

Dealer Won't Sell Small Cars — Shows Why On TV

A Chrysler-Plymouth dealer in Texas has publicly broken with his industry's push to increase sales of small, so-called "economy" cars.

The dealer refuses to sell small car models because, he says, "even though we warn the individual (buyer) as to the odds of survival in case of a medium speed crash with an ordinary sized vehicle, we would still be a partner to his death or serious injury after having sold such an automobile."

Dewey Ray, president of Dewey Ray Inc., in Big Spring, Tex., underscored his feelings recently by buying 30 minutes of prime television time on the Midland, Tex., affiliate of NBC-TV. He used the time to show "Small Cars and Crashes," a 23-minute color film produced by the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety to show results of six head-on crash tests it conducted last year between small cars and sedans. The film shows that occupants of small cars face hazards in crashes that are far greater than those faced by occupants of larger cars. (See *Status Report*, Vol. 6, No. 21, Nov. 16, 1971.)



The Texas dealership refuses to sell either the Dodge Colt or the Plymouth Cricket, both small car models marketed by the Chrysler Corp. One of the test crashes in the film involves a 1972

(cont'd. on page 2)

The passenger compartment of this 1971 Dodge Colt exposed occupants to grave risk in a head-on crash test conducted by the Insurance Institute, evidence cited by Texas dealer Dewey Ray in refusing to sell this and other small car models.

Inside

- Chrysler Man Sees 'Tough Row to Hoe' In Small Car Safety . . . page 2
- Car Backs Away In Crash—Ford Loses \$200,000 In Court . . . page 2
- Windshield Rule Extended, But Not Yet For Vans . . . page 3
- DOT Revives Plan To Lift Mini-Car Exemption From Rules . . . page 4
- Fumes May Leak In Through Heater, VW Owners Warned . . . page 4
- Doctors Warn: Pregnant Women Should Use Seat Belts . . . page 5

Chrysler Man Agrees

'Tough Row To Hoe In Small Cars'

A high-ranking Chrysler Corp. official—chief engineer for automotive safety and security Roy C. Haeusler—commented recently: “In a small car you have a tough row to hoe in protecting the occupant. The same thing can be done relatively easy in a big car.”

Haeusler's remarks were made during a press preview of his corporation's 1973 model cars in Marco Island, Fla. The safety engineer was quoted by automotive columnist Murray Forsvall of the *Dallas Times Herald* as saying he wouldn't allow his own wife to drive a small car model. Haeusler verified the remarks later in a telephone interview.

The Dallas columnist said Haeusler was “so strong in his belief” about the relative lack of safety in small cars that he criticized “market strategy which ‘drives people into buying a smaller car’.”

The columnist pointed out that Haeusler's remarks were particularly noteworthy since Chrysler Corp. has 16.7 per cent of the overall car market, but that this climbs to 26.6 per cent of the small car market and to 40 per cent of the compact model market.

(cont'd. from page 1)

Plymouth Fury and a 1971 Dodge Colt. In the test the Colt's windshield tore partially loose and fell into the passenger compartment; a safety belt buckle unlatched; a shoulder harness strap broke, and a head restraint was dislodged from its mounting and flew out of the car. An occupant test dummy's head impacted the sun visor, header and windshield. The dummy's head was lacerated and its leg was broken at the hip. Risk of severe injury to a dummy occupant in the sedan-sized Fury was considerably less.

Following the television showing, Ray told *Status Report* he had heard “several complaints from auto dealers” but “a lot of favorable comments from consumers.” He said several consumers had told him they had decided against buying small cars after seeing the film.

Ray said he was pleased with such consumer response because “we simply do not want to be associated with the placing of such small vehicles on the highway.” He feels, “The retailer of the future must . . . start advertising with complete candor and, if anything, lean over backwards to present factual material and factual comparisons of automobiles.”

Ford Reversal Suffers In Court

A federal District Court jury in Norfolk, Va., has awarded \$200,000 to the victim of a crash involving alleged safety defects in the throttle system and mountings of the engine and transmission of a 1968 Ford.

The crash victim, Robert E. Matthews of Maryland, was severely burned in the crash. While driving a 1968 Ford Galaxie 500 he swerved to miss a dog. The car struck a ditch, a tree and a house. According to Matthews' attorney, Thomas J. Harlan, Jr., of Norfolk, the throttle was jammed “at least 50 per cent” open in the frontal collisions because the engine mounts permitted the engine to slide more than an inch and a half forward, pulling on the throttle cable and forcing open the throttle.

Following the frontal crashes, according to Harlan, the car's transmission shifted into reverse and the car backed across the road “at a speed estimated by witnesses to be 35 to 40 miles per hour.” The car

struck two cars and another house; during the rear-end crashes the fuel tank ruptured and the fuel was ignited, he said.

The suit against Ford Motor Co. and a Norfolk dealership alleged that, in addition to jamming the throttle open, the forward movement of the engine also carried forward a crossmember that supports the car's transmission mount, "thereby causing the transmission to shift into reverse."

Ford Motor Co. agreed during the trial that a 1972 Ford Galaxie 500 "is materially similar to a 1968 Ford Galaxie 500 with respect to the engine-transmission complex frame and throttle cable assembly." Also, the 1970 Galaxie, Ford said, "has the same chassis and construction as the vehicle involved in the accident."

During the 1970 low-speed crash test program conducted by the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety, a 1970 Ford Galaxie 500 dropped from neutral into reverse after a 15 mile per hour frontal crash into a standard test barrier. Film of this and 11 other possible safety defects found in other cars during the low-speed crash test program was made public during an Institute-sponsored symposium, "Key Issues in Highway Loss Reduction," in June, 1970. (See *Status Report*, Vol. 5, No. 10, June 16, 1970.) The results of the Institute's test of the 1970 Ford Galaxie were presented in evidence during the Norfolk trial.

Windshield Rule Expansion — Not Yet For Vans

The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration is proposing to extend its standard against pop-out windshields to previously exempt multipurpose passenger vehicles, and trucks and buses of 10,000 pounds or less. But, it proposes to continue exempting from the standard, until the 1979 model year, all "forward control vehicles," including popular van-type campers and multipurpose vehicles.

The standard (FMVSS 212) has been in force for passenger cars since Jan. 1, 1970. It is aimed at preventing windshields from popping out in head-on crashes, thus both preventing unrestrained car occupants from being ejected and permitting the required laminated glass windshield to serve as a "cushion"—similar to a firenet—upon impact by occupants.

As previously written, the standard requires that passenger cars meet one of two specifications in a 30 mile per hour head-on crash into a standard test barrier: that at least 75 per cent of the periphery of the windshield be retained in its mounting, or that 50 per cent of the windshield periphery be retained if an unrestrained adult male test dummy is seated in each outboard front seating position during the crash.

Under the new proposal the NHTSA would eliminate the second of the alternatives because, according to the agency, "observation of test data and accident reports indicates that vehicles that presently meet the 75 per cent retention requirement of (the first) alternative where anthropomorphic test devices are not used can generally meet the same 75 per cent retention requirement using an unrestrained anthropomorphic test device."

The agency says it intends that the amended standard be applied to multipurpose passenger vehicles, trucks and buses of 10,000 pounds gross vehicle weight or less manufactured beginning Sept. 1, 1974—except that for forward control vehicles, the proposed effective date isn't to be until Sept. 1, 1978. In justifying the delay, the agency said, "It is recognized that forward control vehicles may have difficulty achieving windshield retention since objects impacted by the front of such a vehicle tend to either impact the windshield itself or deform the windshield mounting."

Comments about the proposal (Docket No. 69-29; Notice 3) should be submitted by Nov. 22, 1972, to Docket Section, National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, Room 5221, 400 Seventh St., S.W., Washington, D.C. 20590.

DOT Revives Plan To Lift Mini-Car Exemption

The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration has resurrected its proposal—dropped in January—to withdraw the across-the-board exemption from motor vehicle standards now granted to cars weighing 1,000 pounds or less.

In announcing its renewed proposal, the agency noted a recent petition filed by the Center for Auto Safety, arguing, “A person should not have to sacrifice safety to obtain the size and type of vehicle which meets his or her needs.” (See *Status Report*, Vol. 7, No. 10, May 22, 1972.)

The sweeping exemption of mini-cars was written into the initial NHTSA rules issued in 1967. In 1969 the National Motor Vehicle Safety Advisory Council unanimously recommended that the exemption be removed, and a year later NHTSA announced it would do so by Jan. 1, 1971, by which time small car manufacturers would have had “nearly four years” to overcome “especially difficult problems” in bringing mini-cars into conformity. But, at the start of this year it announced it was dropping its plans to withdraw the exemption because there was not “sufficient justification . . . at this time.”

In reviving the plan to withdraw the exemption, NHTSA noted, “Considerable interest has been shown . . . in the development of light vehicles for transportation in metropolitan areas, and there is reason to believe that such vehicles will constitute a significant portion of the vehicle population in the future. This appears to be an appropriate time, therefore, to reconsider NHTSA policy and establish guidelines on this subject.”

The agency said mini-cars have “inherent disadvantages” in meeting some standards—“for example, structural strength or . . . crush distance”—but that “many other important standards . . . such as those on lighting, braking and (windshield) glazing, should be attainable by lightweight vehicles virtually as easily as by heavier ones.”

The agency said that if the proposed change takes effect—which would be six months after final publication as a new rule—all existing standards will become applicable to mini-cars. A spokesman said, however, that the agency expects small car manufacturers to petition for continued exemption from some of the standards and that these—as well as determinations of applicability of all future standards—will be decided on a “standard-by-standard basis,” as is now done for heavier vehicles.

Comments on the notice of proposed rule making should be submitted before Nov. 17, 1972, to Docket 72-20, Docket Section, National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, Room 5221, 400 Seventh St., S.W., Washington, D.C. 20590.

Early VW Owners Warned About Fume Leaks

Owners of pre-1963 model Volkswagens are being warned by the federal government that their cars' heating systems may be leaking carbon monoxide into the passenger compartments.

The warning is in the form of a public advisory issued by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration. The agency said it is continuing its investigation of the problem; it has not yet made a determination that the leaks are a “safety-related defect” under the National Traffic and Motor Vehicle Safety Act of 1966.

NHTSA began investigating the possibility of heater leaks in the Volkswagens as a result of its probe into similar problems with 1961-1969 model Chevrolet Corvairs, an American made compact that used a

similarly designed heating system. (In the Corvair case, General Motors disagreed with an initial NHTSA finding that a safety defect existed but agreed to send defect notification letters to Corvair owners.)

The safety administration said the Corvair investigation pointed up the need to look into the pre-1963 Volkswagens as well. As a result of its investigation thus far, the agency is urging owners of pre-1963 Volkswagens to seek immediate repairs if engine fumes are noticed in the passenger compartment, and that, until the repairs are made, occupants should ride "with one of the large side windows opened far enough (at least one inch) to give good ventilation."

Owners of 1949-1962 Volkswagens who notice engine fumes in the passenger compartment are being urged to report the fact, along with the car model and year, to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, Office of Consumer Affairs, 400 Seventh St., S.W., Washington, D.C. 20590.

Safety Belt Use During Pregnancy Urged

An American Medical Association committee has underscored its 1967 recommendation that pregnant women wear safety belts.

In a recent *Journal of the American Medical Association* article, the AMA's Committee on Medical Aspects of Automotive Safety conceded "the real possibility of belt-caused injury to the pregnant woman and her fetus in severe collisions," but stressed:

"The woman's overall chances for survival and freedom from serious injury are much better if she uses a restraint system. The lap belt is preferable to the absence of restraint, and the three-point system is superior to either." The committee said the lap belt should be worn low on the pelvis to lessen the possibility of fetal injury.

The committee said it was reiterating its 1967 recommendation because of "a number of reports of belt-caused injuries" and the possibility that NHTSA's passive restraint rule making "might lead people to a mistaken conclusion that safety belts will soon be obsolete. . . ."

Among other findings, the committee cited a motor vehicle crash study and two experiments with pregnant animals:

- A California study of crash-involved pregnant women concluded that "in severe collisions the maternal fatality rate for unbelted mothers was just about double that for belted mothers, but the fetal mortality, including those who died with their mothers, was unchanged by lap belt restraint."

- A Wayne State University study compared the effectiveness of lap belts and combination lap-and-shoulder belt systems on pregnant baboons. In simulated 26 mile per hour frontal barrier crashes, "50 per cent of the lap-belted mothers lost their fetuses, compared with 8 per cent fetal mortality when the mother wore the shoulder harness in addition to the lap belt. . . . None of the mothers had any significant injuries as a result of the impact."

- In the only published report on a restraint system developed specifically for pregnant women, researchers at Wayne State University found that monkeys wearing an experimental restraint net could withstand simulated frontal barrier crashes ranging from 15 to 28 miles per hour "without fatal injuries to themselves or the fetuses, even after multiple impact."

A committee member said the committee found only a few "individual doctors and inventors" doing any development work on restraint systems designed specifically for pregnant women. In its report

the committee noted, "Whether the 'air bag,' 'safety blanket' or other proposed passive restraint systems will provide better protection for pregnant women and their fetuses remains to be seen."

The recommendations were published in the *Journal of the American Medical Association*, Vol. 221, No. 2, July 3, 1972, pages 20-21. Reprints are available from the Committee on Medical Aspects of Automotive Safety, American Medical Association, 535 N. Dearborn St., Chicago, Ill. 60610.

(Contents may be republished, whole or in part, with attribution.)

the highway
loss reduction

STATUS REPORT

Ralph W. Hoar, Jr., Editor

INSURANCE INSTITUTE for HIGHWAY SAFETY
WATERGATE SIX HUNDRED • WASHINGTON, D.C. 20037
(AREA CODE 202-333-0770)