

AUTO MAKERS SAY BACK OFF ON BUMPERS

Automobile manufacturers have told the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration that they are unable to meet the proposed Aug. 1, 1972, deadline for tougher bumpers. One manufacturer claims not to be able to meet the proposed requirements until 1975.

The safety administration has proposed that cars manufactured after Aug. 1, 1972, be able to withstand 5 mile per hour impacts front and rear from a pendulum-like device without damage to specified safety related features (see Status Report Vol. 5, No. 21, Dec. 1, 1970).

Even though the safety administration's proposed standard would not provide the level of safety protection being advocated by many, auto makers are unanimous in their protests that the proposed standard is too stiff.

General Motors, the manufacturer most optimistic about meeting the standard, has told the safety administration that the proposed effective date should be slipped one month to allow completion of 1972 model year production. Ford wants an Aug. 1, 1973, deadline — a one year delay. Chrysler argues that if any standard "must become effective before September 1975," it should require that the vehicle be "barrier impacted at 5 miles per hour in the forward direction and 3 miles per hour in the rearward direction." American Motors claims it needs three years after the administration's final decision on a bumper standard before the requirements can be met.

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All of the major American auto makers are asking the safety administration to change the proposed rule to allow rear bumpers that are weaker than front bumpers. American Motors and GM both ask that rear bumpers be required to withstand test impacts of 2.5 miles per hour rather than the proposed 5 miles

per hour. Ford is requesting a 2 mile per hour rear bumper requirement, and Chrysler is asking for a 3 mile per hour rear bumper requirement.

In its statement to the safety administration, GM claims that statistics compiled by its wholly owned insurance company "indicate" that bumpers capable of withstanding 5 mile per hour frontal crashes and 2.5 mile per hour rear end crashes "will offer the consumer more potential savings than a system that would have to meet more stringent performance requirements."

Virtually all of the manufacturers contend that the requirement that the lower edge of a bumper be no more than 14 inches above ground will create problems for motorists in navigating entrance and exit ramps at restaurants and residences. They claim that the lowered bumper will scrape the pavement.

Chrysler speculates that other problems might arise if bumpers are strengthened: "Drivers of vehicles which have such an exterior protection system might be more careless in operating their vehicles and hit structures that they would now avoid. In addition, some may even play 'dodgem' with less protected older vehicles."

Menasco, a leading developer of shock absorbing bumper mounts, is asking that the proposed pendulum test be abandoned and that a fixed barrier be employed as a test device. GM agrees and points out that "a barrier impact more closely simulates the real life car-to-car low speed collision." A barrier test is also favored by the Center for Auto Safety and Students Mobilizing on Auto Safety Hazards (SMASH). Such a test was proposed by the Institute in April 1970.

As of the closing date for comments, Jan. 25, the docket showed that no statements had been filed by insurance companies or trade associations. The Institute submitted a filing in late December 1970.

STATES MOVE TO FORCE BETTER BUMPERS

During the first month of the new legislative year, lawmakers in at least nine states have introduced bills to require that cars manufactured for sale in their states be equipped with crashworthy front and rear ends. Similar legislation is being considered for introduction in at least seven more states.

In seven of the nine states where legislation has been introduced the bills are similar to one enacted last year in Florida in that they would require that private passenger cars be sold subject to a manufacturer's warranty that they are capable of withstanding low speed crashes into a standard test barrier without damage.

In Indiana, Massachusetts, Mississippi, Ohio and New York the bills specify barrier crashes at 5 miles per hour for cars manufactured beginning Jan. 1, 1973, and at 10 miles per hour for those manufactured beginning Jan. 1, 1975 — similar to Florida's act. In Maryland and Minnesota similar laws move the effective dates to Jan. 1, 1974, and Jan. 1, 1976, respectively, and an additional New York bill moves 5 mile per hour effectiveness back to Jan. 1, 1972.

A second bill introduced in Minnesota would, among other things, require standard bumper heights and widths beginning Jan. 1, 1973, in an attempt to eliminate crash damage resulting from bumper mismatch. Four bills in New York aim at requiring bumpers on trucks which would prevent car-under-ride in a crash.

A Texas bill would require 5 mile per hour crash protection on all state-purchased cars beginning Jan. 1, 1975.

Two separate bills have been introduced in California, one to require 5 mile per hour crashworthiness beginning Jan. 1, 1975, the other requiring 5, 10 and 15 mile per hour crashworthiness beginning Jan. 1, 1974, Jan. 1, 1975, and Jan. 1, 1976, respectively.

Two other bills are about to be introduced in California, one tracking the Florida test crash, warranty and timetable requirements and the other to require that no new car be sold after Jan. 1, 1974, unless the manufacturer certifies that occupants will be protected from nonpermanent injury in a head-on collision at 40 miles per hour, a crash with a stationary car at 50 miles per hour and a 30-degree front to side impact at the driver's compartment at 30 miles per hour.

The Pennsylvania Action Committee for Highway Safety and Iowa insurance commissioner (see story below), the West Virginia Safety Council, the South Carolina Legislative Highway Safety Committee, the Georgia House Motor Vehicles Committee, the New Hampshire insurance commissioner and Illinois Gov. Richard B. Ogilvie are also urging or considering state level bumper legislation. In West Virginia and New Hampshire bills have actually been drafted; both would be similar to the Florida act.

BROAD LOSS REDUCTION PROGRAMS URGED IN TWO STATES

Wide-ranging programs for highway loss reduction are being urged on the 1971 legislatures of two states. In both cases the countermeasures being recommended include stiff controls on vehicle speeds, "muscle car" usage, bumper performance and driving by abusive drinkers.

IOWA

The insurance commissioner of Iowa has drawn up a legislative package that covers vehicles, drivers and the roadway. Lorne R. Worthington told Status Report that initial response by legislators has been favorable. He is urging that:

- Effective Jan. 1, 1973, cars sold in the state be capable of withstanding a 5 mile per hour barrier crash and a 10 mile per hour crash with an identical car without damage to the cars or passengers, in 1974, the barrier crash test speed would be increased to 10 miles per hour;
- Effective Jan. 1, 1973, all new cars be required to have an "anti-skid braking device";
- Effective Jan. 1, 1972, all new cars sold in the state be equipped with governors to prevent speeds above 80 miles per hour and their speedometers not be capable of registering speeds above 80 miles per hour;

STATE COUNCIL SCORES 'MUSCLE CARS'

South Carolina's State Safety Council has adopted a resolution accusing "muscle car" manufacturers of "advertising vehicles in such a manner as to give the public . . . the feeling that automobiles are built for quick acceleration, speed and daring exploits, all of which tend to aggravate the hazardous situation which exists on our highways."

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- Effective Jan. 1, 1972, licenses be denied for any new car capable of accelerating from a standstill to 60 miles per hour in nine seconds or less when equipped with any available factory options;
- All motor vehicles be inspected twice a year;
- Automobile manufacturers be required by state law to pay for any repairs when a car is found to have a safety defect by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration; (Under the National Traffic and Motor Vehicle Safety Act of 1966, the federal government only has authority to require that automobile makers notify a car owner that a defect exists. The federal government does not have authority to require that the defect be corrected. Worthington would have the state require not only that the defect be corrected but also that the cost of the correction be "done at the manufacturer's expense.")
- Driving with a blood alcohol concentration of .10 per cent or more be made an illegal act per se; (Iowa now has a .10 per cent "presumptive" level for intoxication. A law that establishes a presumptive level of intoxication does not, in itself, make the act of driving at that level of blood alcohol concentration an offense.)
- Drivers 65 and older be required to take annual driving tests;
- Limits be placed on the number of traffic violations a person is allowed over a period of time; once that limit is reached the person would be identified as an "habitual violator" and deprived of his driver's license for 10 years.

Worthington estimated that his proposals would lower the state's highway deaths by 300 per year and cut property losses by \$50 million per year.

PENNSYLVANIA

The Pennsylvania Action Committee for Highway Safety, a privately organized committee of 28 citizens headed by Dr. Herbert S. Denenberg of the University of Pennsylvania, has prepared a "working document" of 110 general "proposals for saving lives and property" on the highways. Major recommendations include:

- A bumper bill "to require bumpers that can take a five mile per hour crash without damage" or a bill to regulate automobile safety and set "damage-ability standards";
- Lowering the state's legal definition of intoxication from .10 per cent to .08 or .05 per cent;
- Legislation to allow pre-arrest tests for intoxication, modeled after the Baton Rouge, La., program which permits police to administer breath tests to determine — before a DWI arrest — the blood alcohol content of suspected drunk drivers who have been cited for a moving violation or have been involved in a crash; (The program, developed with the assistance of the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety, makes use of a mobile test van supplied to Baton Rouge by the Institute.)
- Legislation to require that ambulance personnel be trained and licensed and that standards be set for ambulance equipment;
- A statewide program of "highway design, construction and maintenance . . . for pedestrians and motorists";
- A requirement for seat belts "in all vehicles regardless of date or model";
- Authorization of "consumer class actions against automobile manufacturers for safety deficiencies";
- Laws making it "illegal to use 'muscle cars' in Pennsylvania."

Copies of the committee's reports and recommendations are available from Dr. Denenberg at the state capitol in Harrisburg, Pa. Shortly after the report was issued, Denenberg was appointed state insurance commissioner by Gov. Milton Shapp.

WARNINGS NEEDED; SAFE CHILD SEATS PLAY HARD TO GET

Prompted by the apparent failure of retailers to widely promote and make available "wholly safe" child restraining systems for cars, the Senate Commerce Committee is considering amending the National Traffic and Motor Vehicle Safety Act of 1966 to allow the Department of Transportation to require that consumers be warned about unsafe child restraints manufactured before the April 1 effective date of the DOT's new child seating systems standard.

Committee Chairman Sen. Warren G. Magnuson (D-Wash.) wrote DOT Secretary John A. Volpe in December that he feared child restraint systems "may have received insufficient attention." He noted that the American Academy of Pediatrics has stated that the child restraints manufactured by Ford and General Motors "are the only ones which they considered wholly safe," but that they are not generally available.

Volpe told Magnuson that while "we recognize that their (Ford's and GM's) child seats are among the best from a safety standpoint, and while we would certainly encourage them to make their products widely available, we have no direct influence on their marketing policies."

Status Report conducted a telephone survey of Ford and GM dealerships in the Washington, D. C., area Jan. 22. Of 87 Ford and GM dealerships in the metropolitan area, 51 were called. Only five said they both stocked and promoted the item with displays or other advertising; 12 had some in stock but did not promote them, and 34 did not have any in stock.

Most GM dealers blamed the protracted United Auto Workers strike last year for the unavailability of the seats. One Pontiac dealer commented, "Accessories haven't been coming in since the strike. We're still trying to catch up on parts."

Thirty GM dealers out of a total of 55 were checked: four had child restraints in stock and promoted them (a Chevrolet dealer said he had only one in stock), another five had them but did not promote them, and 21 did not have them in stock. One of the latter, a Buick dealer, remarked that during the GM strike "I must have had 30 people asking for them."

Among the Ford dealerships, 21 of 32 were checked: only one said he had some in stock and promoted them; seven others stocked them but did not promote, and 13 (almost two-thirds) said they did not stock or promote them.

Most of the dealers who did not stock the child restraints said they would order them for customers but that delivery would take from one to three weeks. A Lincoln-Mercury dealer said he had had the seats "on back order for five weeks" because "they're hard to get; when Ford gets them in, they send them around one at a time."

Since the safest seats are difficult to obtain, Magnuson and the Senate Commerce Committee staff feel that even after the child seating standard becomes effective, most of the seats on the market will not meet performance requirements but will be immune from an NHTSA-proposed ban (to be effective Jan. 1, 1972) since they were manufactured prior to the effective date of the standard. They feel these should be required to carry a warning to consumers even if a change of law is needed.

In a recent letter to Dr. Charles Seymour, president of Physicians for Automotive Safety, NHTSA Acting Administrator Douglas W. Toms said the 1966 safety act provides that "only motor vehicles and . . . equipment manufactured after the effective date of a standard must comply with it. We could not, therefore, impose a requirement, including a warning requirement, on those seating systems manufactured before April 1, 1971."

In his letter to Magnuson, Volpe said the NHTSA also is developing a "comprehensive pamphlet that will provide detailed information to assist consumers in selecting a safe child restraint system" and that an advisory bulletin will be issued by NHTSA when it is available.

FAA IGNORES RECORDS OF TRAFFIC VIOLATIONS

A highway loss reduction attorney has voiced concern that the Federal Aviation Administration may be avoiding the use of available information concerning alcoholics and other problem drinkers before issuing them airmen's certificates.

While researching the role of alcohol in both air and highway crashes, Andrew R. Hricko, general counsel for the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety, concluded that the FAA should be making use of the National Driver Register Service established by Congress in 1960 to maintain a nationwide record of driver license suspensions and revocations. The register now lists more than 2.5 million violations, most of them involving alcohol.

His research indicated many parallels between general aviation and automobile crashes involving alcohol. One parallel was that many pilots killed in non-commercial plane crashes had prior histories of alcohol related highway offenses.

He pointed out that current use of the register is restricted to state and federal agencies in matters relating only to a person's application for a driver's license or permit.

The Department of Transportation, which maintains the driver register, is now drafting legislation that would expand the use of its information, but officials decline to comment on whether the draft proposals would allow FAA to use the register to determine whether a person applying for an airman's license has a record of traffic law violations involving alcohol.

A DOT official told Status Report that a bill will be introduced in "a couple of weeks" dealing with the use of the register. However, both he and an FAA official said that the aviation administration has not yet decided whether to request access to the register. Use of the register could also be extended to agencies within DOT responsible for administering aid programs for or regulating other modes of transportation.

Hricko's research paper was published in the National Underwriter, August 1970, and reprinted in Private Pilot Magazine, January 1971.

CRASHWORTHINESS AT 60 MPH 'REASONABLE,' ENGINEERS SAY

Automobiles that can withstand 60 mile per hour crashes with a fixed object without experiencing "serious" passenger compartment intrusion are a "reasonable objective," according to a recent study conducted by Cornell Aeronautical Laboratory.

Under National Highway Traffic Safety Administration contract, Cornell engineers concluded that by making modifications in the structure of automobiles already in production and by employing simple techniques of engine deflection, a car could be driven into a fixed object at 60 miles per hour with little damage to the passenger compartment.

In addition to keeping the engine from being shoved into the passenger compartment, deflecting the engine out of the way would also provide more distance for energy absorption to lessen the crash forces experienced by auto passengers.

According to the study, "Present full size front engine vehicles provide approximately two feet of distance for energy dissipation during frontal collisions." By adding a device which guides the engine under the passenger compartment during a high speed crash the Cornell engineers conclude that an additional two feet of energy management space would be gained — "increasing the maximum crashworthiness potential (from 40 mile per hour) to 60 mile per hour velocity impacts."

The Cornell engineers concluded that the concept has "high potential . . . as a safety feature."

REED RENOMINATED NTSB CHIEF — President Nixon has nominated John H. Reed to succeed himself as chairman of the National Transportation Safety Board. Reed was appointed a member of NTSB in 1967. He became chairman in 1969 to complete the unexpired term of his predecessor, Joseph J. O'Connell, Jr. Reed's nomination must now be confirmed by the Congress.

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