy. Make a car or truck one percent more efficient, and the added sales stagger the imagination. What better reason to experiment with lightweight, easy to mould engine parts in place of a metal engine? Or computer-driven brakes, now installed in some top-of-the-line models? Or engines no bigger than those which now power motorcycles, and which self-adjust to different grades of fuel?

If windshield wipers will know when to wipe and drivers can command cruising speed at the sound of their voice -- it won't be because government mandated these things. But we've created an environment conducive to such innovation and technology. A government that is sensitive to the creative dynamic -- one that recognizes many years lead time -- such a government can foster an atmosphere wherein individual genius can merge with corporate resources. A century ago, it was backyard inventors, like Selden, Goodyear and Edison, who changed the face of industry. Today, it is teams of exceptional engineers who advance the frontiers of design and safety. Our commitment to safety remains paramount -- safety must never be deregulated. What also hasn't changed is the need for government to clear the deck of burdensome economic regulation and reflect in its own actions some of the same experimental energy which translates a dream from the drawing board to the auto showroom.

We will, for example, continue to remove impediments to technological innovation. We intend our safety standards to encourage new safety technology and designs, not stifle them. And where the auto companies or

any group can suggest ways to streamline and update our standards, I am eager to listen. To cite just one example, we believe that our vehicle lighting standards can and should be simplified. We have already made progress to permit new types of headlamps to be used in the U.S. If we could move toward a truly performance-oriented standard for headlamps for both the U.S. and other nations, it would reduce excessive design restrictions on auto manufacturers without compromising essential safety.

In the years just past, great strides have been made. Through both individual innovation and international cooperation, we now have the capacity to design automobiles that can withstand higher-impact collisions; that have better vehicle control and braking systems; greater occupant protection and restraint systems, and overall structural safety improvements. Out of forums such as this have come cars that burn less fuel, that combine safety and style. You have explored the outer reaches of modern technology, and in doing so, challenged the conventions of the field. Here in Washington, it is all too easy to fall into a mistaken line of reasoning, to see no further than the morning headlines or the evening newscast. One can soon begin to believe that people's lives are affected exclusively by what happens at today's hearing or tomorrow's staff conference. In truth, lives are shaped by those who invent or manufacture a product as much as those who make a regulation.

I'm reminded of a story about the great American Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes, who once found himself on a train, but couldn't locate his ticket.

While the conductor watched, smiling, the 88-year old Justice Holmes searched through all his pockets without success. Of course, the conductor recognized the distinguished justice, so he said, "Mr. Holmes, don't worry. You don't need your ticket. You will probably find it when you get off the train and I'm sure the Pennsylvania Railroad will trust you to mail it back later."

The justice looked up at the conductor with some irritation and said, "My dear man, that is not the problem at all. The problem is not, where is my ticket. The problem is, where am I going?"

Where, indeed. We might very well ask ourselves the same question. But whatever the future holds, one thing is for sure -- we'll get there on four wheels. And however the vehicles of the future look, they will doubtless be the product of your imagination. Along the road, there will be plenty of fresh changes. For every custom was once an eccentricity; every idea was once a dream, including democracy -- and democracy's favorite transport -- the automobile. Through this forum, we've traveled a long way together. The road ahead looks more promising yet -- and the United States government looks forward to continuing the journey with you.

Thank you very much.