U.S. Department of Transportation
news:
Office of Public and Consumer Affairs
Washington, D.C. 20590

FOR RELEASE THURSDAY
January 11, 1979

NHTSA 1-79
Tel: 202-426-9550

DOT ASKS STATE GOVERNORS TO CHECK CARBON MONOXIDE LEVELS IN SCHOOL BUSES

The Department of Transportation has advised all state governors to review their school bus inspection and maintenance practices to prevent possible dangers of carbon monoxide poisoning.

A recent study, conducted by DOT's National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, tested 645 school buses at various locations around the country for carbon monoxide leaks under normal operating conditions. About one bus in three had a harmful level of carbon monoxide.

"We have notified the governors because it is a serious situation that is not presently covered by any federal regulation," said Joan Claybrook, NHTSA Administrator. "Cooperation at this time by state and private school agencies is vital to forestall the dangers of carbon monoxide poisoning of our school children."

Existing laws governing carbon monoxide levels are applicable mainly to industrial workers, Claybrook pointed out. A level of 20 parts per million (PPM) was established as potentially dangerous for school bus interiors under a proposed amendment to the Clean Air Act of 1976, but was not enacted into law, she said.

- more -

This 20 PPM reference level was used in the study of the 645 school buses which operated from 1976 through 1978 in a variety of terrains and weather. The results of the data analysis revealed that:

- 7.2 percent of all buses tested had "average" carbon monoxide readings above 20 PPM.
- 20 percent had "maximum" carbon monoxide readings above 20 PPM.
- 5.4 percent had "maximum" carbon monoxide readings above 50 PPM.

Analysis of the data on a nationwide scale could mean that on a daily basis 2.1 million pupils would be exposed to levels in excess of 20 PPM, and 1.6 million would be exposed to "maximum" levels exceeding 50 PPM.

Major factors that caused high carbon monoxide readings were:

- Defects in the exhaust system.
- Rusted areas in the school bus body.
- Leaking seals around the windows.
- Leaking seal at the emergency door.
- Tailpipe not extending beyond the bus body.
- Leaks around the accelerator and brake pedals.

The federal safety agency urged all state, local and private school bus agencies to adopt improved and continuous maintenance and inspection procedures to reduce and eliminate the carbon monoxide problem, with particular emphasis upon a thorough visual inspection of the exhaust system and school bus body. Carbon monoxide test equipment should be utilized and any incident involving possible carbon monoxide poisoning should be thoroughly investigated and immediate remedial action taken.

Copies of the study may be obtained by writing to: The U. S. Department of Transportation, NHTSA, 400 Seventh St., S.W., Washington, D.C. 20590.

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U.S. Department of Transportation
news:
Office of Public and Consumer Affairs
Washington, D.C. 20590

FOR RELEASE 10A.M.
THURSDAY, JANUARY 11, 1979

NHTSA 3-79 (BOAZ)
Tel. No. 202-426-9550

DOT URGES RE-ENACTMENT OF MOTORCYCLE HELMET LAWS

Motorcyclist deaths resulting from head injuries have doubled in three states that have repealed mandatory motorcycle helmet use laws, according to studies released today by the U.S. Department of Transportation.

"These studies show conclusively that motorcycle helmets are effective in preventing head injuries and deaths, and that mandatory helmet usage laws are effective in getting cyclists to wear helmets," said Joan Claybrook, Administrator of DOT's National Highway Traffic Safety Administration.

"As a result of the studies' findings," said Claybrook, "the department is urging re-enactment of helmet use laws in the 26 states that have repealed them."

"Thousands of people--most of them under 30--are being killed on motorcycles every year, and tens of thousands more are being injured. Many of them are being crippled and maimed for life. Particularly damaging are the head injuries that are occurring because of failure to wear helmets. That is why these studies are so important," Claybrook said.

The studies summarized in the report were undertaken by NHTSA in cooperation with the states of Colorado, South Dakota, Kansas, Oklahoma and Los Angeles County.

Until recently, motorcycle helmet laws were enforced in most states. In 1975, a total of 47 states, Puerto Rico and the District of Columbia had laws requiring all motorcyclists and their passengers to wear helmets. But in 1976, the Congress repealed the authority to impose such sanctions.

(more)

Today, only 21 states, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico still require all cyclists to wear helmets, Claybrook pointed out.

Some of the major findings summarized in the reports are:

1. Motorcyclists who don't wear helmets and are involved in crashes have twice as many head injuries as those wearing helmets, and from three to nine times as many fatalities.

2. In most states, compliance with mandatory usage laws is very high (over 95%), but the usage rate falls rapidly following repeal of such laws to below 60%.

3. In states studied, head injury rates have increased following repeal of helmet use laws. Deaths from head injuries have doubled.

4. Contrary to the contention of some interested groups, safety helmets do not cause accidents by interfering with the cyclist's vision or hearing.

5. Motorcycle helmets do not cause injuries that otherwise would not have occurred in an accident. In a detailed study of some 900 motorcycle accidents in the Los Angeles area, researchers found only four minor injuries which were caused by a helmet, and in each case the helmet prevented a much more serious injury from occurring.

As a result of these findings, Administrator Claybrook announced several initiatives by her agency. She has sent the findings to each state governor. She pointed out that, "with a new state legislative season approaching, it is vital that we act soon to urge the states to support retention of their helmet laws, and to urge those states which have already repealed their laws to work for their re-enactment."

In addition, Claybrook requested all states to collect their own data on motorcycle helmet use, and fatal and head injury accidents. She plans to write to motorcycle manufacturers, insurance companies, and state insurance commissioners to bring the findings to their attention, and to ask them to use their offices to encourage helmet use.

The Administrator also is writing to the medical community, voluntary safety organizations, and citizen action groups to make them aware of the report, and to suggest they support motorcycle helmet laws.

"With a broad based support from society as a whole, we should be able to restore the life-saving capabilities of helmet use," Claybrook said.

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U.S. Department of Transportation

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Office of Assistant Secretary for Governmental and Public Affairs

Washington, D.C. 20590

FOR RELEASE THURSDAY
Jan. 18, 1979

CONSUMER ADVISORY

NHTSA -- 7-79 (Ames)
Tel. 202-426-0670

DOT FINDS DEFECT IN FIATS
DUE TO UNDERBODY RUSTING

The U. S. Department of Transportation today announced its initial determination that a safety related defect exists in the 850 and 124 models of the Fiat automobile built during 1970-1974 because of excessive rust and corrosion on the underbodies.

These vehicles were imported by Fiat Motors of North America, Inc., and more than 180,000 were sold in the U. S. between 1970 and 1974.

This initial determination is the result of an investigation conducted by the department's National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA), which established that the underbodies of these cars are subject to premature rusting and corrosion which causes bending or separation of such structural components as suspension systems, rocker panels, floor pans and steering components. Such failures may result in loss of vehicular control.

NHTSA said the investigation involved reviewing 672 complaints from vehicle owners, of which 294 involved safety related systems of the automobiles. The complaints about rusting received on Fiats were almost 60 times greater than those received on comparable vehicles. Further, the complaints of rusting and corrosion in other vehicles generally have not involved critical vehicle components.

The NHTSA also announced that a public meeting will be held on February 21, 1979, at 10 a.m., in room 6332 of the Department of Transportation building, 400 Seventh St., S.W., Washington, D. C. At that time Fiat, and any other interested parties, including consumers, will be given the opportunity to present testimony, data, and information relating to initial defect finding.

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U.S. Department of Transportation
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Office of Assistant Secretary for Governmental and Public Affairs
Washington, D.C. 20590

ADVANCE FOR RELEASE
Monday PMs Jan. 22, 1979

NHTSA -- 6-79 (Paris)
Tel. 202-426-9550

DOT SURVEY INDICATES MOST DRIVERS FAVOR "55"

Most American drivers favor the 55 miles per hour national speed limit, according to a public opinion survey conducted for the U. S. Department of Transportation.

The nationwide sampling of 1,500 licensed drivers was made between May 28 and June 7 for the department's National Highway Traffic Safety Administration by Teknekron Inc. of Washington, D. C.

In answer to the multiple choice question "How do you feel about maintaining the present 55 mph speed limit on the nation's highways?" those surveyed replied in this manner:

- Strongly in favor - 56 percent
- Somewhat in favor - 21 percent
- Somewhat opposed - 13 percent
- Strongly opposed - 10 percent

While most drivers interviewed said that speeds somewhat in excess of 55 mph should be tolerated, more than 77 percent contended that speeds over 60 mph justify a traffic citation. The majority also felt that police in their areas are giving tickets only for speeds in excess of 60 mph, a belief that is particularly strong among drivers from the Northeast and West, the survey results indicate.

At the same time, 83 percent of those questioned reject the contention that drivers of trucks and buses observe the national speed law more often than drivers of passenger vehicles do.

The drivers' most common excuse for not observing the speed limit was that their speed was the same as everyone else's and was within the probable tolerance range.

- more -

In addition to questions about the 55 mph speed limit, drivers were asked their views on three other important highway safety issues -- passive restraints, safety belts and drunk driving. The survey results show that:

- o 73 percent support a DOT standard that requires all cars sold in this country to be equipped with passive restraints (usually air bags or automatic belts) by 1984. Those who favor the system do so on the grounds that it will increase their individual safety. Those who oppose the requirement express a fear of the air bag; opposition to paying for it, and dislike government requirements. This result is consistent with the findings of an earlier survey made for the Department of Transportation by Peter D. Hart Research Associates.

- o Only 24 percent of those queried indicated that they wear safety belts all or most of the time. An additional 8.4 percent said they wore their belts more than one half the time. Drivers who said they wore safety belts less than half the time cited inconvenience and forgetfulness as reasons for less than full usage.

- o 70 percent believe that avoiding drunk driving is the most effective method of reducing serious traffic accidents. More than half of these drivers favored paying higher taxes for programs to combat this problem and 64 percent of all those questioned supported more severe penalties for drunk drivers.

Single copies of the report, entitled "A Survey of Public Perceptions on Highway Safety," may be obtained by writing to the General Services Division, National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, 400 Seventh St., SW, Washington, D. C. 20590.

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CONSUMER ADVISORY

FOR RELEASE TUESDAY
Jan. 23, 1979

NHTSA 8-79 (Ames)
Tel.No. (202) 426-0670

SUBARU VEHICLES RECALLED
FOR THROTTLE VALVE PROBLEM

Subaru of America, Inc., is recalling its 1977 and 1978 model vehicles because of unsatisfactory engine operation and the possibility of the throttle valve sticking when operated in cold weather, the U.S. Department of Transportation said today.

The company notified the department's National Highway Traffic Safety Administration that the recall involves approximately 170,000 vehicles.

Subaru was conducting a cold weather service campaign which included only vehicles sold in cold weather states. Upon urging from NHTSA's Office of Defects Investigation, Subaru agreed to conduct a safety recall campaign and to include all vehicles.

Subaru has found that the defect relates to cold weather operation under long hours of high speed driving in temperatures of approximately -20°F and below. Under such conditions unsatisfactory engine operation and throttle valve sticking may occur. This is caused by condensed water vapor drawn from the crankcase ventilation system, which freezes in the carburetor. Carburetor icing can be noticed by a gradual loss of power and eventual stalling of the vehicle. The NHTSA knows of no accidents or injuries resulting from this problem.

-more-

Subaru indicated that while these problems only occur at extremely low temperatures, all 1977 and 1978 model year Subaru vehicles will be equipped with improved crankcase ventilation and a carburetor shield to prevent freezing. In addition, early 1977 model vehicles will be equipped with a revised automatic temperature control, already incorporated in late 1977 and 1978 models and designed to introduce heated air into the carburetor.

The manufacturer is currently notifying distributors and dealers of the recall campaign. Necessary parts are already available at dealers in cold weather areas, and parts will be available to dealers in warm climates on or about April 1, 1979.

Owners of the affected vehicles are urged to contact their dealers immediately upon receiving recall notification letters from Subaru. Repairs will be performed without charge to vehicle owners.

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CONSUMER ADVISORY

FOR RELEASE TUESDAY
Jan. 23, 1979

NHTSA 09-79 (Ames)
Tel.No. (202) 426-0670

RUSTING OF 1971-1974 PANTERAS BEING INVESTIGATED BY DOT

The Department of Transportation is investigating reports of rusting and corrosion of structural components and fuel tanks in 1971-1974 Pantera automobiles.

The Pantera is a high-performance, prestige-type sports car that was manufactured in Italy and marketed by the Ford Motor Co. in the early 1970s.

The department's National Highway Traffic Safety Administration said it has received over 100 reports of gas tank and suspension system failures in these vehicles allegedly due to excessive rust and corrosion. While the NHTSA knows of no injuries attributed to this problem, it has reports of one alleged accident, nine cases of fuel tank leakage and seven cases of separation of suspension system components.

The investigation is based on reports of severe rust and corrosion involving all model year Pantera vehicles received by NHTSA's San Francisco office. The investigation involves some 5,250 vehicles.

Most reports allege failure of the rear inner wheelhouse on both sides of the vehicle. This component serves as the major structural member of the chassis. The upper rear suspension control arms and the rear spring/shock absorber units are attached to this wheelhouse. Weakening of the wheelhouse area due to rust and corrosion usually starts from the inside, goes undetected until the cars actually become dangerous, and can result in suspension system failures and loss of rear wheels. Both these conditions can result in loss of vehicle control.

- more -

Allegedly, the fuel tanks rust from the inside out, as well as from the outside in. The fuel tank is located immediately behind the driver's seat, along the left side of the engine. Leaked fuel is discharged into an area approximately 6 inches from the left side of the exhaust manifold. Fuel tank leaks are usually accompanied by the smell of fuel in the driver's compartment.

Any owners of Panteras experiencing these problems are urged to write to NHTSA, 400 Seventh St., S.W., Washington, D.C. 20590 or call the agency's toll-free Auto Safety Hotline, 800-424-9393 (Washington, D.C. metro area call 426-0123).

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CONSUMER ADVISORY

FOR RELEASE TUESDAY
Jan. 23, 1979

NHTSA -- 11-79 (Paris)
Tel. 202-426-9550

DOT CANCELS MEETING
ON FUEL ECONOMY;
EXTENDS COMMENT PERIOD

The U. S. Department of Transportation today cancelled a public meeting scheduled for Feb. 15-16 to discuss the federal automotive fuel economy program administered by the department's National Highway Traffic Safety Administration.

Instead, the NHTSA said it was soliciting comments from the public on the agency's annual report to Congress on the automotive fuel economy program, and extending the deadline for written comments from Feb. 16 to March 23.

NHTSA said it was canceling the scheduled public meeting because the submission of views in written form is considered by the agency to be more appropriate than oral comment, particularly because of the technical nature of the issues involved.

Individuals and organizations who would like to participate in the review of the report and the recommendation of future rulemaking activities, but are financially unable to do so, may apply for financial assistance.

Applications for such assistance must be submitted by Feb. 6 to Jeannette Feldman, National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, Room 5232, 400 Seventh St., SW, Washington, D. C. 20590.

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CONSUMER ADVISORY

FOR RELEASE WEDNESDAY
Jan. 31, 1979

NHTSA 13-79 (Chor)
Tel.No. (202) 426-0670

VOLVO RECALLS 75-76 CARS TO REMEDY FUEL SURGE PROBLEM

Volvo of America Corp. is recalling approximately 57,000 of its 1975 and 1976 automobiles to correct a potentially dangerous fuel spillage problem the U.S. Department of Transportation announced today.

Prompted by the department's National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, the recall includes late-production 1975 and all 1976 Volvo 240 and 260 series cars. In warm weather, fuel tank pressure can build up and force gas to spew or surge from the filler pipe as the gas cap is removed.

NHTSA became aware of the problem when it received several reports from the Center for Auto Safety. Additional reports were received from Volvo owners attending an agency-sponsored town meeting on auto problems last October in Portland, Ore.

Volvo will correct the problem by installing metal baffles in the fuel filler pipes to prevent fuel surge or new pressure control valves in the gas tanks to ease in-tank pressure.

Volvo will send notification letters to the 57,000 owners when the parts are available. In the interim, Volvo advises owners to stand to one side of the fuel filler pipe and ease the gas cap off when refueling. This will minimize the possibility of a fuel surge.

The safety agency said it has no reports of fatalities related to this problem.

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FOR RELEASE FRIDAY
Feb. 2, 1979

NHTSA -- 12-79 (Paris)
Tel. 202-426-9550

SECRETARY ADAMS NAMES
IOWA WOMAN TO HEAD
HIGHWAY ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Secretary of Transportation Brock Adams has announced the appointment of Sheila D. Sidles as Chairperson and Oscar Edmonds as Vice Chairperson of the National Highway Safety Advisory Committee.

Sidles is the Executive Secretary of the Iowa Consumers League and a member of the Consumer Federation of America. She was appointed to the committee by President Carter on Aug. 23, 1978.

Edmonds is a member and former Chairman of the Memphis City Council. He was appointed to the committee by President Carter on Nov. 15, 1977.

The National Highway Safety Advisory Committee is composed of 35 members who are selected from among state and local governments and public and private interest groups affected by or concerned with highway safety and research scientists and other individuals who are experts in this field.

The committee advises and consults with the Secretary on federal highway safety programs administered by the Federal Highway Administration and the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration.

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FOR RELEASE WEDNESDAY
Feb. 14, 1979

NHTSA 14-79 (Paris)
Tel. 202-426-9550

TRAFFIC FATALITIES CLIMB OVER 50,000 IN 1978

Traffic fatalities in the United States last year soared over 50,000 for the first time in five years, the U. S. Department of Transportation announced today.

An estimated 50,145 people died in traffic accidents in 1978, an increase of 4.7 percent over the 1977 toll of 47,876. The last time the nation's fatality count exceeded 50,000 was in 1973 when the figure reached 54,052.

When the 55 miles per hour national speed limit law was introduced in 1974, deaths dropped dramatically by about 9,000 to approximately 45,000, and stayed at a reduced level for the next two years.

The preliminary figures for 1978 are based on reports to the department's National Highway Traffic Safety Administration from the 50 states and the District of Columbia.

Motorcycle fatalities increased about six percent in 1978, continuing a trend begun in 1977 when they jumped 23 percent. Fatalities for truck occupants also were up six percent. For the most part, however, the increase in fatalities affected occupants of other vehicles, usually passenger cars. For example, occupant fatalities for vehicles in accidents involving a heavy truck increased almost 13 percent in 1978 over 1977, while the corresponding increase in accidents involving a pickup or van was 15 percent.

NHTSA Administrator Joan Claybrook said the increase in the death toll to more than 50,000 "underscores the need to re-emphasize those programs which have proven to be effective in reducing the number of deaths and injuries on the highway."

"That means we need greater compliance with the 55 mph speed limit law. The Department of Transportation remains firmly committed to this law because it not only saves lives but also makes a vital contribution to President Carter's energy conservation program."

-more--

Claybrook also called on motorists to wear their safety belts -- "the most effective safety device available today."

She singled out for comment two groups which suffered the greatest increase in fatalities -- motorcyclists and truck occupants. "To protect motorcyclists, we need to increase helmet wearing, which in many states means readopting helmet use laws which were repealed in the last two years.

"To protect truck occupants, we need to apply to light trucks and vans some of the same motor vehicle safety standards which have been protecting passenger car occupants for the last 12 years."

For the second straight year, there was an increase in the fatality rate. In 1978, there were 3.27 deaths per 100 million vehicle miles of travel, slightly higher than the 3.24 recorded in 1977.

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CONSUMER ADVISORY
Request for Public Comment

FOR RELEASE TUESDAY
Feb. 20, 1979

NHTSA 15-79 (Paris)
Tel. No. 202-426-9550

DOT CALLS FOR COMMENTS
ON NEW AIR BRAKE STANDARD
FOR HEAVY VEHICLES

The U. S. Department of Transportation took the first step today to establish a new air brake standard for trucks, buses and tractor-trailers to ensure their safe stopping and handling capabilities.

The department's National Highway Traffic Safety Administration issued an advance notice of proposed rulemaking calling for views and comments from interested persons on steps to be taken to write a new rule that will be Federal Motor Vehicle Safety Standard No. 130. It would replace Standard No. 121, which became effective in 1975.

The major provisions of Standard 121 were reviewed by a federal court last year. Today's action is intended to resolve issues raised by the court decision.

The NHTSA is seeking information on the appropriate requirements that would form the new standard, including the benefits of any portions of the existing standard. Examples are a requirement for separate brake lines to the front and rear brakes to provide "back-up" braking in the event of leakage, and a requirement for better resistance of the brakes to heat build-up that degrades stopping capability.

The notice also asks for views on the appropriate level for a new 60 miles per hour stopping distance for trucks that would provide adequate braking, consistent with the court ruling.

-more-

Those interested in submitting comments on the advance notice should write to the NHTSA, 400 Seventh St., SW, Washington, D.C. 20590, by April 16.

Those organizations or individuals who wish to participate in the agency's regulatory proceedings, but are financially unable to do so, may apply for financial assistance by writing to Jeannette Feldman, Public Affairs and Consumer Participation, NHTSA, Room 5232, 400 Seventh St., SW, Washington, D.C. 20590. Their applications should be received no later than March 7.

A separate notice, to be issued shortly, will address longer range issues of braking technology such as automatic brake adjusters, and other means to improve vehicle stability, including antilock systems.

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CONSUMER ADVISORY
Request for Public Comment

FOR RELEASE TUESDAY
Feb. 27, 1979

NHTSA 16-79 (Boaz)
Tel. 202-426-9550

DOT REQUESTS COMMENTS ON BUMPER STANDARDS

The U.S. Department of Transportation is asking for public comment on several different analyses of the costs and benefits of performance standards for automobile bumpers.

In an Advance Notice of Proposed Rulemaking to be published in the Federal Register on March 1, 1979, the department's National Highway Traffic Safety Administration is requesting comments from consumers and industry on a preliminary report prepared by the agency, on a study prepared by Houdaille Industries of West Virginia, a manufacturer of bumpers, and on a study by the John C. DeLorean Corp. on the consumer price of the present bumper standards.

The existing bumper standard prohibits any damage to a car body in a 5 mile-per-hour collision with a stationary barrier or in a pendulum test. Beginning Sept. 1, 1979, the rule also will require that damage to the bumper itself be severely limited.

The NHTSA is responding to a request from the Senate Appropriations Committee that a study be done on the effectiveness of the 5 mph Part 581 bumper standard in comparison to requirements at different speeds. Houdaille Industries has recommended that the standard be set at 2.5 mph.

Available today in addition to the notice are copies of the calculations supporting the agency's preliminary report sent to the Appropriations Committee on Jan. 26, as well as copies of the Houdaille and DeLorean studies. These studies are available upon request to Eleanor Kitts, Room 4423, NHTSA, 400 7th St., S.W., Washington, D.C. 20590.

Comments from the public are requested on all of these documents as well as on a series of questions published in the Federal Register as a part of the advance notice. Individuals or groups who wish to comment, but are unable to do so because of a lack of funds may apply for financial assistance. Applications should be made to Ann Mitchell, NHTSA, Room 5232, 400 7th St., S.W., Washington, D.C. 20590.

All comments will be due by early May. The comments should refer to Docket Number 73-19; Notice 25 and be sent to Room 5108 Nassif Building, 400 7th St., S.W., Washington, D.C. 20590.

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CONSUMER ADVISORY
Request for Public Comment

FOR RELEASE FRIDAY
March 2, 1979

NHTSA 17-79 (Paris)
Tel. 202-426-9550

TOUGHER STANDARDS EXAMINED TO PREVENT DEATH, INJURY FROM EXPLODING TIRE RIMS

The U. S. Department of Transportation is considering proposing regulations to govern the performance of multipiece rims for tires used on some trucks and buses which have blown apart causing deaths and injuries.

The department's National Highway Traffic Safety Administration issued an advance notice of proposed rulemaking calling for views, comments and information from interested parties on the rims, which consist of two pieces (a rim base and a side ring) or three pieces (a rim base, side ring or flange, and lock ring).

The rulemaking would be aimed at preventing the explosive separation of multipiece rims during maintenance in repair shops and while the vehicles are on the road.

According to Joan Claybrook, the NHTSA administrator, the agency is evaluating the potential danger of multipiece rims and is investigating the need to ban their use.

At least 439 explosive separations of multipiece tire rims, occurring between 1957 and the present, have been reported to the NHTSA. Of these explosions, 71 resulted in one or more deaths.

"We continue to receive reports of injuries and fatalities due to explosive separation of multipiece rims," Claybrook said. "We are aware, of course, that these accidents, in many cases, are caused by the failure of maintenance personnel to follow proper safety precautions.

(more)

"Consideration of the data we have collected together with information submitted by the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety (IIHS) has led this agency to conclude that the hazards and potential remedies associated with the separation of multipiece rims should be re-evaluated," Claybrook said.

The NHTSA wants to determine whether Federal Motor Vehicle Safety Standard No. 120, "Tire Selection and Rims for Motor Vehicles Other Than Passenger Cars," should be amended to require certain performance levels for the retention of tire and rim components.

The advance notice is in response to a petition by IIHS, calling for tougher regulation addressing the multipiece rim problem.

Last October, the federal safety agency issued a public advisory on the problem and urged maintenance personnel to use adequate safety precautions when working on multipiece rims. NHTSA has also made available safety charts that illustrate the precautions to be observed.

The agency seeks comments and views regarding the merits and disadvantages of contemplated requirements, with particular reference to the safety benefits to be derived, costs to be incurred, and the imposition of any burden on the public, the manufacturers of multipiece rims, and the transportation industry.

Individuals or groups who want to participate in the rulemaking proceeding but lack the funds may apply for financial assistance. Applications should be submitted by April 4 to Jeannette Feldman, National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, Room 5232, 400 Seventh St., S.W., Washington, D.C. 20590.

Comments should be sent by June 5 to the Docket Section, Room 5108, National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, 400 Seventh St., S.W., Washington, D.C. 20590.

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U.S. DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION
NATIONAL HIGHWAY TRAFFIC SAFETY ADMINISTRATION
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Office of Assistant Secretary for Governmental and Public Affairs

Washington, D.C. 20590

FOR RELEASE WEDNESDAY
March 7, 1979

NHTSA 18-79 (AMES)
Tel. No. (202)426-0670

DOT AUTO DEFECT CASE
REPORTS FOR OCT-DEC 1978

During this reporting period, one new safety-related defect investigation was opened and five were terminated. At the end of the reporting period, 52 safety-related defect investigations were in progress, including six in the "suspended" category, three of which are in litigation, and three in which an initial defect determination has been made.

For terminated cases, information collected during investigations is available for public viewing in the Technical Reference Division, Room 5108, National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, 400 Seventh Street, SW., Washington, D.C. 20590.

Cases listed as suspended will be carried in this category for two months, after which they will be terminated unless new evidence is received which justifies continued investigation.

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Reporting Period: October -- December, 1978

SAFETY RELATED DEFECT INVESTIGATORY CASES
OPENED THIS REPORTING PERIOD

(Note: For all those cases listed below, investigation was initiated to determine whether an alleged problem does, in fact, exist, and whether the alleged problem constitutes a potential safety-related defect within the meaning of the National Traffic and Motor Vehicle Safety Act of 1966 (as amended). The NHTSA's objectives are to discover whether alleged problems do occur, the cause of such problems, and whether the problems result in accidents, property damage, fatalities, injuries, or other safety-related problems.

In some instances, a manufacturer may recall certain vehicles or items of automotive equipment after the investigation is begun. The investigation may then be terminated based on recall action, or it may be continued to determine whether the alleged problem affects other models or other model years which should also be recalled for remedy).

October 1978:

Case Number:	C9-01
Manufacturer:	Ford Motor Company
Make:	Ford
Model:	Vans and F&E Series Light Trucks
Year(s):	1974-1977

SUBJECT: Alleged inadequate attachment of steering gear box to the vehicle frame.

BASIS FOR INVESTIGATION:

Investigation was initiated in response to a petition; 26 reports to NHTSA of steering failures, including two alleged accidents and two alleged injuries; and reports of eight complaints and 59 warranty claims from the Ford Motor Co.

DESCRIPTION AND FUNCTION:

The steering gear box enables the front wheels to turn in response to motion of the steering wheel. If the box separates from the frame, steering is lost.

ANALYSIS OF THE ALLEGED PROBLEM:

Allegedly, the steering gear box becomes loose and/or detaches from the frame, causing a gradual or sudden loss of steering. Although the problem may be preceded by looseness in steering response, steering loss may occur with little or no warning.

SAFETY RELATED DEFECT INVESTIGATORY CASES
APPROVED FOR SUSPENSION THIS REPORTING PERIOD

(Note: Special attention is directed to the suspended investigatory cases listed below, so that persons with experience or information they consider vital to these investigations may report the matter in detail to the NHTSA.

These cases have been suspended in accordance with the Department of Transportation, NHTSA, Defects Investigation Policy published in the Federal Register, October 12, 1973.

Cases will be terminated in two months unless new evidence is received which justifies continued investigation).

Case Number:	C4-07
Manufacturer:	Ford Motor Company
Make:	Mercury, Ford
Model:	Full size
Year(s):	1970-1971

POSSIBLE PROBLEM: Possible failure of hood latch mechanism. Could result in hood pop-up, obscuring driver vision.

Case Number:	C5-09
Manufacturer:	Kar-Rite
Make:	Kar-Rite Jack Stand
Model:	1052, Rated at 4,000 pounds
Year(s):	All

POSSIBLE PROBLEM: Alleged failure to meet load rating. Failure during use could result in injury to persons under or adjacent to vehicle.

SAFETY-RELATED DEFECT INVESTIGATION CASES
TERMINATED THIS REPORTING PERIOD

(Note: Information collected during these investigations is available for public viewing in the NHTSA public files).

October, 1978:

Case Number: C2-61
Manufacturer: Ford Motor Company
Make: Ford-Mercury
Model: Sedan 15 x 6.5 wheels
Year(s): 1969-1971

POSSIBLE PROBLEM: Alleged wheel disc failure in 15 x 6.5 inch wheels on 1969-1971 full-size Ford and Mercury police cars and station wagons. Disc failure could result in wheel loss.

REASON FOR TERMINATION: Investigation indicated that vehicles not in unique police vehicle use, such as that of the California Highway Patrol (CHP) and the Georgia State Police (GSP) will not experience the problem. Ford replaced the wheels for the CHP and GSP with wheels having a heavier gauge disc section.

Case Number: C4-09
Manufacturer: Chrysler Corporation
Make: Dodge-Plymouth
Model: Dart and Valiant
Year(s): 1967-1972

POSSIBLE PROBLEM: Alleged failure of brake proportioning valve, possibly resulting in rear wheel lockup during braking.

REASON FOR TERMINATION: There was no evidence to suggest a history of or potential for any general condition of brake proportioning valve failure or malfunction on the subject vehicles.

Case Number: C4-30
Manufacturer: Ford Motor Company
Make: Ford
Model: School Bus
Year(s): 1966-1974

POSSIBLE PROBLEM: Alleged brake drum failure, possibly resulting in loss of braking.

REASON FOR TERMINATION: This case was closed because there were only three known failures --- two as a result of inadequate maintenance and one from a casting flaw. A survey of bus fleets revealed there was no significant problem with these parts.

Case Number: C4-52
Manufacturer: International Harvester Company
Make: International
Model: Scout-Travelall, 1110-1310, 4x4
Year(s): 1970-1973

POSSIBLE PROBLEM: Alleged brake pull and fade during normal operation.

REASON FOR TERMINATION: This case was closed because no specific defect could be found. Braking complaints were the result of various isolated problems in the system, which generally could be diagnosed and corrected.

Case Number: C7-12
Manufacturer: American Honda Motor Co., Inc.
Make: Motorcycle
Model: 750 and 1000cc
Year(s): 1975-1976

POSSIBLE PROBLEM: Brake effectiveness impaired by wet road conditions.

REASON FOR TERMINATION: Recall No. 78V-033

DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION
NATIONAL HIGHWAY TRAFFIC SAFETY ADMINISTRATION

CURRENT INVESTIGATIONS OF ALLEGED SAFETY RELATED DEFECTS

I. INVESTIGATIONS

Report for Period Ending: December 1978

Those cases listed hereon are the subjects of current safety-related investigations being conducted in accordance with NHTSA responsibilities under provisions of the National Traffic and Motor Vehicle Safety Act of 1966. When an investigation is begun, it should not be assumed that a defect exists; only that a safety-related problem has been reported with sufficient indication of its existence to justify a formal investigation. The aim of the formal investigation is to establish whether a vehicle defect is causing the problem, and, if so, how it happens, and how it may be remedied. The NHTSA will make public its conclusions upon completion of each investigation. In line with the foregoing, the NHTSA solicits from the public pertinent information relating to the cases listed. By submitting such information, you make your contribution to highway safety.

CASE NO.	MANUFACTURER/MAKE	MODEL	YEAR	COMPONENT	POSSIBLE PROBLEMS
128	Ford	F-250	1968-1969	16 x 5.5 Two Piece Wheel	Lock Ring Gutter Failure Could Result in Rapid Air Loss or Side Ring Leaving Wheel.
C4-07	Ford (Suspended)	Mercury	1970-1971	Hood Latch	Failure of Latch Mechanism Could Result in Hood Pop-up Obscuring Driver Vision.
C4-17	General Motors	Chevrolet Series C, P, G-10 Trucks and GMC Series C, P, G-1500 Trucks	1971-1972	Steering Tie Rod	Separation of Ball from Socket with Loss of Vehicle Control.
C4-18	Ford	Fairlane and Ranchero Mercury Montego Ford Falcon Mercury Comet	1965-1969 1965-1969 1965-1970	Engine Mounts	Secondary Effects from Shearing of Engine Mounts. Engine Lift and Rotation could Depress Throttle in Open Position and Result in Loss of Control.

HS Form 338 (Feb. 1975)

DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION
NATIONAL HIGHWAY TRAFFIC SAFETY ADMINISTRATION

CURRENT INVESTIGATIONS OF ALLEGED SAFETY RELATED DEFECTS

Report for
Period Ending: December 1978

CASE NO.	MANUFACTURER/MAKE	MODEL	YEAR	COMPONENT	POSSIBLE PROBLEMS
C4-28	Ford	All Pintos	1971-1972	Rack and Pinion Steering	Alleged Steering Difficulty or Loss of Steering Control Due to Bending of Steering Assembly Due to Wheel Impacts.
C4-29	Ford (suspended)	All with 4-Barrel Carburetors	1968-1974	Non-Metallic Fast Idle Cam	Breakage Causes Jamming of Throttle in Open Position, Resulting in Loss of Control of Vehicle Speed.
C4-53	General Motors	Chevelle	1965-1969	Engine Mounts	Alleged Engine Mount Failure. See C4-18.
C4-59	Volkswagen (suspended)	VW Type 3 prior to August 1971; Porsche 914, 1.8, 1.7, and 2.0 Liter Engine; VW Type 4, 1.7 Liter Engine	1970-1972	Bosch Fuel Injector	Alleged Electronic Fuel Injector Leakage. Could Result in Engine Compartment Fires.
C5-01	General Motors (suspended)	Chevrolet Corvettes	1964-1974	Rear Wheel Bearing	Failure of Rear Wheel Bearings. Wheels may Bind up or Lock.
C5-07	General Motors (suspended)	Pontiac All V8	1966-1972	Timing Gear and Chain	Failure of Timing Gear and Chain Resulting in Loss of Engine Power in Traffic.
C5-08	Toyota Motor Sales	Corolla and Carina Vehicle Equipped with 1600cc Engine	1971-1973	Throttle	Alleged Throttle Sticking. Could Result in Loss of Vehicle Control.

HS Form 338A (Feb. 1975)

DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION
NATIONAL HIGHWAY TRAFFIC SAFETY ADMINISTRATION

CURRENT INVESTIGATIONS OF ALLEGED SAFETY RELATED DEFECTS

Report for
Period Ending: December 1978

CASE NO.	MANUFACTURER/MAKE	MODEL	YEAR	COMPONENT	POSSIBLE PROBLEMS
C5-09	Kar-Rite (suspended)	Jack Stand Model 1052, Rated at 4,000 Pounds	All	Jack Stand	Failure to Meet Load Rating. Failure of Jack Stand During Use Could Result in Injury to Persons Under or Adjacent to Vehicle.
C5-26	Ford	Mercury Capri	1971-1973	Seat Failures	Failure in Reclining Mechanism Allowing Seat to Rotate Rearwards and Could Result in Loss of Control.
C6-22	American Motors	Pacer	1975	Power Steering Gear	Alleged Leakage of Rack and Pinion Seal Resulting in Possible Loss of Steering Control.
C6-31	Ford	F-250 and F-350 Series Trucks	1972-1974	Budd Duo-Rim & "C" Section Side Ring	Alleged Explosive Separation of "C" Section Side Ring from Budd Duo-Rim Wheels. Could Result in Loss of Air Pressure, Loss of Vehicle Control, and Injury from Separated Side Ring
C7-10	Ford	Mercury Capri	1971-1974 1976-1977	Front Stabilizer Bar	Alleged Front Stabilizer Bar Failures. Could Result in Loss of Vehicle Control.
C7-14	Volkswagen	Rabbit Scirocco Dasher Audi	1975-1976 1975-1976 1974-1975 1973-1975	Throttle Control System	Alleged Throttle Control System Malfunctions Could Result in Loss of Vehicle Control.

HS Form 398A (Feb. 1975)

DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION
NATIONAL HIGHWAY TRAFFIC SAFETY ADMINISTRATION

CURRENT INVESTIGATIONS OF ALLEGED SAFETY RELATED DEFECTS

Report for
Period Ending: December 1978

	CASE NO.	MANUFACTURER/MAKE	MODEL	YEAR	COMPONENT	POSSIBLE PROBLEMS
(2)	C7-21	General Motors	Chevrolet, Pontiac, Oldsmobile, Buick, Cadillac, and GMC Trucks	1971-1977	Power Brake Booster	Power Brake Booster Failure Requires High Brake Pedal Forces to Stop Vehicle.
(1)	C7-22	Chrysler	Dart, Valiant, Aspen Volare	1975-1977	Carburetion and Emissions System	Vehicle Stalling-Carburetion and Emissions. Could Result in Loss of Control or Accident in Traffic Situation.
(2)	C7-24	Ford	Passenger Cars and Light Trucks	1970-1977	Flex-Fan (Engine Cooling Fan)	Flex-Fan Breakage Can Result in Injury to Anyone Working Under Hood of Vehicle with Engine Operating.
	C7-30	Fiat, Inc.	All	1970-1977	Undercarriage	Suspension and Undercarriage Failure Due to Corrosion.
	C7-31	British Leyland	Triumph Spitfire 1975-1977 TR-7, MGB, MG Midget, 1971-1977 Jaguar XJ6, Jaguar XJ12		Ignition System	Ignition Amplifier May Fail Causing Vehicle to Stall in Traffic.
(2)	C7-32	British Leyland	Triumph TR-7	1975-1977	Throttle Cable	Throttle Cable Failure Accelerator Sticks or Returns to Idle. Results in Loss of Power or Inability to Control Vehicle Speed.
	C7-33	General Motors	Light Duty Trucks Chev., GMC C10, P10, K10, G20	1975-1977	Jack	Jacks may Fail When Used on Some Shoulder Inclines.

HS Form 398A (Feb. 1975)

DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION
NATIONAL HIGHWAY TRAFFIC SAFETY ADMINISTRATION

CURRENT INVESTIGATIONS OF ALLEGED SAFETY RELATED DEFECTS

Report for
Period Ending: December 1978

	CASE NO.	MANUFACTURER/MAKE	MODEL	YEAR	COMPONENT	POSSIBLE PROBLEMS
(3)	C7-34	Hollywood Accessories	Model 646	All	Hydraulic Jack	Leveling Mechanism May Fail if Load is not Centered on Jack Saddle.
(2)	C7-37	British Leyland	Triumph -- All	1970 thru 1977	Headlamp Switches	Failure of Switch to Activate can Result in Accidents due to Loss of Lights when they are needed.
	C7-39	Ford	Mercury Capri	1971-1972	Headlight Switch	Switch May Fall Apart Causing Headlights and Taillights to Cease Operation.
	C7-40	British Leyland	Midget	1970-1974	Throttle Cable	Throttle may Break or Stick in the Open or Partially Open Position. Results in Loss of Power or Inability to Control Vehicle Speed.
(1)	C8-01	General Motors	Cadillac	1975-1977	Electronic Fuel Injection System	Engine Compartment Fires due to Possible Fuel Leakage in Fuel Injection System.
	C8-02	Ford	All Models with V-8 Engines and C-6 or FMX Transmissions	1973-1978	Transmission Linkage	Transmission may Jump From Park to Reverse.
	C8-03	Peugeot, Inc.	304 and 504	1972-1975	Seat Belt System	Retractor Fails to Operate Properly. Belt Becomes Damaged or Entangled.

HS Form 338A (Feb. 1975)

DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION
NATIONAL HIGHWAY TRAFFIC SAFETY ADMINISTRATION

CURRENT INVESTIGATIONS OF ALLEGED SAFETY RELATED DEFECTS

Report for
Period Ending: December 1978

	CASE NO.	MANUFACTURER/MAKE	MODEL	YEAR	COMPONENT	POSSIBLE PROBLEMS
	C8-04	Ford	Ford, Mercury Lincoln, Full-size and Intermediate	1968-1974	Idler Arm and Mounting Bracket	Bracket Pulls Out of Frame Rail Resulting in Loss of Steering Control.
(1)	C8-06	American Motors	Hornet Gremlin	1975 1976 1977	Power Steering Hose	Power Steering Hose Fails due to Location next to Exhaust Manifold. Results in Loss of Power Steering and possible Engine Compartment fire.
(1)	C8-07	American Motors	All	1975,1976	Ignition System	Ignition System Failure Causes Stalling.
	C8-08	Kool Klutch Co.	Kool Flex Imperial	1973-1977	Engine Cooling Fan	Cracking and/or Separation of Engine Cooling Fan Blades.
	C8-19	Ford	Capri	1971-1978	Manual, Floor-Mounted Gear Shift Lever	Gear Shift Lever Breaks or Detaches from Transmission
	C8-20	Ford	Granada Monarch	1975-1977	Power Steering Control Valve	Steering Instability
(1)	C8-22	Overhead Door Co.	Jifflox 5000 Series Convertor Dolly	1977	Anti-Lock Sensor	Sensor Produces an Erratic Signal to Driver's Anti-Lock Warning Light in Truck Lab.
(1)	C8-23	General Motors	Olds Starfire V-6 Buick Skylark V-6 Chev Monza V-8	1975	Wheel Bearing	Wheel Bearing Failure may Damage or Break Wheel Spindles and Wheel can Separate from Vehicle.

HS Form 938A (Feb. 1975)

DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION
NATIONAL HIGHWAY TRAFFIC SAFETY ADMINISTRATION

CURRENT INVESTIGATIONS OF ALLEGED SAFETY RELATED DEFECTS

Report for
Period Ending: December 1978

CASE NO.	MANUFACTURER/MAKE	MODEL	YEAR	COMPONENT	POSSIBLE PROBLEMS
C8-24	Broadwheel Co.	13" and 14" Wheel	All	Boat Trailer Wheels	Rim Detaches from Spider due to Weld Failure, Causing Wheel to Separate from Trailer.
C8-25	Chrysler Corp.	Dodge Vans, Models B-300, MB-300, CB-400, MB-400	1973-1977	Front Disc Brakes	Temporary Loss of Front Brakes due to Caliper Contact with Frame.
C8-26	Ford	Heavy Trucks Models B,C,F,L,W, and DCL	1975-1978	Wiring Harness Connecting Rear-Wheel Sensor Junction Block to Anti-Lock Computer Module.	Failure of Wiring Due to Flexing while in motion may result in Reduced Braking Capability.
C8-27	Ford	Granada & Monarch	1975-1977	Fuel Line Hose	Hose Failure may Result in Engine Compartment Fires.
C8-28	Fiat	X-1/9 & 128	1973-1977	Front Wheel Bearing	Bearing Failure may Cause Loss of Vehicle Control.
C8-29	Ford	Pinto, Bobcat	1973-1975	Steering Coupling Flange	Failure may Result in Loss of Steering Control.
C8-33	General Motors	Buick, Pontiac, Oldsmobile	1977	231 V-6 Engine	Alleged Stalling may Result in Loss of Control or Accident in Traffic Situation.
C8-39	Volkswagen	Porsche 911	1977	Engine Compartment Fires	Possible Engine Compartment Fires

HS Form 338A (Feb. 1975)

DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION
NATIONAL HIGHWAY TRAFFIC SAFETY ADMINISTRATION

CURRENT INVESTIGATIONS OF ALLEGED SAFETY RELATED DEFECTS

Report for
Period Ending: December 1978

CASE NO.	MANUFACTURER/MAKE	MODEL	YEAR	COMPONENT	POSSIBLE PROBLEMS
C9-01	Ford	Vans; F&E Series Light Trucks	1974-1977	Steering Gear Bolt	Alleged Steering Gear Bolt Failure. Possible Loss of Steering.

HS Form 338A (Feb. 1975)

DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION
NATIONAL HIGHWAY TRAFFIC SAFETY ADMINISTRATION

CURRENT INVESTIGATIONS OF ALLEGED SAFETY RELATED DEFECTS

II. INVESTIGATION IN LITIGATION OR INITIAL DETERMINATION

Report for Period Ending: December 1978

	CASE NO.	MANUFACTURER/MAKE	MODEL	YEAR	COMPONENT	POSSIBLE PROBLEMS
(1)	140	Ford (FINAL DEFECT DETERMINATION MADE 8-12-75, IN LITIGATION)	Mustang & Cougar	1968-1969	Seat Back Pivot Arm	Inboard Pivot Failures. Seat Back Could Collapse Resulting in Loss of Vehicle Control.
(1)	C3-11	General Motors (IN LITIGATION 2-13-74)	Cadillac	1959-1960	Steering Pitman Arm	Fatigue Failure Causing Loss of Vehicle Control.
(1)	C3-29	Ford (FINAL DEFECT DETERMINATION MADE 12-30-75, IN LITIGATION)	Capri	1971-1973	Windshield Wiper	Arm Detaches from Drive Shaft Motor. Failure due to Under-power. Could result in Loss of Driver Visibility.
(1)	C4-23	General Motors (INITIAL DEFECT DETERMINATION MADE 2-14-77)	Opel	1964-1971	Fuel Tank and System	Fuel System Integrity. Tail Light Mounting Bolt can Penetrate Fuel Tank in Right Rear End Impacts at Speeds Below 10 mph.
(4)	C7-38	Ford/GM (INITIAL DEFECT DETERMINATION MADE 5-8-78) Regarding Pinto & Bobcat Vehicles (except station wagons)	Pinto/Vega Subcompact	1970-1976	Gas Tank	Readily Damaged in Rear End Collision. Possibility of Fire or Explosion.

HS Form 338A (Feb. 1975)

DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION
NATIONAL HIGHWAY TRAFFIC SAFETY ADMINISTRATION

CURRENT INVESTIGATIONS OF ALLEGED SAFETY RELATED DEFECTS

Report for Period Ending: December 1978

	CASE NO.	MANUFACTURER/MAKE	MODEL	YEAR	COMPONENT	POSSIBLE PROBLEMS
(5)	C8-18	Firestone Tire and Rubber Co. (INITIAL DEFECT DETERMINATION MADE 7-9-78) Regarding Firestone 500 Steel-Belted Radial Tires and Identical Tires Manufactured by the Firestone Tire and Rubber Co. under other brand names	All Steel-Belted Radial Tires	Various	Tires	Tire Failures may Result in Loss of Vehicle Control.

(1) Vehicles have been recalled by the manufacturer.

(2) Manufacturer has recalled some models.

(3) Jacks have been recalled by the manufacturer.

(4) Pinto and Bobcat vehicles have been recalled by the manufacturer.

(5) Subsequent to development of this listing, the manufacturer has agreed to recall the Firestone 500 Steel-Belted Radial Tires and identical tires manufactured by the Firestone Tire and Rubber Co. under other brand names.

HS Form 338A (Feb. 1975)

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Office of Assistant Secretary for Governmental and Public Affairs
Washington, D.C. 20590

FOR RELEASE WEDNESDAY
March 7, 1979

NHTSA 20-79 (Paris)
Tel. 202-426-9550

DOT RESCHEDULES HEARING
ON FIAT RUST PROBLEM

The U. S. Department of Transportation has rescheduled a public hearing on March 21 on an initial determination that a safety related defect exists in certain Fiat automobiles.

The department said the vehicles involved -- models 850 and 124 of the Fiat automobile built during 1970-1974 -- are susceptible to weakening and failure of the critical underbody components because of excessive rust and corrosion.

The initial determination is the result of an investigation conducted by the department's National Highway Traffic Safety Administration. The NHTSA said that premature rusting and corrosion could cause loss of vehicle control.

Fiat Motors of North America, Inc., which sold more than 180,000 of these vehicles in the United States between 1970 and 1974, has petitioned the government to exempt it from the notification and remedy requirements under the law. Fiat contends that the defect is inconsequential as it relates to motor vehicle safety because there are no reported accidents and owners should be aware of any possible rust problems.

The NHTSA said complaints received about rusting in Fiats are almost 60 times greater than those received on other vehicles.

A hearing, originally set for Feb. 21, was postponed.

The March 21 hearing will discuss the defect and the petition filed by Fiat for exemption. Fiat and other interested parties, including consumers, will be given an opportunity to present data at the hearing in Room 6332 of the Department of Transportation building, 400 Seventh St., SW, Washington, D.C., beginning at 10 a.m.

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Office of Assistant Secretary for Governmental and Public Affairs

Washington, D.C. 20590

CONSUMER ADVISORY

FOR RELEASE MONDAY
March 12, 1979

NHTSA 21-79 (Paris)
Tel. 202-426-9550

DOT ORDERS GRADING OF ALL RADIAL TIRES

A system for grading passenger car tires, developed by the U. S. Department of Transportation, will apply to radial as well as bias-ply and bias-belted tires.

The department's National Highway Traffic Safety Administration today announced that beginning April 1, 1979, for bias-ply tires and Oct. 1, 1979, for bias-belted tires, a paper label listing the respective grades must be attached to the tire tread by the manufacturers. Six months after these dates, manufacturers are required to mold the grading information onto the tire sidewall.

The grading system will apply to radials beginning April 1, 1980, with molding requirements set for Oct. 1, 1980. When the effective dates were issued last July for bias and bias-belted tires, the NHTSA deferred an effective date for radials pending further study of test results relating to the treadwear characteristics of radials.

The new uniform tire quality grading regulation is designed to help consumers buy the best tire for the money. Under the regulation, issued last July, tires will be rated on expected treadwear, traction and temperature resistance.

"We are pleased to announce that radial tires are now covered by the grading regulation," said Joan Claybrook, administrator of the NHTSA. "These tires account for approximately half of the replacement tire market and an even higher percentage of original equipment sales.

(more)

"Once the regulation goes into effect for all passenger tires, the consumer will be better equipped to compare quality and price among competing brands," she said.

The regulation was scheduled to become effective March 1, 1979, for bias-ply and Sept. 1, 1979, for bias-belted tires. But on Jan. 19, 1979, the U. S. Court of Appeals for the Sixth Circuit, acting on a motion by eight tire manufacturers, granted a 30-day stay of the effective dates. The manufacturers' suit, challenging the validity of the regulation, was dismissed by the court on Feb. 8, 1979.

TREADWEAR

The treadwear grade will not specify the actual mileage the buyer can expect the tire to last, NHTSA said, but rather the relative tread life compared to other types or brands of tires. The relative ratings are based upon actual performance over a test course established by the agency at San Angelo, Texas.

Using a graded numerical sequence as follows: 70, 80, 90, 100, 110, 120, 130, 140, 150, 160, etc. the tire with the highest number in this category should give the greatest mileage when driven under the same conditions. A tire graded at 150, for example, would be expected to wear one and a half times as well on the government test track as a tire graded 100. Most people could expect to get 50 percent more miles from this particular tire, than one graded at 100, when driven under the same conditions with proper inflation, balancing and wheel alignment.

This comparative grading method was chosen, NHTSA emphasized, because the actual performance of a tire may vary considerably for different drivers in different areas of the country because of differences in driving habits, service practices, road characteristics and climate.

TRACTION

Traction grades from highest to lowest are A, B and C, and they represent the tire's ability to stop on wet pavement as measured under controlled conditions on a specified government test surface. A tire graded A offers the best traction while one graded C may have poor traction on wet roads.

TEMPERATURE

Temperature resistance grades are of importance to the motorist, since excessive high temperatures can cause the material of the tire to deteriorate and reduce tire life, leading to sudden failure. Tests for this characteristic are conducted under controlled laboratory conditions to produce a comparative grading system of A, B and C. The grade C corresponds to a level of performance which all passenger car tires must meet under a federal standard. Grades A and B represent higher levels of performance.

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U. S. Department of Transportation

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Office of Assistant Secretary for Governmental and Public Affairs

Washington, D.C. 20590

FOR RELEASE MONDAY
March 19, 1979

CONSUMER ADVISORY

NHTSA -- 23-79 (AMES)
Tel. 202-426-0670

FIAT AGREES TO RECALL 1970-1971 SPYDER MODELS FOR RUSTING PROBLEM

The U. S. Department of Transportation has announced an agreement in principle between Fiat Motors of North America, Inc., and the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration to recall 31,702 1970-71 Model 850 Spyders because of excessive rust and corrosion on the undercarriage.

The investigation covered the 850 and 124 Fiats for model years 1970-1974. The recall has been limited to the '70 and '71 model 850 Spyder based on the number of consumer complaints received by Fiat and the NHTSA.

NHTSA Administrator Joan Claybrook said, "The investigation of the remaining vehicles not subject to this recall -- the 1972 through 1974 850 Spyder and the 1970 through 1974 Fiat 124 -- remains open for at least 60 days. If any consumer has information indicating that these vehicles are subject to corrosion which weaken critical areas and components of their vehicles, they should notify the agency as soon as possible."

The corrosion weakens critical areas and components of the underbody such as the suspension system, steering system and floor pans beneath the seats. A failure or weakening of these structures can result in accidents. As a result of this decision by Fiat and NHTSA, the public hearing on the case scheduled for March 21, 1979 has been cancelled.

"This recall is especially significant because it requires the manufacturer to repurchase the vehicle where the corrosion is so advanced it cannot be repaired," Claybrook said.

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NHTSA has been investigating claims of premature corrosion of the undercarriage of these automobiles which, in January 1979, led to an initial determination that a safety-related defect existed.

Notification letters will be sent to all owners informing them of the safety defect and requesting that they bring their cars to Fiat dealers for inspection to determine if undercarriage corrosion exists. Fiat will provide two kinds of notification and remedy, depending on whether owners purchased their cars before or after Jan. 16, 1971. This date is the cut-off for the agency's eight-year statue of limitations under the National Traffic and Motor Vehicle Safety Act. The NHTSA cannot require a manufacturer to recall and remedy without charge, defect in cars purchased before that time period.

For cars purchased on or after Jan. 16, 1971, if the vehicle is defective, the manufacturer will repair the damaged portions or buy back the vehicle. The buy back price would be determined according to a depreciation formula. The owners of cars purchased after Jan. 15, 1971, can petition NHTSA to hold a public hearing if they believe the price offered by Fiat is not appropriate or if they are otherwise not satisfied with the remedy.

Fiat will notify owners of affected vehicles purchased before the cut-off date of the defect, but will not agree to extend full remedy to those owners as was requested by the NHTSA. While Fiat will voluntarily repair 1970 model vehicles, if possible, it may not be required to compensate owners whose vehicles cannot be repaired at the same rate as it must compensate owners whose cars are covered by the statute. Owners who purchased their cars before the Jan. 16 cut-off date will not have the right to petition the agency and challenge the manufacturer's remedy if dissatisfied.

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Washington, D.C. 20590

FOR RELEASE TUESDAY
March 20, 1979

CONSUMER ADVISORY
Request for Public Comment

NHTSA -- 24-79 (PARIS)
Tel. 202-426-9550

DOT ASKS PUBLIC COMMENT ON TRAILWAYS PETITION TO LIMIT SPEED OF COMMERCIAL VEHICLES

The U. S. Department of Transportation has asked for comments on a petition submitted by the Trailways Bus Co. to require commercial vehicles to be equipped with governors that would limit their speed capability to 57 miles per hour.

A notice issued today by the department's National Highway Traffic Safety Administration requests public views concerning the merits of the petition.

The NHTSA stressed that today's notice is only a request for comments on Trailways' petition. Any future rulemaking involving the issues in the petition will include further notification and an opportunity to comment.

The Trailways petition contends that a rule limiting the speed capability of commercial vehicles would reduce accidents, save lives and conserve fuel.

Trailways said it has tested road speed governors and intends to install them in the company's entire bus fleet. A governor is a mechanical device that automatically limits the top speed of a vehicle, without affecting its performance up to the set limit.

The road governor used by Trailways limits the speed of a bus to 57 mph and is said to be reasonably tamper proof. Trailways said the cost of the governor it uses is approximately $75 and it can be retrofitted.

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The NHTSA is especially interested in obtaining information concerning the following questions:

1. If the maximum speed capability of commercial vehicles is limited, what classes of vehicles should be included and why?

2. What safety benefits could be expected from a rule limiting the speed capability of commercial vehicles? Could governors adversely affect the safe operation of commercial vehicles?

3. What benefits in fuel economy could be expected from a rule limiting the speed capability of commercial vehicles?

4. What types of governors are the most effective and efficient for limiting the speed capability of vehicles?

5. To what degree can each of the various types of governors be made tamper proof?

6. If the maximum speed capability of commercial vehicles is limited, what should the upper limit be and why?

7. Would a rule limiting speed capability be generally favored by commercial fleet owners? By commercial drivers?

8, How many commercial fleets currently use speed governors on their vehicles and what has been the experience of these companies with the governors in terms of accident reduction, fuel economy, etc.?

Those who wish to comment on the Trailways' petition should do so by Aug. 17, 1979, by writing to the Docket Section, Room 5108, NHTSA, 400 Seventh St., SW, Washington, D.C. 20590.

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FOR RELEASE 6 P.M. EST
MONDAY, MARCH 26, 1979

NHTSA -- 22-79 (PARIS)
Tel. 202-426-9550

ADAMS ACCEPTS NEW TECHNOLOGY CAR

SEATTLE -- Secretary of Transportation Brock Adams accepted delivery today of a car designed for the 1980's,demonstrating that a safe, fuel efficient, clean, economical automobile can be built.

The four-passenger prototype vehicle was built for DOT's National Highway Traffic Safety Administration under the Research Safety Vehicle Program.

The purpose of the program is to build and test cars with advanced safety features that can be included in cars by the mid-1980's. The vehicles in the current program weigh less than 3,000 pounds and are designed to "package" the driver and passengers against injury in 40-50 miles-per-hour front crashes, and side crashes with other vehicles at speeds greater than 50 mph.

In presenting the car to Adams, NHTSA Administrator Joan Claybrook said, "Mr. Secretary, you have been emphasizing the need to develop a socially responsible car for the 1980's. I am pleased and proud to present to you this prototype vehicle which we think comes very close to meeting that description."

Secretary Adams unveiled the car at a ceremony at the Transportation Department's facility on Marginal Way in Seattle. The ceremony launched a 16-city, 14-state tour during which the vehicle will be displayed for the public.

The new car will be exhibited on March 29 and 30 in Salem and Portland, Ore., respectively. Then it will be available for viewing in Boise, April 2, Salt Lake City, April 4; Denver, April 6; Omaha, April 9; Jefferson City, Mo., April 11; Little Rock, April 13; Houston, April 16;Dallas-Fort Worth, April 18; Oklahoma City, April 20; Albuquerque, April 23; Phoenix, April 25; Las Vegas, April 27; and Los Angeles, April 29 and 30.

-more-

"This program has achieved our basic goal -- to employ safety features in a car that gets good gas mileage, does not pollute and can be adapted to design and production line assembly," the secretary said. "The vehicle could be manufactured almost totally from materials and components available to the manufacturer in today's marketplace.

"From tires to rooftop," Adams noted, "the car is unusual and offers the consumer advantages not found in today's cars." It boasts a large interior for comfort and features outstanding visibility, "gull wing" doors for easy access to front and rear seats and a stratified charge engine that produces an estimated 32 miles per gallon with low emissions.

Before building the car, the contractor, Minicars, Inc., of Goleta, Calif., performed extensive analyses of accident statistics showing the highest priorities should be occupant protection in both front and side crashes, and pedestrian protection.

Frontal crashes account for 55 percent of occupant fatalities in accidents. But only about 14 percent of front-seat occupants use available belt systems. Thus, NHTSA has developed an advanced air bag system to protect front seat occupants.

The experimental car has an innovative auomotive body composed of foam-filled steel sections. The foam-filled structures absorb the energy of a crash much more efficiently than do conventional car bodies, providing more effective protection for occupants in the collision.

Side crashes account for an estimated 25 percent of occupant fatalities. To meet this problem, the vehicle has foam-filled structures and doors that substantially increase occupant protection in side crashes without adding weight to the car. The vehicle also has interior foam padding that will reduce injuries to occupants.

Automobile collisions with pedestrians cause close to 8,000 fatalities each year. This vehicle has a soft, flexible bumper, hood and front fenders that reduce the impact forces on a pedestrian hit by the car. The bumpers are not damaged in crashes up to 10 mph. In frontal crashes at up to 20 mph, damage occurs only in an easy-to-change front section, substantially reducing repair costs.

Some of the vehicles delivered later will be equipped with run-flat tires capable of carrying the car 50 miles at 50 mph after being punctured. These tires eliminate the need for a spare and the hazard of roadside tire-changing.

-more-

NHTSA's contractors also are developing anti-skid brakes that cut wet road stopping distances 30 percent when compared to today's cars, a dashboard electronics digital display that enables the driver to monitor the running health of the car, and a radar system that will signal a warning if the vehicle is too close to the rear of another vehicle and automatically brake the car if a high speed crash is unavoidable.

The final phase of the program will feature testing and evaluation by U.S. contractors, and foreign automobile manufacturers.

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CONSUMER ADVISORY

FOR RELEASE MONDAY
March 26, 1979

NHTSA 25-79 (Scott)
Tel. 202-426-9550

PRIVATE AUTO REPAIR SHOPS INSTRUMENTAL IN RECALLS

Private automobile repair shops participating in a parts return program sponsored by the U.S. Department of Transportation supplied information last year that saved lives and prevented injuries by contributing to four major recall campaigns.

Fifteen repair shops have been given special recognition for their work. Information from the repair shops assisted in investigations conducted by the department's National Highway Traffic Safety Administration. They resulted in recalls by American Motors, General Motors, Chrysler and the Firestone Tire and Rubber Co.

The Firestone recall involved 14.5 million tires. The three other recalls involved more than 1.5 million vehicles.

NHTSA's parts return program, which aided 15 safety defect investigations in 1978, is an early warning system designed to help identify the existence of safety defects in the design, performance, construction, components or materials of motor vehicles and motor vehicle equipment.

Manufacturers are required by law to conduct defect notification and recall campaigns when they discover a safety defect, or when the government has determined that a safety defect exists.

(more)

Announcing the awards, NHTSA Administrator Joan Claybrook said, "The voluntary cooperation of the private repair shops demonstrates the operators' genuine concern for improving automotive safety. The information we receive from them through the parts return program is crucial to our defects investigations."

The 15 shops receiving Certificates of Appreciation this year are: Harry's Auto Service, Great Barrington, Mass.; Auto Brake Corp., Norfolk, Va.; Ise Automotive Service, North Hollywood, Calif.; Kolesnik's Service Station, Rochester, N.Y.; Las Vegas Wheel Alignment and Brake Service, Las Vegas, Nev.; L.A.D. Auto Electric, Spokane, Wash.; Foreign Auto Service Center, Minneapolis, Minn.; Big Brake Safety Service, Gulfport, Miss.; Woody's Garage, Montoursville, Pa.; Day-Nite Auto Station, Kaukauna, Wis.; A. Ruth's Garage, Colonie, N.Y.; Automotive City Service Center, San Francisco, Calif.; Bob Chester's Auto Service, Arlington, Texas; Bud Jones Service, Delmar, N.Y.; and Clemen's Auto Repair, Racine, Wis.

Participation in the voluntary program is open to independent repair shop owners, dealers, high-mileage fleet operators and parts suppliers. Auto parts discovered during the normal course of business to be defective by any of the participating shops are tagged for identification and submitted to a NHTSA contractor. Enrollment in the parts return program, now in its eighth year, has grown from 160 after the first year of operation to more than 2,500.

Persons interested in obtaining information on how to participate in the program should contact the Office of Defects Investigation, National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, 400 Seventh St., SW, Washington, D.C. 20590.

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NHTSA 26-79 (Boaz)
Tel. 202-426-9550

FIRESTONE TO RECALL
STEEL BELTED RADIAL 500
TIRES MADE IN SWEDEN

The U.S. Department of Transportation announced today that it has reached an agreement with the Firestone Tire and Rubber Co. for the recall and free replacement of approximately 130,000 steel belted radial 500 tires manufactured in Sweden.

Most of the tires included in the recall were sold as original equipment on Volvo automobiles. The recall will cover all such tires sold after Sept. 1, 1975, and manufactured prior to May 1, 1976.

These are the same sale and manufacturing cut-off dates for the current recall and free replacement of approximately 7.5 million steel belted radial 500 tires manufactured by Firestone in the United States. Both recalls resulted from an investigation conducted by the department's National Highway Traffic Safety Administration and negotiations with the company. At the time of the domestic recall, questions arose concerning the Swedish made tires carrying the same brand name, and NHTSA continued its investigation.

"The recall of these Swedish-made tires was made possible by the hundreds of consumers who brought the problem to our attention," said Joan Claybrook, administrator of the NHTSA. "We continued this investigation based on the information given to us by the public. We have urged Firestone and its dealers to act quickly to assist the owners of these tires."

Firestone has now agreed to include its Swedish-made production of tires bearing the "500" trademark, although it has stated that the tires were produced according to different specifications from the domestic-made tires. NHTSA had initially determined in July 1978 that the domestic-made steel belted radial 500 tires were defective and the domestic recall began last November.

In addition to replacing eligible tires free of charge, Firestone has also agreed to replace at half the current retail price any Swedish-made steel radial 500 tires which were sold prior to Sept. 1, 1975, and to refund any amounts paid by owners for adjustments of the tires covered by the free replacement terms.

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Request for Public Comment

FOR RELEASE MONDAY
April 2, 1979

NHTSA 30-79 (Ames)
Tel. 202-426-0670

NHTSA INVESTIGATING VW BRAKE COMPLAINTS

A suspected safety defect in the braking systems of more than 400,000 Volkswagen cars is under investigation by the U. S. Department of Transportation.

The investigation, being conducted by the department's National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, centers on 1975-1976 Rabbits and Sciroccos, and 1974-1976 Audi Foxes and Dashers. These cars may exhibit diminished braking performance thought to be due to faulty seals in the brake master cylinders.

The brake master cylinder activates the brakes when the driver applies pressure to the brake pedal. The problem may result in reduced stopping ability. The NHTSA has received 30 owner complaints about this problem, including two reported accidents and one injury.

Anyone experiencing this problem is urged to report it by writing to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, Office of Defect Investigations, Washington, D.C. 20590 or by calling the agency's toll-free auto safety hotline 800-424-9393 (Washington, D.C. metro area 426-0123).

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CONSUMER ADVISORY

NHTSA 28-79 (Ames)
Tel. 202-426-0670

FOR RELEASE MONDAY
April 9, 1979

DOT WARNS MOTORISTS ON MISUSE OF "TEMPORARY USE" SPARE TIRES

The U. S. Department of Transportation warned motorists today on the dangers of misusing the new "temporary use" (T-type) spare tires supplied as original equipment with some 1978 and 1979 model year automobiles.

The T-type tire is narrower than the other tires supplied with the vehicle and is mounted on a specially-designed rim that is also narrower than the other tire rims on the vehicle. It is normally used in compact and subcompact cars. This special tire and rim combination were developed to reduce the spare tire weight for smaller, lightweight automobiles and to conserve trunk space.

It is stored, already inflated, in the trunk of the vehicle, and is designed only for "temporary use" in the event of failure of one of the vehicle's regular tires. It should be used only until the conventional tire can be repaired or replaced.

Although the temporary use tire and rim must meet the same Federal performance standards as conventional full-sized tires and rims, owner's manuals for vehicles equipped with T-type tires recommend that the tire not be used continuously at speeds over 50 mph. In addition, the manuals indicate a tread life expectancy of 1,000 to 3,000 miles, depending on driving habits and road conditions.

Any person considering buying a car with one of the "temporary use" spare tires should ask the salesman about the special characteristics. The owner of a car with these types of tires should also read very carefully the instructions in the owner's manual.

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Joan Claybrook, administrator of the department's National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, said "the agency has received reports that some motorists are replacing the T-type spare tire with a conventional, full-sized tire, while still using the special, narrow, T-type rim designed only for use with the smaller spare tire."

"This is an extremely dangerous practice, since such a mismatch between tire and rim can result in separation of the tire from the rim and loss of vehicle control," she said.

Claybrook cautioned motorists that:

.....The T-type spare tire and rim combination should be used only for that short period necessary to drive to a service facility to have the regular tire repaired or replaced. It should not be driven at high speeds, nor can it be routinely rotated with the other tires on the vehicle.

.....If the spare tire must be replaced because it has worn out or has become damaged, it should be replaced only with a tire designed to be used with the special rim. Full-size tires must not be mounted on the special rim.

.....Motorists who prefer to replace their narrower, T-type spare tire with a full-size tire are warned to replace the rim also. The T-type rim cannot be used with a full-size tire.

.....If the T-type tire and rim combination are replaced with a full-size tire and rim combination, it will probably not fit in the storage area designed specifically for the narrower tire and rim. This will require the tire and rim to be stored loosely in the trunk, where it can move about with changes in the vehicle's velocity and direction, and upon deceleration or

The T-type tire should not be confused with other types of smaller, space-conserving spare tires that are stored deflated and require use of a special, pressurized cannister to inflate them when they are used. These tires too are designed for use only until the regular tire can be repaired or replaced, and require special care in inflation and mounting.

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CONSUMER ADVISORY

FOR RELEASE FRIDAY
April 13, 1979

NHTSA 31-79
Tel. No. (202) 426-0670

RECALL 172,000 GM CARS FOR STEERING PROBLEM

The General Motors Corp. is voluntarily recalling 172,000 of its 1977 and 1978 Chevrolet Monza, Pontiac Sunbird and Oldsmobile Starfire vehicles to remedy a problem that could make steering difficult, the U.S. Department of Transportation said today.

The department's National Highway Traffic Safety Administration said the recall is to reinforce the attachment area of the left engine mount bracket.

Only vehicles equipped with the L-4, 151 CID engine are involved.

General Motors reported that operation of these vehicles in a manner which produces hard "bottoming out" of the front suspension may cause deformation of the left front engine mount support structure. "Bottoming out" refers to a condition where the suspension system reaches its extreme upper level and experiences stress, such as when hitting a large bump or depression in the road.

This deformation will allow the bracket to contact the steering pitman arm or steering linkage. Over a period of time, the effort required to steer the vehicle will be increased. Ultimately, difficulty in returning the steering wheel to a straight ahead position from a sharp right turn may occur.

While the NHTSA knows of no accidents or injuries resulting from this problem, vehicle owners are encouraged to have their vehicles corrected as soon as they receive recall notification letters from the manufacturer.

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CONSUMER ADVISORY
Request for Public Comment

FOR RELEASE TUESDAY
April 17, 1979

NHTSA 32-79 (Boaz)
Tel. 202-426-9550

DOT CALLS CONFERENCE
ON HIGHWAY SAFETY PLAN

The U.S. Department of Transportation has proposed a five-year plan to develop remedies for traffic safety problems to be carried out by state and local governments under federal grants and state matching revenues.

The department's National Highway Traffic Safety Administration has set April 22-26 for a review of the proposed plan at a conference for highway safety professionals to be held at the Dulles Marriott Hotel, Chantilly, Va.

The meeting will be conducted by the Transportation Research Board of the National Academy of Sciences.

The proposed five-year plan establishes 14 priority program areas for research, development and demonstration projects. They include:

- Compliance with the 55 mph national speed limit;
- Use of occupant restraint systems, including seat belts and child restraint systems;
- Alcohol and drug abuse by drivers;
- Fatalities and injuries involving pedestrians, bicyclists and school bus accidents;
- The driver licensing system;
- Motorcycle and moped rider deaths and injuries;

(More)

-- The growing problem of the extremely high number of 16-24 year old drivers who are involved in 39 percent of highway crashes, and 38 percent of fatal crashes;

-- Emergency medical services to assure victims of traffic accidents and other medical emergencies of prompt and adequate emergency care.

Other program areas include: state traffic records; adjudication of traffic cases; police traffic services; state program management; motor vehicle registration, titling and anti-theft; and the national driver register.

NHTSA Administrator Joan Claybrook said the proposed plan constitutes the agency's first comprehensive effort to establish a five-year program for research, development and demonstrations in the highway safety area. The agency has previously published five-year plans in the motor vehicle safety area.

"By publishing the plan at this stage of its development," said Claybrook, "we are giving the highway safety community and the general public an opportunity to react and comment during the early stages of the program planning process. In addition, the five-year plan, when it is completed, will give states and local governments and the highway safety research community a chance to anticipate our programs in their own planning."

Under Section 403 of the Highway Safety Act of 1966, funds for highway safety research and development activities are reviewed and appropriated annually by the Congress.

Members of the general public and the highway safety community are urged to take part in the development of the five-year plan by submitting written comments on the proposal by July 2, 1979. The public is also invited to attend the April conference as observers, although actual participation will be by invitation only to a broad range of individuals representing the various aspects of the research programs.

All comments received before the cutoff date of July 2, 1979 will be considered in the development of the five-year 403 Program Plan. The plan will not be published in its final form until the Transportation Research Board completes its report on the April conference.

Comments should refer to Docket Number 79-05 and be submitted to: NHTSA Docket Section, Room 5108, 400 7th Street, S.W., Washington, D.C. 20590.

A periodic update and review of the plan by NHTSA is planned, which will reflect new assessments, changing state and community traffic safety priorities and changing safety needs.

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CONSUMER ADVISORY

FOR RELEASE FRIDAY
April 20, 1979

NHTSA 33-79 (Reiley)
Tel. 202-426-0686

1979 GAS MILEAGE GUIDES INCLUDE FOREIGN CARS

A new listing of the mileage ratings for domestic and foreign cars is available to the public, the U.S. Department of Transportation announced today.

The second edition of the 1979 Gas Mileage Guide is the first publication to list the miles-per-gallon fuel ratings of foreign cars.

The department's National Highway Traffic Safety Administration is responsible for ensuring that the guide is displayed by auto dealers in their showrooms. Each dealer must also maintain an adequate supply for the public.

NHTSA Administrator Joan Claybrook said, "With energy consumption becoming a more important aspect of our lives every day it is vital that consumers know which vehicles are the most fuel efficient and economical to operate.

"For the first time potential buyers will be able to compare the figures for gas consumption of both domestic and foreign cars without having to rely on the manufacturers for that information," she added.

The guide, which lists the ratings for 1979 model cars, station wagons and light trucks has a separate version for cars sold in California. That state has stricter emission standards than the rest of the country so the mileage ratings are different.

Compiled by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), and distributed to new car dealers throughout the nation by the Department of Energy, the guide's gas mileage information pertains to vehicles intended for sale in the United States. Information also is provided about the engine size, number of cylinders, the kind of transmission and fuel system, and the interior space of the vehicle.

(more)

NHTSA is authorized to penalize dealers who fail to display the guides. When the 1979 guide is not available in a dealer's showroom, consumers may contact the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, Office of Enforcement, at the Transportation Department's Headquarters, 400 Seventh Street, S.W., Washington, D.C. 20590.

Bulk copies of the 1979 Gas Mileage Guide can be obtained from Fuel Economy Distribution, Technical Information Center, Department of Energy, P.O. Box 62, Oak Ridge, Tenn. 37830. Requests in writing for free single copies should be addressed to Fuel Economy, Pueblo, Colo. 81009. In ordering either quantity, the 49-state or California version should be designated.

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FOR RELEASE 10:30 A.M. EST
Friday, April 20, 1979

NHTSA 34-79 (Paris)
Tel. 202-426-9550

TRAFFIC FATALITIES OUTPACING REGISTERED VEHICLES, MILES TRAVELED AND LICENSED DRIVERS

The number of persons being killed in traffic accidents is increasing dramatically at a faster rate than the number of registered vehicles, miles traveled, drivers licensed and the U.S. population, the Department of Transportation said today.

"People are dying on the nation's highways in epidemic proportions," said Joan Claybrook, administrator of the department's National Highway Traffic Safety Administration.

"The number of fatalities has shown alarming increases over the last 12 consecutive months. The toll in 1978 reached 50,000 for the first time in five years and we already have recorded an increase of more than 16 percent in the first two months of 1979," Claybrook said.

In the first two months of 1979, there were an estimated 6,267 fatalities, an increase of 855 deaths or 16.4 percent over the corresponding period in 1978.

The administrator released four reports today, including a four year study (1975-1978) of trends in the Fatal Accident Reporting System (FARS), which identifies the types of vehicles primarily involved in the recent increase in deaths.

The FARS study indicates the need for action to reduce fatalities in several specific areas, including motorcycle safety, light and heavy trucks and enforcement of the 55 miles per hour national speed limit.

Fatality increases have occurred predominantly on highways that post a 55 mph speed limit and in the western-southwestern states where failure to observe the 55 limit is believed to be most widespread.

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Since 1975, for example, there has been a 12.6 percent rise in traffic fatalities. The 1978 toll of 50,145 was 5,620 more than the 1975 total. An estimated 3,500 or 63 percent of these additional deaths occurred in the western-southwestern states. Yet only 35 percent of the increased travel has occurred in these states.

Over the four-year period, FARS shows a 28 percent increase in traffic fatalities in the western-southwestern states, as compared to a 10 percent rise in the midwest section, a 7 percent increase in the southern states and no change in the northeastern sector.

"These statistics make it obvious that we need far greater compliance with the 55 mph speed limit because it not only saves lives but also makes a significant contribution to President Carter's energy conservation program," Claybrook said.

The FARS study shows that large increases in fatalities involving motorcycles, pickup trucks, vans and heavy trucks have contributed to the 12.6 percent rise.

Since 1975, occupant fatalities have increased almost 41 percent in heavy trucks, motorcycle deaths are also up 41 percent and fatal accidents claiming the lives of occupants of pickup trucks and vans have risen 37 percent. As a comparison, passenger car fatalities since 1975 are up 7 percent.

The administrator released three other reports today, one analyzing vehicle accidents to determine the causes of deaths and injuries, and two reviewing agency programs to address motor vehicle problems. The reports include:

- o Preliminary findings from the National Crash Severity Study (NCSS), a collection of data from detailed investigations of vehicle-disabling accidents that identifies the type of injury, the type of crash, the speed of the vehicle and other factors.

- o The Five Year Plan for Motor Vehicle Rulemaking, which sets out the agency's rulemaking priorities for the next five years and sets the schedule for safety and fuel economy regulations.

- o A progress report which discusses what the industry is doing to meet the federal requirements for automatic belts and air bags, and agency programs to increase safety belt use.

The NCSS file indicates that people involved in serious accidents use their safety belts only 8.4 percent of the time, a usage rate that is 40 percent lower than that found in the general driving population.

The NCSS file also demonstrates the seriousness of occupant ejection showing that nearly a third of the fatalities among vehicle occupants are thrown from their cars in crashes.

Ejection, which occurs primarily in rollover and side impact collisions, increases the chances of a person being killed or seriously injured by 40-fold. Only 5 percent of the people in the NCSS data were involved in rollover accidents, but they account for 16 percent of the serious injuries and 18 percent of all fatalities.

About half of those ejected went through either the side windows or the windshield while 40 percent of those thrown out went through opened doors, most of which had damaged latches or hinges.

The NCSS file also shows that more than 90 percent of the serious injuries and fatalities in side crashes occur where the vehicle damage is to the occupant compartment. Side impacts account for about one-third of all serious occupant injuries and fatalities.

Claybrook said the NHTSA has made great strides in coping with the serious problem of frontal crashes with the introduction of air bags and automatic belts beginning with 1982 model cars.

"We know that the single most effective way to protect people from serious crash injury or death is with safety belts or air bags. Our five year rulemaking plan will concentrate heavily on providing better protection for occupants in side impact collisions and the problem of ejection," Claybrook said.

Other priority areas in the five year plan include:

- o Extending many existing motor vehcle standards to cover trucks and vans.
- o Reducing pedestrian fatalities.
- o Improving braking requirements for all vehicles.
- o Motorcycle safety.

In addition to these priorities, the NHTSA will give greater emphasis to heavy truck safety, including rear underride protection, improved fields of view, interior noise level, fuel system integrity and ride quality.

The safety agency said in its progress report on air bags and automatic belts that their continued performance in crashes confirms past assessments of their capability to save lives and reduce injuries.

A number of manufacturers already have installed automatic belts in their cars and three automakers plan to offer air bags as an option in some 1981 models, a year before automatic restraint systems become mandatory in full-sized cars.

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Recent agency analyses based on extensive accident statistics show that the use of occupant restraints--manual or automatic--is effective in reducing the number of fatalities and serious injuries by up to 50 percent.

The NHTSA estimates that 9,000 lives will be saved and tens of thousands of serious injuries averted each year once automatic restraints are installed in all cars on the road.

All the reports may be obtained by writing to the General Services Division, National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, 400 Seventh St., S.W., Washington, D.C. 20590.

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FOR RELEASE 10:30 A.M. EST
Friday, April 20, 1979

NHTSA 34-79 (Paris)
Tel. 202-426-9550

TRAFFIC FATALITIES OUTPACING REGISTERED VEHICLES, MILES TRAVELED AND LICENSED DRIVERS

The number of persons being killed in traffic accidents is increasing dramatically at a faster rate than the number of registered vehicles, miles traveled, drivers licensed and the U.S. population, the Department of Transportation said today.

"People are dying on the nation's highways in epidemic proportions," said Joan Claybrook, administrator of the department's National Highway Traffic Safety Administration.

"The number of fatalities has shown alarming increases over the last 12 consecutive months. The toll in 1978 reached 50,000 for the first time in five years and we already have recorded an increase of more than 16 percent in the first two months of 1979," Claybrook said.

In the first two months of 1979, there were an estimated 6,267 fatalities, an increase of 855 deaths or 16.4 percent over the corresponding period in 1978.

The administrator released four reports today, including a four year study (1975-1978) of trends in the Fatal Accident Reporting System (FARS), which identifies the types of vehicles primarily involved in the recent increase in deaths.

The FARS study indicates the need for action to reduce fatalities in several specific areas, including motorcycle safety, light and heavy trucks and enforcement of the 55 miles per hour national speed limit.

Fatality increases have occurred predominantly on highways that post a 55 mph speed limit and in the western-southwestern states where failure to observe the 55 limit is believed to be most widespread.

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Since 1975, for example, there has been a 12.6 percent rise in traffic fatalities. The 1978 toll of 50,145 was 5,620 more than the 1975 total. An estimated 3,500 or 63 percent of these additional deaths occurred in the western-southwestern states. Yet only 35 percent of the increased travel has occurred in these states.

Over the four-year period, FARS shows a 28 percent increase in traffic fatalities in the western-southwestern states, as compared to a 10 percent rise in the midwest section, a 7 percent increase in the southern states and no change in the northeastern sector.

"These statistics make it obvious that we need far greater compliance with the 55 mph speed limit because it not only saves lives but also makes a significant contribution to President Carter's energy conservation program," Claybrook said.

The FARS study shows that large increases in fatalities involving motorcycles, pickup trucks, vans and heavy trucks have contributed to the 12.6 percent rise.

Since 1975, occupant fatalities have increased almost 41 percent in heavy trucks, motorcycle deaths are also up 41 percent and fatal accidents claiming the lives of occupants of pickup trucks and vans have risen 37 percent. As a comparison, passenger car fatalities since 1975 are up 7 percent.

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CONSUMER ADVISORY

FOR RELEASE THURSDAY
April 26, 1979

NHTSA 35-79 (Paris)
Tel. 202-426-9550

ADVISORY COMMITTEE SETS PUBLIC MEETING ON SPEED LIMITING DEVICES

A proposal that commercial vehicles be equipped with speed limiting devices will be debated at a public meeting June 19 conducted by the National Highway Traffic Safety Advisory Committee.

The meeting will be held from 10 a.m. until 5 p.m. in Room 2232 of the U.S. Department of Transportation Headquarters Building, 400 7th St., S.W., Washington, D.C. The public is invited to take part in the discussion.

The Trailways Bus Co. has petitioned the department's National Highway Traffic Safety Administration to require commercial vehicles to be equipped with governors that would limit their speed capability to 57 miles per hour. A governor is a mechanical device that automatically limits the top speed of a vehicle without affecting its performance up to the set limit.

The Trailways petition contends that a rule limiting the speed of commercial vehicles would reduce accidents, save lives and conserve fuel. The company said it intends to install governors in its entire bus fleet.

Last month, the NHTSA issued a public notice requesting comments on the proposal. The deadline is Aug. 17, 1979.

The Advisory Committee is a 35-member group appointed by the President to advise the Secretary of Transportation on highway safety issues. The purpose of the meeting is to assist the Advisory Committee in developing a recommendation on the Trailways' proposal. The chairman of the meeting will be Glen Craig, Commissioner of the California Highway Patrol.

Those interested in participating in the meeting should contact the Executive Secretary of the NHTSA by June 1 at Room 5221, 400 7th St., S.W., Washington, D.C. 20590, or by calling 202-426-2872.

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CONSUMER ADVISORY
Request for Public Comment

FOR RELEASE 6:00 P.M. EST
Friday, April 27, 1979

NHTSA -- 36-79 (BOAZ)
Tel. 202-426-9550

DOT FINDS FUEL TANK DEFECT IN MAVERICKS AND COMETS

The U. S. Department of Transportation today made an initial determination that a safety related defect exists in the fuel tanks of 1970-73 Ford Mavericks and 1971-73 Mercury Comets.

An estimated 974,000 of the 1.1 million vehicles produced are still in use.

The defect determination was disclosed in a letter to Ford President Philip Caldwell from DOT's National Highway Traffic Safety Administration. In the letter, the agency says that the fuel tank systems in the pre-1974 model year Mavericks and Comets are subject to failure, rupture and dislodgment which can result in fuel leakage, fires, injuries, deaths and property damage.

NHTSA says it has received reports of at least 26 rear impact collisions with fuel spillage and fire, resulting in at least 31 fatalities and 19 injuries to occupants.

NHTSA says it has conducted an engineering analysis of the problem and its findings show that two of five crash tests of the 1973 Mavericks impacted by 1974 Plymouth Fury Sedans at nominal closing speeds of 30 mph resulted in fires. The remaining three crash tests caused fuel tank puncture and fuel leakage rates of between 10 and 100 ounces per minute. The present federal safety standard permits leakage of no more than one ounce per minute after a series of barrier and rollover tests.

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As a result of the initial determination of a defect announced today, NHTSA will hold a public meeting on May 29 at 10:00 a.m. in Room 2230 of the Department of Transportation headquarters building, 400 7th St., SW, Washington, D.C., to permit the Ford Motor Co. to present its data, views and arguments concerning the determination. Interested members of the public will also have an opportunity to present their views and data at that time.

Persons who wish to participate in the meeting should contact Joyce Tannahill of NHTSA at (202) 426-2850 before May 18, 1979, to schedule their presentations.

A public file containing all non-privileged information received during the course of the agency's engineering analysis is now available for inspection between the hours of 7:45 a.m. and 4:15 p.m. daily in NHTSA's Technical Reference Library, Room 5108, Department of Transportation Building.

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CONSUMER ADVISORY
Request for Public Comment

FOR RELEASE 11 A.M. EDT
Monday, May 7, 1979

NHTSA 39-79 (Paris)
Tel. 202-426-9550

DOT SETS 3-DAY FORUM ON PROBLEMS DEALING WITH REPAIR OF VEHICLES

Secretary of Transportation Brock Adams today announced a three-day public forum in Washington, D.C., May 22-24 to examine problems consumers have with maintenance and repair of motor vehicles.

The three-day workshop is being held as a follow-up to a DOT-sponsored seven-city undercover auto repair survey that disclosed consumers had about a 50-50 chance of getting their cars repaired properly.

Co-sponsored by the department's National Highway Traffic Safety Administration and the Transportation Research Board, the workshop will be held at the National Academy of Sciences, 2101 Constitution Ave., N.W.

The purpose of the conference is to pinpoint the major problems, develop recommendations for remedial programs and establish priorities on needed action for effective remedies.

Representatives from state and local governments, consumer groups, the repair industry, equipment and vehicle manufacturers, congressional committees and federal agencies are expected to attend the meeting.

"An estimated $50 billion is spent on repairs and maintenance annually in the United States," Joan Claybrook, Administrator of the NHTSA, said. "A significant portion of this huge bill is spent on repairs that are performed inadequately, needlessly, or not at all.

"This has resulted in an enormous volume of citizen complaints concerning automotive repairs. These complaints emphasize the frustrations consumers experience in resolving their problems."

Problems of maintenance and repair will be ranked in order of importance, and potential solutions will be ranked on the basis of cost, technical feasibility and consumer acceptance.

Four panels have been established to cover issues such as:

- o Standardization--Should manufacturers be required to design vehicles to permit standardized inspection, diagnosis, maintenance and repair? Is there a need for standardized repair practices and procedures? If so, how to go about it?

- o Equipment--Should equipment manufacturers be required to standardize all inspection, diagnosis, maintenance and repair equipment? How can equipment reliability be improved? What can be done to assure an adequate supply of reasonably priced service test equipment when new vehicle designs are introduced?

- o Inspection/Diagnosis--Is diagnostic inspection a practical tool as a separate entity from the repair industry? If so, who should be responsible for carrying out the operation of such systems?

- o Consumer and self-help programs--What type of state and local laws offer the most help to the consumer in dealing with auto repair? Should all mechanics be licensed? What training should mechanics have? Should repair facilities be rated and their standing made available to consumers?

For futher information on the conference, contact James Forrester, NHTSA, NTS-30, 400 Seventh St., S.W., Washington, D.C. 20590, or telephone 202-426-9294.

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FOR RELEASE WEDNESDAY
May 9, 1979

NHTSA -- 40-79 (Umansky)
Tel. 202-426-9550

SAFETY AGENCY ASKS CANCELLATION OF 200-MILE TRUCK-TRACTOR RACE

In a strongly worded letter, the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration has asked the promoter to cancel a scheduled 200-mile speed race at the Atlanta International Raceway on June 17, featuring 30 truck tractors.

"The 'rules' governing this alleged sporting event make it nothing more than an opportunity for truck drivers to be killed," Joan Claybrook, the NHTSA Administrator, said in a letter to the promoter, James Donoho. "I cannot see any benefits coming out of this event, but the detrimental aspects are numerous. At the very least, I ask that you reconsider, but I would hope that you will cancel the event."

The race has been dubbed the "Bobtail 200." (Bobtail is the term used for truck tractors running without a trailer). Claybrook pointed out that the event, the first of its kind, lacks planning and safety precautions that usually precede modern day auto racing.

"There is an appalling lack of safety regulations which should be required for an event of this type," Claybrook wrote. "Fireproof clothing is not mandatory, nor are special fuel tanks, tires, heavy duty brakes, suspension systems and roll bars. I feel that it could be a bloody spectacle rather than anything resembling a sports contest."

She said the race is open to truck drivers who regularly earn their living driving trucks on the open road. None of the drivers can be professional racers.

"It should also be noted that these trucks are very hard to handle in their normal setting, the highway, even when they are pulling trailers which give them added stability and braking power," Claybrook continued. "Anyone who has driven a bobtail tractor knows how difficult it is to control during emergency braking and we can only imagine how this inherent problem will be magnified under aggressive competitive racing circumstances.

(more)

"Additionally, racing stock cars are built low to the ground," she said. "This along with the comparatively small size of their tires usually prevents them from leaving the track when they crash into the outside wall. When a similar crash occurs involving a truck its height and the size of its tires will make it much more difficult, if not impossible for the wall to retain it.

"While the federal government has no authority over off-highway activities such as this, we would be remiss not to protest the presentation of this spectacle, when it could lead directly to severe harm to the truck drivers."

She suggested that since a key attraction is the prize money being offered, just as many contestants could be attracted along with a sizable crowd to an event which could display the safety driving skills so necessary for drivers to handle today's large rigs.

"Such an event would be a true demonstration of what the highly skilled professional truck driver can do."

Claybrook also noted that she joins with the International Brotherhood of Teamsters, the American Trucking Association, the trucking trade press and numerous other manufacturers "in condemning this ill-conceived spectacle. Even the original sponsor of the event has withdrawn support in light of the unanswered safety questions."

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CONSUMER ADVISORY

ADVANCE FOR RELEASE NOON EDT
MONDAY, MAY 14, 1979

NHTSA--41-79 (PARIS)
Tel. 202-426-9550

DOT ACCEPTS NEW SAFETY CARS
AND HONORS SAFETY PIONEERS

Secretary of Transportation Brock Adams today unveiled two cars of the future that feature improved safety, good fuel economy and low exhaust emissions.

At the same ceremony, at noon on Monday, in the courtyard of DOT headquarters in Washington, D.C., Adams honored Col. John Paul Stapp and Hugh DeHaven, two pioneers in crash testing who made vital contributions in the field of auto safety.

"The progress we have made in creating a safer environment for motor vehicle drivers and passengers is due in large measure to the work you began and have carried on so faithfully," Adams told the recipients.

The two experimental cars, which Adams accepted formally for the department, were built for DOT's National Highway Traffic Safety Administration under the Research Safety Vehicle Program. The purpose of the program is to develop and test cars suitable for family transportation with advanced safety features that can be included in vehicles today through the mid-1980's.

Referring to the nation's fuel shortages and the emphasis he has placed on developing cars that get 40-50 miles per gallon, Secretary Adams said such vehicles are certain to be much smaller and lighter than those in use today.

"In a traffic mix that includes older, heavier cars, as well as trucks and buses," he said, "occupant safety becomes even more important."

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Noting that the cars displayed today represent a significant improvement in economy, safety and emissions, Adams said, "they are several steps ahead of anything Detroit is building today."

The Secretary stressed that the two prototype vehicles can be adapted to production line assembly and can be manufactured totally from materials and components available in today's marketplace.

NHTSA Administrator Joan Claybrook said "the technological data acquired in the building and testing of these vehicles will assist greatly in the development of future cost-effective safety and fuel economy standards."

The RSV built by Calspan of Buffalo, N.Y., with the Chrysler Corp. as a major subcontractor, is an adaptation of the Simca 1307/1308 introduced in Europe in 1976. The 2,675-pound vehicle features front wheel drive and delivers fuel economy of over 28 miles-per-gallon on the combined EPA urban/highway cycle.

The vehicle's structure, restraint systems and interior padding are designed to protect occupants at crash speeds of over 40 mph in front, side and rear collisions. There is an air bag on the driver's side and an automatically inflatable safety belt for the front seat passenger.

A plastic foam front end replaces all conventional front end components and, in combination with an aluminum hood, greatly reduces impact injury to pedestrians at speeds up to 20 mph. Flat-proof tires allow the driver to continue to a service area to make repairs, and an anti-skid braking system is under development that will help avoid accidents.

The front and rear bumpers are made of resilient foam and protect the RSV against damage in 8 mph frontal and 5 mph rear barrier impacts. These soft bumpers also reduce damage to other cars in low speed collisions.

The research vehicle built by Minicars of Goleta, Calif., weighs 2,500 pounds and is designed to protect the driver and passengers against injury in 40-50 mph front crashes, and side crashes with other vehicle at speeds greater than 50 mph. It delivers 32 mpg.

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It features an advanced air bag system to protect front seat occupants and has an innovative automotive body composed of foam-filled steel sections that absorb the energy of a crash much more effectively than do conventional car bodies. The foam-filled doors substantially increase occupant protection in side crashes without adding weight.

It also has a soft, flexible bumper, hood and front fenders that would reduce the impact forces on a pedestrian hit by the car. The bumpers would not be damaged in crashes up to 10 mph, and in frontal crashes up to 20 mph, damage occurs only in an easy-to-change front section, reducing repair costs considerably.

The final phase of the RSV program will feature testing and evaluation of both cars by U.S. contractors and foreign automobile manufacturers.

Both cars will be on display in Paris, France, June 5-8 at the Seventh International Technical Conference on Experimental Safety Vehicles.

Col. Stapp of Alamagordo, N.M., retired from the U.S. Air Force Medical Corps, is a recognized authority on how much crash force a human being can stand. His knowledge of human tolerances, crash forces and related subjects was amassed during nearly a quarter of a century of research in the Air Force. He became famous when he rode rocket sleds to measure the forces of deceleration human beings can withstand.

His work, including the crashing of automobiles to measure the impact forces involved, led to better packaging of motor vehicle occupants to protect them from injury or death in survivable collisions.

DeHaven of Lyme, Conn., was the first person to identify the fundamental principle that human injuries in automobile crashes can be substantially reduced by improving structural design and occupant protection.

His interest in crash protection began in 1917 when he was in a near-fatal plane crash. His efforts in automotive safety eventually led to the establishment in 1942 of the Cornell Crash Injury Research program at the Cornell University Medical College.

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CONSUMER ADVISORY

FOR RELEASE TUESDAY
May 22, 1979

NHTSA 44-79 (Paris)
Tel.No. (202) 426-9550

DOT WARNS MOTORISTS OF GASOLINE STORAGE AND TRANSPORT HAZARDS

Transporting or storing gasoline in portable containers in the trunk of a car is an extremely hazardous practice that could result in serious injury or death, the U.S. Department of Transportation warned motorists today.

The department's National Highway Traffic Safety Administration said an increasing number of people, concerned about the availability of gasoline, are storing gasoline in their homes and automobiles.

"We have an extremely dangerous situation developing," said Joan Claybrook, the head of the NHTSA. "The public has a vivid memory of the long lines at service stations during the 1973-74 Arab oil embargo, and, once again, people are filling any available containers -- from plastic household trash cans to gasoline cans -- with fuel.

"People are traveling with lethal liquid bombs in the trunks of their cars. It's like riding around with dynamite that can explode at any time.

"Even a minor rear-end collision or a spark from a short in a tail light or brake light could set off an inferno resulting in injury or death," Claybrook said.

The NHTSA said the explosive power of one gallon of gasoline has been compared to the explosive force of 14 sticks of dynamite. Gasoline vapors expand and can split the seams of an unvented can or plastic container or the expansion can cause vapor leakage from a vented "safety" can.

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The federal safety agency makes these points:

- During 1977, there were 1.4 million rear-end collisions. Based on that statistic, a driver involved in an accident in any year has one chance in 12 of being involved in a rear-end collision.

- One gallon of gasoline is equal to 14 sticks of dynamite.

- Based on recent NHTSA inquiries, the sale and production of gasoline cans has risen as much as 100 percent. The sale of one-gallon cans has increased, but not nearly at the rate of 5-gallon cans, used primarily for storage. Both large and small retailers are increasing their inventories of gasoline containers.

- There are no known federal regulations concerning the construction or storage of gasoline cans. There are only regulations requiring specific labeling of potentially hazardous materials.

- Consumer Reports, which rated 20 models of gasoline cans in 1974, said that "shoddy workmanship and poor design were evident in most models...and even the best of the tested models is no better than 'conditionally acceptable.'"

"Storage of gasoline in portable containers in the car or around the home always involves a high degree of risk," Claybrook said. "We strongly advise consumers to avoid carrying or storing fuel in such a manner."

Motorists should consider the transportation of fuel only in the most extreme emergencies, the agency cautioned. In such cases, the container should be rugged, securely closed but vented and protected against accidental spillage or damage.

Especially hazardous, the NHTSA said, are glass and plastic containers. Rusted metal containers should also be avoided. Keep stored gasoline out of the reach of children and in a well-ventilated area, away from any flame sources.

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FOR RELEASE 1 P.M. EDT
THURSDAY, MAY 24, 1979

NHTSA 45-78 (Paris)
Tel. 202-426-9550

MILLIONS STILL DRIVING DEFECTIVE FIRESTONE TIRES, DOT OFFICIAL WARNS

The U.S. Department of Transportation told a congressional committee today that millions of Americans are still driving on life threatening, defective Firestone tires involved in a massive recall campaign.

Joan Claybrook, Administrator of the department's National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, told the Consumer Protection and Finance Subcommittee of the House Interstate and Foreign Commerce Committee that the company has not notified the great majority of the owners of Firestone 500 steel belted radial tires which are "defective and a threat to the lives of anyone in a car equipped with them."

A final agreement ironing out details of the recall was signed by NHTSA and Firestone on Nov. 29, 1978.

Claybrook said only about 15 percent of the Firestone tires have been replaced through March 31, 1979. The figures are based on information supplied by the company in its first quarterly report detailing the progress of the recall campaign.

Claybrook was testifying on proposed legislation under which tire manufacturers would give the public media notice of tire defects.

The report shows that Firestone has exchanged only 1.6 million out of a potential 8.7 million tires which qualify for free replacement. In addition, the company has replaced an estimated 500,000 tires out of a potential 5.3 million tires eligible to be exchanged at half price, which were sold prior to Sept. 1, 1975.

Firestone sent notification letters between January and March to 1.2 million consumers who own approximately 40 percent of the tires that fall into the free replacement category. The campaign will continue until all known owners have received notifications. To date the vast majority of owners have not received their notification letter.

Claybrook urged Firestone Chairman, Richard Riley, to step up the pace of his notification efforts with both letters to owners and media notice. "With the high mileage summer months nearly upon us, it is vitally important that Firestone replace these recalled tires as quickly as possible. The major purpose of the recall is to get these defective tires off the road before they cause more accidents, deaths and injuries," she said.

Claybrook noted that it is not necessary for a consumer to wait for official notification from the company in order to obtain replacement tires. All Firestone stores and dealers have consumer information booklets available that explain the terms of the recall.

NHTSA initially determined in July 1978 that the steel belted radial 500 tires were defective and the recall began last November following intensive negotiations. Essentially, the recall covers all 500 steel belted radial tires sold after Sept. 1, 1975, and manufactured prior to May 1, 1976, and tires of similar construction made by Firestone for sale under other brand names.

On March 21, the government and the company agreed to include approximately 112,000 steel belted radial 500 tires made in Sweden. Most of the Swedish tires included in the recall were sold as original equipment on Volvo automobiles.

Firestone is producing an estimated 400,000 tires per month to be used exclusively in the recall effort.

Consumers are reminded that they have 60 days after receipt of their notification letter to present their tires for replacement. Complaints should be forwarded to Mr. J.B. Scarcliff, Consumer Affairs Department, The Firestone Tire and Rubber Co., 1200 Firestone Parkway, Akron, Ohio 44317.

If consumers are unable to obtain satisfaction after contacting the company, they may write to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, 400 Seventh St., S.W., Washington, D.C. 20590.

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION
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U.S. Department of Transportation
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Office of Assistant Secretary for Governmental and Public Affairs
Washington, D.C. 20590

FOR RELEASE FRIDAY
May 25, 1979

NHTSA -- 43-79
Tel. 202-426-9550

NHTSA ISSUES COMPLIANCE REPORT FOR FEB. 1979

Copies of the Compliance Test Reports listed in this summary are available for viewing in the Technical Reference Division, Room 5108, National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, 400 7th Street, S.W., Washington, D.C. 20590.

Reproduced copy of any page, or an entire report, may be purchased at the above address in accordance with the fee schedule prescribed by Part 7, 40 CFR (Public Availability of Information). Basically, the fee is established at 25¢ for the first page and 5¢ for each additional page.

U.S. Department of Transportation
news:
Office of Assistant Secretary for Governmental and Public Affairs
Washington, D.C. 20590

FOR RELEASE FRIDAY
May 25, 1979

NHTSA 46-79 (Paris)
Tel. 202-426-9550

DOT RESCHEDULES
FORD DEFECT HEARING

The U.S. Department of Transportation has postponed a public meeting set for May 29 on an initial finding that a safety related defect exists in the fuel tanks of 1970-73 Ford Mavericks and 1971-73 Mercury Comets.

The department's National Highway Traffic Safety Administration has rescheduled the meeting for July 13, 1979. Ford requested the postponement and said it needed more time to evaluate NHTSA's crash test data.

The federal safety agency notified Ford of its initial defect determination last month and said the fuel tank systems in the pre-1974 model year Mavericks and Comets "are subject to failure, rupture and dislodgment which can result in fuel leakage, fires, injuries, deaths and property damage."

The public meeting will be held in Room 2230 of the Department of Transportation headquarters building, 400 Seventh St., S.W., Washington, D.C., at which time Ford is expected to present its data, views and arguments concerning the determination.

Interested persons also are invited to present their views. Those who wish to participate should contact Joyce Tannahill of NHTSA at 202-426-2850.

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Office of Assistant Secretary for Governmental and Public Affairs

Washington, D.C. 20590

CONSUMER ADVISORY

FOR RELEASE THURSDAY
May 31, 1979

NHTSA 47-79 (Ames)
Tel.No. (202) 426-0670

VOLKSWAGEN RECALLS 450,000 CARS THAT CAN START BY THEMSELVES

Volkswagen of America, Inc., is recalling 450,000 of its 1975-78 Rabbit and Scirocco models to correct a defect that could result in cars with standard transmissions starting and moving by themselves, the U.S. Department of Transportation announced today.

The recall is the result of action taken by the department's National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) which questioned Volkswagen after receiving 15 complaints indicating burned, corroded, or shorted wires in the engine compartment which could cause stalling, self-starting and fires. Three accidents, but no personal injuries were reported.

The manufacturer said the problem exists in vehicles which were equipped with radios installed by dealers, garages, repair shops or owners and is due to improper sealing of the hole in the fender apron through which the antenna cable is routed. Volkswagen stated that water splashed by the front tire could enter the passenger compartment in this area. Drops of water could then trickle down the antenna cable and enter the fuse relay board. This could activate the starter and move the vehicle if the transmission is in gear and the emergency brake is not on.

The NHTSA also is concerned that this condition could result in electrical short circuits causing fires.

Correction will involve checking and sealing all radio antenna cable holes. In addition, electrical parts of the fuse relay board will be examined and replaced if corroded.

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U.S. DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION
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CONSUMER ADVISORY

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
Friday, June 1, 1979

NHTSA 51-79 (Boaz)
Tel. 202-426-9550

FORD MAVERICK AND COMET DEFECT DETERMINATION WITHDRAWN

The U.S. Department of Transportation has ordered retesting of a suspected defect in the fuel systems of 1970-73 Mavericks and 1971-73 Mercury Comets and in the interim, said today it is withdrawing the initial determination that a defect exits.

National Highway Traffic Safety Administrator, Joan Claybrook, cited problems with the previous test results in a letter to the president of the Ford Motor Co.

Claybrook said that the agency has evidence that the Mavericks whose fuel systems failed during the investigative crash testing had previously undergone major repairs, and that it is therefore possible that the fuel systems in the tested vehicles might not have been in their original configuration.

In the May 31 letter, Claybrook said that in her view, this evidence undermines the initial defect determination, and that accordingly she has decided to withdraw the initial determination and cancel a public meeting which had been scheduled for July 13, 1979 concerning that determination.

Claybrook also told Ford that NHTSA will continue its investigation. She cautioned that the withdrawal of the initial defect determination should not be construed as a conclusion that there is no defect in the vehicles.

The safety agency asks owners who have experienced fires in the fuel systems of 1970-73 Mavericks and 1971-73 Comets to provide the agency with a full description of the incident. Persons wishing to report to the agency should provide, if possible, the model and year of the vehicle, the date of the incident, the model and year of the impacting vehicle (if any), and an estimate of the speed at which the collision occurred, if known.

(more)

NHTSA said the information is vital to public safety and to the continuing investigation of the Maverick-Comet fuel systems. All reports should be in writing and should be sent to:

Office of Defects Investigation
National Highway Traffic Safety Administration
400 Seventh St., S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20590

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U.S. Department of Transportation
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Office of Assistant Secretary for Governmental and Public Affairs
Washington, D.C. 20590

CONSUMER ADVISORY

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
Friday, June 1, 1979

NHTSA -- 52-79 (PARIS)
Tel. 202-426-9550

DOT STUDY SHOWS BUMPER STANDARD COST EFFECTIVE

A new analysis completed by the U.S. Department of Transportation shows that the current bumper standard prohibiting damage to a car body in a 5 mile-per-hour crash provides greater savings to the consumer than a 2.5 mph bumper standard would produce.

The study was conducted at the direction of the Senate Appropriations Committee which wanted assurances that the standard was most cost beneficial.

The 5 mph standard produces lifetime net benefits that are estimated to exceed the net benefits of a 2.5 mph standard by $39 per car. The savings to consumers from the 5 mph standard would exceed the savings of a 2.5 mph standard by about $400 million annually.

The standard permits only damage to the bumper face in a 5-mph collision with a stationary barrier or in a pendulum test. Beginning Sept. 1, 1979, the standard also will require that damage to the bumper itself be severely limited.

On Feb. 26, 1979, the NHTSA published preliminary findings comparing the cost savings that automobile owners were gaining from bumpers designed to withstand a 5 mph impact compared to the estimated savings from a 2.5 mph bumper. The preliminary analysis, based on incomplete data, indicated that while there were considerable cost savings from the current 5 mph standard, the costs savings might be even greater with a 2.5 mph standard.

-more-

As a result, the agency published an Advance Notice of Proposed Rulemaking requesting comments on several different analyses of the costs and benefits of performance standards for automobile bumpers.

Extensive new information was submitted as a result of the advanced notice. In all, approximately 165 documents were submitted to the docket. Supplementary questionnaires were sent to the automobile industry, bumper suppliers and insurance companies, and NHTSA conducted a crash test program that generated a substantial amount of information which was useful in evaluating the effectiveness of improved bumper systems.

The net benefit of a bumper improvement is the savings that result, principally from damage avoided by the improved bumper, less the price increases related to its purchase and operating cost.

Copies of the study may be obtained by writing to the General Services Division, National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, 400 Seventh St., S.W., Washington, D.C. 20590.

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CONSUMER ADVISORY

FOR RELEASE FRIDAY
June 1, 1979

NHTSA 48-79 (Ames)
Tel.No. (202) 426-0670

DOT INVESTIGATES UNIROYAL'S STEEL-BELTED RADIAL TIRES

A safety defect investigation involving some Uniroyal steel-belted radial tires was announced today by the U.S. Department of Transportation.

The department's National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) said the investigation is focusing on the larger size tires in Uniroyal's PR6 steel-belted radial tire line and all sizes in the PR5 line made in 1975 and 1976. The PR6 tires include HR 78 and larger size tires, those with JR and LR size designations, which are normally used on full-size cars and station wagons.

The investigation was opened as a result of a petition, consumer complaints and information obtained from Uniroyal. Uniroyal reports receiving 538 complaints in 1978, alleging blowouts or other potentially hazardous failures on PR5 and PR6 tires made since 1975. Additionally, the NHTSA is aware of at least 30 accidents involving 10 injuries and 1 death, allegedly caused by failures of the tires involved in the investigation.

Most of these tires were sold as original equipment on new General Motors vehicles, with a smaller number installed on new Ford vehicles. Tires of this type were also sold as replacement tires by Uniroyal tire dealers and other tire dealers selling Uniroyal products. While the tires were sold with various sidewall designations, all included the word "Uniroyal" on the sidewall.

The federal safety agency said the preliminary indications are that the problem is concentrated in the larger tire sizes; however, the agency will continue gathering information on tire failures involving smaller sizes in the PR6 line.

-more-

Anyone experiencing unexpected tire failure with a Uniroyal steel-belted radial tire is urged to report such failures by writing to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, 400 7th St., SW., Washington, D.C. 20590, or by calling the agency's toll-free Auto Safety Hotline on 800-424-9393 (Washington, D.C. Metropolitan area 426-0123). The agency emphasized the importance of having owners include the DOT identification number, located on the sidewall of the tire, when reporting each failure.

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NHTSA 49-79 (Umansky)
Tel. 202-426-9550

NOTICE TO THE EDITORS

The Seventh International Technical Conference on Experimental Safety Vehicles will be held in Paris at the Palais des Congres, Tuesday through Friday, June 5 through 8. Secretary of Transportation Brock Adams will deliver the keynote address, and government officials from Japan, Italy, West Germany, France and Great Britain will report on the status of their automotive safety research programs.

The technical sessions of the conference will deal with crash avoidance, passenger and pedestrian protection, and the practicality of automatic restraint systems. Other highlights include the presentation of Department of Transportation Awards for Engineering Excellence by Secretary Adams and National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) Administrator Joan Claybrook to auto safety researchers from Italy, Sweden, France, Great Britain, Japan, Germany and the Netherlands.

The Department of Transportation will display its Research Safety Vehicles, and the results of the international RSV test program will be reported. NHTSA Associate Administrator for Research and Development Dr. Rhoads Stephenson will preside over that session.

The purpose of the RSV program is to develop and test cars suitable for family transportation with improved safety that provides occupant protection at crash speeds over 40 miles per hour, fuel economy over 28 miles-per-gallon and low exhaust emissions. The advanced safety features built into these cars can be included in vehicles today through the mid-1980s.

NHTSA Deputy Administrator Howard Dugoff will lead a panel discussion on the potential contributions of the Experimental Safety Vehicle Program to advances in the design of production automobiles.

NHTSA Administrator Joan Claybrook will lead the discussion and question-and-answer session on the various country's plans for safety rulemaking.

This series of International Technical conferences on Experimental Safety Vehicles was begun nine years ago to provide a forum for the sharing of information among nations engaged in automobile safety research in the free world. Its goals are to make the automobile a safer, cleaner and more energy efficient form of transportation. It is the aim of participating nations, in sharing information generated by the independent research of each, to achieve these goals as quickly and efficiently as possible.

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AGENDA FOR THE SEVENTH INTERNATIONAL TECHNICAL CONFERENCE ON EXPERIMENTAL SAFETY VEHICLES

TUESDAY - JUNE 5, 1979

11:00 a.m. - 2:00 p.m. Registration of the participants

2:00 p.m. - 5:30 p.m. Conference Opening

2:30 p.m. Keynote Speech - U.S. Department of Transportation Secretary Brock Adams

3:10 p.m. Engineering Awards for Automotive Excellence Secretary Adams & National Highway Traffic Safety Administrator Joan Claybrook

Government Status Reports:

- o Planning and development of vehicle safety standards and associated research support.
  - -- Safety goals and plans.
  - -- Accident environment in respective countries.
  - -- Motor vehicle (passenger car, truck, etc.)
  - -- Countermeasure programs (motor vehicle).
  - -- Effectiveness of countermeasures.
  - -- Percentage vehicles equipped.
  - -- Use of countermeasures.
  - -- Experimental safety vehicle research & development.

6:00 p.m. Reception by the French Government

WEDNESDAY - JUNE 6, 1979

9:00 a.m. - 12:30 p.m.
2:00 p.m. - 3:00 p.m. Presentation by Manufacturers of Results of ESV/RSV Development

Chairperson: Dr. Rhoads Stephenson, Associate Administrator for Research & Development, National Highway Traffic Safety Administration.

- o Design features and test results
  - -- Frontal impact protection/aggressivity.

— Side impact protection.

— Rear impact protection.

— Pedestrian protection.

— Rollover protection.

— Advanced braking, handling, and stability designs and systems.

— Technology transfer from ESV's to production cars.

— The influence of Environmental, Energy and Economic factors on design for Safety.

3:30 p.m. - 4:00 p.m. Guest Speaker — Mr. Soichiro Honda, Founder, Honda Motor Company; Introduced by Joan Claybrook, Administrator, NHTSA

4:00 p.m. - 5:30 p.m. Panel Discussion on the ESV Program

Chairperson: Howard Dugoff, Deputy Administrator, National Highway Traffic Safety Administration.

— What ESV or RSV technology has been adopted for production vehicles?

-- What effect has the ESV program had on the establishment of vehicle standards or on priorities for setting standards?

-- What effect has the ESV program had on research programs?

-- How can the ESV program contribute to the harmonization of international vehicle standards?

-- What is the future of the ESV program: goals, projects and cooperation?

5:30 p.m. - 6:00 p.m. Guest Speaker

9:00 a.m. - 12:30 p.m. Technical Session 1 - Frontal Crash Protection and Passive Restraint Development

-- Aggressivity and compatibility between difference classes and sizes of vehicles for pedestrians.

-- Passive restraint development.

-- Development of improved test procedures.

-- The impact of downsizing and weight reduction on occupant protection performance.

Parallel Technical Session 2 - Biomechanics and Dummy Development

-- Progress towards determining injury tolerance.

-- The use of injury tolerance in future regulations by means of dummies and otherwise.

-- Progress in dummy development.

2:00 p.m. - 5:30 p.m. Technical Session 3 - Side Impact Protection

-- Designs for side impact protection that show promise for reducing injuries and fatalities.

-- The development of test procedures for side impact protection standards.

-- The effect of improved side impact protection on vehicle weight.

Parallel Technical Session 4 - Accident Investigation and Data Analysis

-- Review national positions including reference to levels of accident investigation carried on.

-- Monitoring changes in accident situations in relations to vehicle safety features.

-- Document collection and analysis of data on an international basis.

-- Scope for international collaboration.

-- Accident data analysis and its impact on safety standard priorities.

FRIDAY - JUNE 8, 1979

9:00 a.m. - 12:00 noon Technical Session 5 - Pedestrian Protection

-- Progress in vehicle design for pedestrian protection.

-- Is a dummy necessary for pedestrian safety compliance tests?

-- Development of test procedures.

Parallel Technical Session 6 -- Braking, Handling and Stability

-- Are improvements needed in braking, handling and stability (including antilock braking) of cars, trucks and motorcycles?

-- How practical is the concept of automatic braking, and would it create more problems than it solves?

1:30 p.m. - 2:00 p.m Guest Speaker

2:00 p.m. - 4:00 p.m. Panel of Government Representatives

Chairperson: Joan Claybrook, Administrator, National Highway Traffic Safety Administration.

o Intentions for rulemaking

-- Side impact protection

-- Pedestrian protection

-- Application of safety standards to light trucks, vans and multipurpose vehicles.

NOTE: Panel discussion as well as questions and answers from the floor.

4:00 p.m. - 5:30 p.m. Awards

Conference Closing

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CONSUMER ADVISORY

FOR RELEASE MONDAY
June 4, 1979

NHTSA -- 50-79 (Boaz)
Tel. 202-426-9550

DOT OFFERS CONSUMER GUIDE TO COMPARE QUALITY OF TIRES

A new consumer pamphlet explaining the Uniform Tire Quality Grading Standard is available from the U.S. Department of Transportation's National Highway Traffic Safety Administration.

The booklet explains how the tire grading system works and how consumers can use it to compare quality and price of various brands when buying new tires.

Consumers will benefit from the information available to them under the standard that went into effect April 1. NHTSA Administrator Joan Claybrook said, "We are confident that when the tire-buying public becomes familiar with this grading system and realizes what it can mean to them in dollars saved, it will become a major shopping tool.

"Until now," Claybrook said, "there has been no way for a consumer to compare prices and quality of tires, because the only terminology available has been advertising and marketing descriptions such as 'premium' or 'first line'. Such words have no agreed-on meaning or definition. One manufacturer's 'premium' tire is often quite different in quality from another company's 'premium' tire."

The regulations now require that tire manufacturers rate all bias-ply passenger car tires on three important tire qualities--treadwear, traction and temperature resistance--so that tire buyers can compare these qualities and prices among various manufacturers.

- more -

Under the new regulation, manufacturers must grade bias-ply tires and attach a paper label listing and explaining the respective grades. Beginning Oct. 1, similar grading will be required for bias-belted tires, and on April 1, 1980 radial tires will be similarly graded. Six months after each of the above dates, the tire grades will also be required to be molded into the sidewall of each tire.

Each tire is graded with a series of numbers and letters indicating comparative treadwear, traction and temperature resistance. The treadwear rating is designated by a number such as 80, 90, 100, 110, 120, 150, etc. A tire with a higher treadwear grade can be expected to have a longer useful life. A tire with a grade of 150, for example, should give 50 percent more mileage than one graded 100 when driven under the same conditions, provided, of course, that the tires are kept properly inflated and balanced, and the car's wheels are properly aligned.

Traction is rated by a letter -- A, B, or C, with A being the best grade. An A rated tire will allow shorter stopping distances on wet pavement than tires rated B or C. Tires rated C may have poor traction on wet pavement.

Temperature resistance is also rated A, B, or C, with A the highest grade. Sustained high temperatures can cause tire materials to degenerate, and excessive temperatures can lead to blowouts and tread separations. An A rating signifies the coolest running tire assuming that the car and the tires are properly maintained. Underinflation or overloading can cause overheating.

Thus, a typical replacement bias-ply tire might be graded 80, B, C -- indicating an 80 grade for treadwear, B for traction, and C for temperature resistance. Based on a sampling of recent newspaper advertising, bias-ply tires rated 80, B, C are being offered at prices ranging from $44.27 for a tire sold with an oil company brand name, to $24.24 for an off-brand tire. Another brand name bias-ply tire rated 80, B, C has been advertised for $34.00, but for the same $34.00 one can also buy an off-brand tire rated 120, B, C. All prices are for the same size G78-14 bias-ply tires.

Bias-ply tires now represent about 30 percent of the replacement tires sold in the United States. Bias-belted tires, which will have to be graded by Oct. 1, represent approximately 20 percent of the replacement market. Radial tires, representing almost 50 percent of the replacement market, will be added to the system on April 1, 1980.

Consumers may obtain free individual copies of the Uniform Tire Quality Grading booklet by writing to:

General Services Division, Room 4423
National Highway Traffic Safety Administration
400 7th St., S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20590

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Office of Assistant Secretary for Governmental and Public Affairs

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CONSUMER ADVISORY

FOR RELEASE FRIDAY
June 8, 1979

NHTSA -- 54-79 (Ames)
Tel. 202-426-0670

DOT OPENS FIVE INVESTIGATIONS OF HATCHBACK, TAILGATE LATCHES

The U.S. Department of Transportation today announced the opening of five separate investigations of suspected safety defects in hatchback and tailgate latches on 2.6 million vehicles including Mazdas, Subarus, Renaults, Toyotas, Pintos, Bobcats and Mustang II's.

The department's National Highway Traffic Safety Administration said the investigations involve: the 1975 Mazda RX3 station wagons; 1975 Subaru station wagons; 1976-79 Renault type 1228 hatchbacks and station wagons; 1973-78 Toyota Corona station wagons; 1975-78 Toyota Corolla station wagons; 1971-78 Ford Pinto hatchbacks and station wagons; 1975-78 Ford Mercury Bobcat hatchbacks and station wagons; and 1974-78 Ford Mustang II hatchbacks.

The federal safety agency became concerned about the strength of the latching mechanisms on hatchbacks and station wagons after receiving a report from the Spokane, Wash., Police Department concerning an accident in which a child was ejected through a hatchback door.

The NHTSA has received reports of 11 accidents resulting in 14 injuries and 2 fatalities allegedly due to failure of the latching mechanisms on the Ford Motor Co. vehicles involved in this investigation. Reports alleging 4 accidents and 7 injuries involved Toyota vehicles. At present, the NHTSA knows of no accidents, injuries, or deaths attributed to this problem in the Mazda, Subaru and Renault vehicles. Since tests of these vehicles showed latch disengagement at force levels even lower than those vehicles where alleged accidents were noted, a potential safety problem may exist.

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Tests were conducted on the hatchback and tailgate latches of 25 different makes and models of domestic and foreign vehicles. In these tests, the latches are mounted in a jig and are pulled in two directions until they fail. For side doors, Federal Motor Vehicle Safety Standard 206 requires that latches withstand a minimum static pull of 2,000 pounds; however, at present this standard does not apply to the latches on the hatchback or tailgate door of a vehicle.

Testing of the latches on all the vehicles being investigated resulted in failure when force was applied at a substantially lower level than the average for all vehicles tested. In these tests, the NHTSA found that the average latch would withstand a pull of just over 1,000 pounds upward or to the side. One of the Mazdas tested failed at a force of only 100 pounds, a Toyota failed at 300 pounds, a Subaru failed at 60 pounds, a Pinto failed at 460 pounds and a Renault Le Car failed at just over 400 pounds.

Joan Claybrook, NHTSA Administrator, said "Some manufacturers are apparently not using proper locking mechanisms, and thus people are being needlessly killed and injured."

She also repeated a warning she issued several months ago, when the NHTSA began receiving reports of this problem, when she cautioned hatchback owners to avoid driving with children riding in the luggage compartment. "The same warning applies to station wagons," she noted.

"For maximum safety, all occupants should ride in regular seating positions, and vehicle safety belts should be used. If child passengers are too small to use safety belts, adequate child restraints should be used," Claybrook said.

The NHTSA said that it will consider, under its five-year plan for safety rulemaking, an extension of Federal Motor Vehicle Safety Standard 206 which applies to passenger doors, so that all tailgates and hatchbacks will be equipped with safety latches. Until the standard is amended, potential hazards to safety in this area must be dealt with under the safety defects provision of the motor vehicle safety statute.

Anyone experiencing the accidental opening of a hatch or tailgate, either while the vehicle is in motion or as a result of a collision, is urged to report the incident by writing to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, 400 Seventh St., S.W., Washington, D.C. 20590, or by calling the agency's toll-free Auto Safety Hotline on 800-424-9393 (Washington, D.C. Metropolitan area--426-0123).

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U.S. Department of Transportation

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CONSUMER ADVISORY

FOR RELEASE MONDAY
June 11, 1979

NHTSA 55-79 (PARIS)
Tel. 202-426-9550

DOT CONSIDERING RULES FOR PLASTIC FUEL TANKS

The U.S. Department of Transportation is considering possible changes in a federal standard on motor vehicle fuel systems to include performance requirements for non-metallic fuel tanks.

The department's National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, answering a petition by the Ford Motor Co., issued an Advance Notice of Proposed Rulemaking seeking public comments on the merits of amending Standard No. 301-75, Fuel System Integrity.

The notice discusses possible requirements needed to ensure the integrity of non-metallic fuel tanks, such as plastic tanks, particularly when exposed to fire.

In anticipation of a large increase in the use of plastic tanks, Ford has asked NHTSA to amend the federal standard by incorporating the major requirements for plastic fuel tanks written by the Economic Commission for Europe.

The NHTSA said the advantages of plastic fuel tanks lie in four areas: (1) weight saving; (2) elimination of rust problems; (3) flexibility of location because of the ability to form complex and unorthodox shapes; and (4) impact and puncture resistance capability.

The major disadvantage of plastic tanks is that most designs will totally burn and dump their fuel after 2 to 2-1/2 minutes of exposure to external fire sources.

(more)

Under the requirements of the standard, which applies to passenger cars, multi-purpose passenger vehicles, trucks and buses under 10,000 pounds, no part of a vehicle's entire fuel system can have fuel spillage beyond certain specified amounts. However, specific requirements for individual components of the fuel system, such as the fuel tank, are not currently included in the standard.

The notice seeks comments on data concerning various tank designs and the projected number of plastic tanks to be produced in the near future. The NHTSA emphasized that any future rulemaking would include further notice and the opportunity to comment.

Those wishing to comment on the notice should do so by Sept. 11, 1979, by writing to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, 400 Seventh St., S.W., Washington, D.C. 20590.

Individuals or groups who need funds to participate in the proceeding may apply for financial assistance by July 11, 1979 by writing to Jeannette Feldman, 400 Seventh St., S.W., Room 5442, Washington, D.C. 20590, or by calling 202-426-0670.

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CONSUMER ADVISORY

NHTSA 56-79 (Marchini)
Tel. 202-426-9550

FOR RELEASE FRIDAY
June 15, 1979

DOT WARNS MOTORISTS ABOUT UNDER INFLATING CAR REPLACEMENT TIRES

The U.S. Department of Transportation today advised motorists who replace their original equipment tires with "P-metric" tires to carefully check their air pressure.

The department's National Highway Traffic Safety Administration warned that P-metric tires must be inflated to three pounds per square inch (psi) higher than the vehicle-manufacturer's recommended pressure for any other type of original equipment tire they replace.

P-metric tires can be identified by locating the size designation on the tire sidewall. On P-metric tires, the letter "P" precedes the size identification. They are included as original equipment on some cars, beginning with the 1978 model year.

The P-metric tires are designed to run at higher inflation pressures to improve gas mileage. Underinflation creates excessive heat, seriously shortens the life of the tire, increases fuel consumption and can result in tire failure.

The correct pressure for a car's original tires can be found on the vehicle information placard located on the driver's doorpost or the glove box door. As an easy reminder, NHTSA suggests that motorists who have switched to P-metric tires place a piece of masking tape over the original pressure information and write in the recommended pressure for their new tires.

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U.S. DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION
NATIONAL HIGHWAY TRAFFIC SAFETY ADMINISTRATION
Washington, D.C. 20590

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U.S. Department of Transportation

news:

Office of Assistant Secretary for Governmental and Public Affairs

Washington, D.C. 20590

FOR RELEASE 2:00 PM EDT
Wednesday, June 20, 1979

NHTSA 57-79 (PARIS)
Tel. 202-426-9550

LOWER GAS MILEAGE
LIMITS REJECTED BY DOT

The U.S. Department of Transportation announced today it has denied requests from General Motors and the Ford Motor Co. to reduce fuel economy standards for model year 1981 through 1984 passenger cars.

The department's National Highway Traffic Safety Administration said, however, that it has decided to lower the fuel economy standard for 1981 model year two-wheel drive light trucks, but is holding firm on the standard for four-wheel drive trucks.

The agency's decision not to reopen rulemaking on the passenger car standards is detailed in a report made available to the public today.

The decision on passenger cars was made by NHTSA after careful evaluation and analysis of documents submitted between last January and May by the auto companies. GM and Ford argued that the additional fuel savings expected from the current schedule of fuel economy standards in comparison to their proposal would be outweighed by increases in auto prices caused by compliance during the model years the standards are effective.

NHTSA concluded that the arguments raised by the two manufacturers did not warrant lowering the standards. Neither Ford nor GM argued that the current standards are not feasible. In fact, the agency said, both companies submitted plans for complying with the standards.

Transportation Secretary Brock Adams said, "After much deliberation, we have decided that the standards originally set by the department two years ago are the most equitable for the nation as a whole.

"We must do everthing we can," Adams continued, "to reduce gasoline consumption. The technology is available to improve gas mileage and it must be put to use as quickly as possible."

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On June 30, 1977, Secretary Adams established passenger car standards that require manufacturers to achieve an average fuel economy of 22 miles per gallon in 1981, 24 mpg in 1982, 26 mpg in 1983 and 27 mpg in 1984. Under the Motor Vehicle Information and Cost Savings Act, the Congress set the 1980 standard at 20 mpg and the 1985 level at 27.5 mpg.

GM and Ford had asked that the standards be reduced to levels requiring annual improvements in fuel economy of 1.5 mpg from the 1980 level, or 21 1/2, 23, 24 1/2, and 26 mpg for model years 1981-84, respectively.

NHTSA Administrator Joan Claybrook said, "Our analysis of the information submitted by Ford and GM indicates that the increases in automobile prices because of industry compliance with the current standards will be more than offset by the overall savings to consumers from reduced gasoline consumption."

Claybrook said "The agency report, which is based on the manufacturers' own product plans, fuel economy benefit estimates and consumer price information, concludes that the nation's consumers would reap net benefits worth between $500 million and $680 million more under the current standards over the life of the vehicles."

The report supporting the decision to turn down the GM and Ford requests focuses on the impact of energy conservation and also deals with the serious consequences of our growing reliance on imported petroleum.

In the response to a petition by Chrysler Corp., NHTSA agreed to reduce the fuel economy regulation for 1981 two-wheel drive light trucks (pickups and vans) with a gross vehicle weight rating up to 8,500 pounds. The agency, however, rejected a similar request on four-wheel drive trucks after evaluating new information supplied by the company and other manufacturers.

The decision sets the standard for 1981 models at 17.2 mpg for the two-wheel drive vehicles while retaining the 15.5 mpg standard for four-wheel drive light trucks.

In March 1978, the DOT announced fuel economy regulations for model year 1981 light trucks at 18.0 and 15.5 mpg for two and four-wheel drive vehicles, respectively. The Chrysler petition, filed last September, requested that the standards be reduced to 16.5 and 14.5 mpg for the two categories of vehicles.

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Chrysler claimed in its petition that without a reduction in the standards it would have to either close down some of its truck plants and limit the sale of the company's less fuel efficient trucks, or violate the law.

As a result of new information, NHTSA concluded that its earlier estimate of the ability of Chrysler and other manufacturers to increase fuel economy of model year 1981 two-wheel drive light trucks was too high. However, for the four-wheel drive vehicles, the agency concluded that a reduction in the standard was not warranted.

In setting fuel economy standards, NHTSA is directed by Congress to balance the difficulties which individual manufacturers may have in meeting a given level of fuel economy against the benefits to the nation of complying with a higher standard. In the case of the 1981 two-wheel drive truck standards, the amount of gasoline at stake is approximately 710 million gallons over the life of those trucks.

NHTSA also concluded in reviewing the Chrysler petition that there were clear risks facing the company and that the potential civil penalty or marketing difficulties which could confront Chrysler in its attempt to meet the higher standards for two-wheel drive vans and light trucks outweighed the extra petroleum savings. This was not the case for the four-wheel drive vehicles.

The agency noted, however, that the reduction results in standards which are at the maximum feasible levels that the manufacturers can meet.

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INFORMATION SHEET ON FUEL ECONOMY

PASSENGER CARS

The fuel economy standards established by the U.S. Department of Transportation on June 30, 1977 for model year 1981 through 1984 passenger automobiles are:

1981 -- 22 miles per gallon

1982 -- 24 mpg

1983 -- 26 mpg

1984 -- 27 mpg

The reduced levels in the standards requested by General Motors and Ford for those model years and rejected by DOT are:

1981 -- 21 1/2 mpg

1982 -- 23 mpg

1983 -- 24 1/2 mpg

1984 -- 26 mpg

LIGHT TRUCKS AND VANS

The fuel economy regulations set by DOT in March 1978 for 1981 model year two wheel and four-wheel drive light trucks (pickups and vans) with a gross vehicle weight rating up to 8,500 pounds are:

1981 -- two-wheel drive light trucks, 18.0 mpg

four-wheel drive light trucks, 15.5 mpg

The reduced levels in the standards requested by Chrysler Corp. for model year 1981 light trucks are:

1981 -- two-wheel drive light trucks 16.5 mpg

four-wheel drive light trucks, 14.5 mpg

The new DOT standards for 1981 model year two-wheel drive light trucks is:

1981 -- two-wheel drive light trucks, 17.2 mpg

four-wheel drive light trucks, 15.5 mpg (NO CHANGE)

U.S. Department of Transportation

news:

Office of Assistant Secretary for Governmental and Public Affairs

Washington, D.C. 20590

FOR RELEASE 1:00 PM EDT
Thursday, June 21, 1979

NHTSA 58-79 (Boaz)
Tel. 202-426-9550

DOT HONORS MARYLAND STATE POLICE OFFICIALS FOR ENFORCEMENT OF 55 MPH LIMIT

Officials of the Maryland State Police were honored in Annapolis today by the U.S. Department of Transportation for outstanding contributions in the enforcement and public understanding of the national 55 mile per hour speed limit law.

A Public Service Award was presented to Col. Thomas S. Smith, Superintendent of the Maryland State Police, for distinguished service in developing innovative and effective traffic law enforcement programs.

Certificates of Appreciation were presented to William E. Clark, special projects officer and Sgt. H. Thomas Moore, public information officer of the Maryland State Police.

The awards were presented by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration in connection with the start of a 3-1/2 month tour of the East, South and Midwest of a prototype safety vehicle that gets high gas mileage, is low polluting and protects the driver and passengers from serious injury in a 50 mph crash.

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NHTSA ISSUES COMPLIANCE REPORT FOR MARCH 1979

Copies of the Compliance Test Reports listed in this summary are available for viewing in the Technical Reference Division, Room 5108, National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, 400 7th Street, S.W., Washington, D.C. 20590.

Reproduced copy of any page, or an entire report, may be purchased at the above address in accordance with the fee schedule prescribed by Part 7, 40 CFR (Public Availability of Information). Basically, the fee is established at 25¢ for the first page and 5¢ for each additional page.