Nissan 300ZX Ads
Promote High Speed,
Ignore Safety Concerns

A Nissan commercial for the 1990 300ZX Turbo "irresponsibly promotes excessive speed and exhibits a blatant disregard for public safety," says the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety.

Nissan recently aired the commercial on CBS television during the Super Bowl. It shows the redesigned 300ZX racing a motorcycle, a race car, and finally, a jet fighter. The chase reaches an estimated 150 mph in the final moments of the 60 second advertisement as the car becomes airborne.

Brian O'Neill, Institute president, together with 18 medical, insurance, and law enforcement groups, publicly asked the company to withdraw the advertisement after private appeals failed, saying "the only message in the commercial is look how fast this car can go."

Nissan refused the request to withdraw the ad, saying it "is so fanciful and far-fetched that we see no confusion or connection with real-world driving situations."

Pointing to photographs of two 300ZXs involved in fatal crashes, O'Neill said: "Nissan claims this ad is a fantasy. But what isn't a fantasy at all—what is all too real—is that people are dying in high speed crashes involving this car."

Nissan has, in general, shown little interest in safety, O'Neill said. Unlike virtual-

Caveat Emptor Is Still the Watchword
For Automobile Bumper Performance

The results of low speed crash tests show bumpers on 16 small four-door 1990 models vary widely in their ability to prevent expensive damage.

The best of the group, the Honda Civic DX, accumulated $789 in total damage in four 5 mph front and rear crashes compared with $3,838 in damage for the Daihatsu Charade SE, the worst.

The tests are performed annually by the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety to provide an indication of the relative performance of bumpers on popular models. The cars were tested in 5 mph front and rear flat barrier crashes, a 5 mph front angle barrier crash, and a 5 mph rear pole impact.

"There is no way for consumers to tell which cars have bumpers that are merely poor and which have bumpers that are all but useless ...", says Brian O'Neill, Institute president. "This is why we conduct low speed crash tests ... to give consumers some useful information and to keep the heat on automakers to equip cars with better, more damage-resistant bumpers."

(Cont'd on Page 2)
Two youths died in this 1990 Nissan 300ZX when the driver lost control and struck a pickup.

Nissan 300ZX Ads Promote High Speed, Ignore Safety Concerns

(Cont'd from Page 1)

ly all of the competition in its class, the 1990 300ZX lacks air bags and is furnished with "vastly inferior" automatic belts that are easily disconnected, he pointed out. Only about 5 percent of Nissan's cars will be equipped with air bags in the 1990 model year, compared with 100 percent of all Audis, BMWs, Mercedes, Porsches, Saabs, and Volvos. Ford has air bags in nearly half its 1990 models and Chrysler has put them in more than 90 percent of its cars.

"Where are Nissan's safety ads?" asked O'Neill. "We can't find any—none at all. . . . We challenge Nissan to start engineering air bags into all of its cars and begin promoting safety instead of speed."

O'Neill was joined by Lt. Col. C.M. Robinson of the Virginia State Police, Howard Champion, M.D., director of the Medstar shock trauma unit at Washington Hospital Center in the District of Columbia, and retired Air Force Brig. Gen. Robert McDermott, chairman of USAA Insurance Group, a major auto insurance company.

"They come into trauma units dismembered, many paralyzed or injured for life," Champion said. Young people often feel themselves to be immortal, he pointed out, and speed is an addictive thrill. "It is also quite unconscionable that these cars are offered without air bags," Champion added.

McDermott characterized the advertisement as "appalling," demonstrating a lack of corporate responsibility. "Nissan has been totally insensitive," he added, "to the laws, goals, and hopes we have to improve the quality of life and safety on the road."

In a recent Institute study, 1985-87 300ZX models had the fifth highest fatality rate among 103 of the most popular cars on the road during 1986 through 1988. (See Status Report, Vol. 24, No. 11, Nov. 25, 1989.)

Groups participating in effort include Advocates for Highway and Auto Safety, Aetna, the Alliance of American Insurers, the American Academy of Pediatrics, the American Trauma Society, Center for Auto Safety, Consumer Federation of America, Epilepsy Foundation, GEICO, Kemper, the National Association of Governors' Highway Safety Representatives, National Association of Independent Insurers, Nationwide, National Head Injury Foundation, Professional Insurance Agents, and Public Citizen.
Lack of Restraints, Safety Seat Misuse Is A Problem for Children

Although all 50 states have child restraint use laws, too many children are riding unprotected, safety organizations and the federal government agree.

The chief problems, says Brian O'Neill, president of the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety, are nonuse of restraints — especially among older children — and misuse of infant and toddler seats.

In separate hearings before the Senate Consumer Subcommittee and the House Subcommittee on Transportation and Hazardous Materials on the safety of children riding in vehicles, Jerry Ralph Curry, administrator of the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA), reported recent government surveys now show safety seat use rates of 81 percent. Unfortunately, says Curry, about one-fourth of the children riding in child seats or wearing belts are improperly restrained.

The latest research shows that properly used child restraints reduce the likelihood of death by about 70 percent, O'Neill says.

The safety belt use rate for children 5 to 12-years old who have outgrown toddler seats is only 39 percent, O'Neill notes, adding usage could be improved by publicizing and enforcing restraint laws.

The hearings, chaired by Sen. Richard Bryan, Nevada Democrat, and Rep. Thomas A. Luken, Ohio Democrat, also focused on recent allegations by the Center for Auto Safety. The center reported that the vast majority of child seats recalled for defects are not being replaced or repaired and warning labels are not reaching owners.

Curry responded that child seating standards are a top priority in NHTSA compliance testing programs and that since 1981 over 600 seats, representing some 200 seat models, had been tested.

"Some of these tests had resulted in test failures, which, upon further examination, do not prove to have safety significance," Curry said. "However, and this is a point that needs to be stressed, we believe that each of the seats tested is still capable of giving a child significant protection in a crash."

O'Neill and other witnesses agreed, saying that while the center raised some legitimate questions about the recall process, safety groups should avoid sending the dangerous and erroneous message to parents that large numbers of child seats are unsafe and should not be used.

Dr. Mark Widome, chairman of the American Academy of Pediatrics, told the Senate panel that parents are often confused by the various seat belt designs, some of which cannot accommodate child seats. Child restraints are "generally incompatible with ‘automatic’ seat belts," he noted. "Likewise they are difficult, if not impossible, to use at seating positions equipped with lap belts which have emergency locking retractors," he said.

In addition he noted children who have outgrown child restraints and are now using seat belts or booster seats "are often denied maximal protection because they do not have available to them a seating position with a shoulder strap to provide upper torso protection... Likewise, an older child or adult receives inferior protection from a lap belt alone, when compared to the protection possible with a three-point system."

Noting that many parents have found it "nearly impossible to find a car dealer" willing to install shoulder belts for their cars, he urged the federal government to act to make retrofit lap and shoulder belts readily available to consumers.

RADAR RULING

The Circuit Court for the City of Baltimore has affirmed a Maryland Insurance Commission decision that Government Employees Insurance Company (GEICO) cannot refuse auto insurance coverage to people who own radar detectors.

Judge Robert L.H. Hammerman deferred to the Insurance Commissioner, noting that he did so "with a heavy heart... from a personal point of view." He said that he deplored the use of radar detectors: "I think there is a serious moral question involved for people who use them to circumvent the law in this manner."

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CORRECTION

In the December issue of Status Report, the bumper performance for Mitsubishi 1990 model cars was incorrectly reported. All 1990 models, except the Precis, have strong 5 mph bumpers. In addition Mitsubishi will not offer a 1990 model year Starion.
Caveat Emptor Is Still
The Watchword For
Bumper Performance

(Cont'd from Page 1)

The Institute tests also show that bumpers can vary among car models that are considered virtual twins. For example, Toyota Corollas are manufactured in Japan, California, and Ontario. The California factory also produce cars almost identical to the Corollas for General Motors to be sold under the Geo Prizm nameplate. The Institute's engineers discovered that the California factory models are equipped with bumpers that are inferior to the Japanese-made models when they tested the Geo Prizm, for it sustained $267 in a flat barrier frontal impact compared with no damage at all for the Japanese-manufactured Corolla DX. Yet the better bumper weighed two pounds less than the inferior system on the Prizm.

"Consumers cannot possibly find out this sort of thing on their own," O'Neill commented. "When the U.S. Department of Transportation rolled back federal bumper requirements in 1982, it said consumers would be supplied with bumper performance information and that the marketplace would then decide what kind of bumpers consumers want." So far, however, the Transportation Department has not fulfilled its promise.

The engineers also found bumper variations among Hyundai Excel models. At the beginning of 1990 production, Hyundai reinforced the front and rear bumpers on Excels. Later in production, Hyundai removed the bumper reinforcements. In the Institute tests, the car equipped with the reinforced bumpers had $562 in damage in the rear pole impact, compared with $721 for the car with the weakened bumpers.

The Honda Civic, equipped with improved bumpers on 1990 models, did better than the rest, with $769 in total damage.

Volkswagen models fared poorly: $2,656 in total damage for the Jetta GL, $916 in the front angle barrier crash.

The VW Fox sustained $1,990 in total damage, and $413 in damage in the front angle barrier crash.

### Comparison: 1983 and 1990 Plymouth Horizons Using 1990 Labor Rates and Parts Prices

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Front Into Barrier</th>
<th>Rear Into Barrier</th>
<th>Front Into Angle Barrier</th>
<th>Rear Into Pole</th>
<th>Total Damage in All Tests</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1983 Horizons With 5 MPH Bumpers</td>
<td>$0</td>
<td>$0</td>
<td>$267</td>
<td>$0</td>
<td>$287</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1983 Horizons With 2.5 MPH Bumpers</td>
<td>102</td>
<td>273</td>
<td>296</td>
<td>247</td>
<td>918</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990 Horizons</td>
<td>231</td>
<td>480</td>
<td>341</td>
<td>424</td>
<td>1,476</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Hyundai lowered the quality of their already poor bumpers. The better of the two sustained $562 in damage from the rear pole impact . . .

After Hyundai removed the bumper reinforcement, there was $721 in damage.

A total of five cars survived the front and rear flat barrier tests without damage. They are the Mazda 323 Protege SE, Nissan Sentra XE, Ford Escort LX, Dodge Shadow, and Toyota Corolla DX.

But good performance in front and rear flat barrier tests does not necessarily carry over in the other tests, the Institute points out. Among eight cars with no damage in the front flat barrier test, the engineers found that damage in the front angle barrier test ranged from $200 for the Honda Civic to $718 for the Mazda 323 Protege SE.

Among the seven cars with no damage in the rear flat barrier test, damage in the rear pole test ranged from $479 for the Dodge Shadow to $1,404 for the Ford Escort LX.

This need not be the case, says O'Neill. Nine years ago, the Institute reported, the 1981 Escort sustained no damage at all in any of the tests. This year's model sustained a total of $1,718 in damage. Since the Department of Transportation weakened the strong 5 mph bumper standard to 2.5 mph for 1983 models, many car makers have abandoned the better designs.

Yet another example is the Plymouth Horizon. A 1983 model equipped with 5 mph, no-damage bumpers survived all four of the Institute's crash tests with only $287 in damage. (adjusted for 1990 labor and parts prices). Later in the model year, the bumpers were weakened—no savings to consumers. When the Institute repeated the tests, the later model sustained $918 in damage in all four tests. When the 1990 model was tested this year, there was $1,476 in total damage.

"There is no reason why any car should be damaged at all in 5 mph crashes," O'Neill says. "But as long as every car is being damaged . . . consumers should have reliable information about bumper performance. We are still waiting for U.S. Department of Transportation officials to make good on their 1982 promise to supply such information."

### Damage Repair Costs in 5 MPH Crash Tests 1990 Small 4-Door Cars

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Make and Model</th>
<th>Front Into Barrier</th>
<th>Rear Into Barrier</th>
<th>Front Into Angle Barrier</th>
<th>Rear Into Pole</th>
<th>Total Damage in All Tests</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Daihatsu Charade SE</td>
<td>$478</td>
<td>$1,508</td>
<td>$460</td>
<td>$1,372</td>
<td>$3,838</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Volkswagen Jetta GL</td>
<td>247</td>
<td>363</td>
<td>916</td>
<td>1,130</td>
<td>2,656</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Volkswagen Golf GL</td>
<td>179</td>
<td>298</td>
<td>761</td>
<td>1,013</td>
<td>2,251</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Volkswagen Fox GL</td>
<td>141</td>
<td>433</td>
<td>423</td>
<td>993</td>
<td>1,990</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mazda 323 Protege SE</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>718</td>
<td>1,203</td>
<td>1,921</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nissan Sentra XE</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>531</td>
<td>1,346</td>
<td>1,877</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ford Escort LX</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>314</td>
<td>1,404</td>
<td>1,718</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Geo Metro</td>
<td>121</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>363</td>
<td>1,060</td>
<td>1,564</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subaru Loyale</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>570</td>
<td>945</td>
<td>1,562</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plymouth Horizon</td>
<td>231</td>
<td>480</td>
<td>341</td>
<td>424</td>
<td>1,476</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Geo Prizm</td>
<td>267</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>466</td>
<td>732</td>
<td>1,465</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hyundai Excel</td>
<td>125</td>
<td>113</td>
<td>460</td>
<td>721</td>
<td>1,419</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mitsubishi Mirage EXE</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>611</td>
<td>513</td>
<td>1,197</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dodge Shadow</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>676</td>
<td>479</td>
<td>1,155</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Toyota Corolla DX</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>448</td>
<td>492</td>
<td>940</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Honda Civic DX</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>344</td>
<td>200</td>
<td>225</td>
<td>769</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Damage repair estimates were completed in December and January by two independent damage appraisers using ADP Collision Estimating Services with a labor rate of $25 per hour. Criteria for bumper face bar damage were adapted from the U.S. Department of Transportation Part 581 Bumper Standard in effect 9/1/79 through 7/8/82.
Side Impact Rule Extension Proposed For Light Trucks

The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) is seeking to extend the current automobile side door strength standard, Federal Motor Vehicle Safety Standard 214, to light trucks, buses, and multipurpose vehicles.

Jerry Ralph Curry, NHTSA administrator, said the reason for proposing the change is because "more and more of these vehicles are being used on the nation's highways and we believe they should have a higher level of protection in side impact crashes."

The proposal would apply to pickups, vans, and utility vehicles with a gross vehicle weight rating of 10,000 pounds or less, beginning with the 1993 model year.

The standard would require side doors to resist crushing forces applied by a steel cylinder during a laboratory test. Most car manufacturers meet the standard by reinforcing side doors with metal beams.

Sales of pickups, vans, and utility vehicles total about five million annually and, NHTSA says, side impacts among these vehicles account for around 1,600 deaths a year. NHTSA says strengthened doors will help prevent deaths in side impacts with fixed objects such as poles, trees, or guardrails, and reduce the chances of doors unlatching in a crash, thus lowering ejection deaths.

Washington, D.C. Area Car Dealers Still Ignore Belt Display Rule

A recent survey by the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety shows that only 14 percent of Washington, D.C. area new car dealers comply with a federal requirement that cars equipped with detachable automatic belts be displayed with the belts connected.

The Institute has already reported to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) the results of two previous 1989 surveys demonstrating that dealers are not complying with the federal requirement. (See Status Report, Vol. 24, No. 9, Sept. 23, 1989.)

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The first survey, conducted in February 1989, showed that only 4 percent of new cars displayed had both driver and right front passenger belts connected. The second survey conducted last August indicated that the disconnection of belts was still routine; only 22 percent of the cars had both belts connected. The latest survey, conducted in November and December, indicates that only 25 percent had both belts connected. Three-point nonmotorized belts are the type most frequently shown disconnected, the Institute reports.

Brian O'Neill, Institute president, again urged NHTSA "to aggressively confront this problem and to immediately take action that will ensure that dealers fulfill their obligation to display detachable automatic seat belts with belts connected."

The Institute asked NHTSA to require Nissan to withdraw all copies of the brochure from circulation.

A number of Institute surveys show few Washington, DC area dealerships display cars with detachable automatic seat belts with the belts connected as required by NHTSA.

SCHOLARSHIP AWARDS

Two Johns Hopkins University doctoral candidates, Deborah Lambert and Robert Dodd, will receive the William Haddon, Jr. fellowship award for the study of injury prevention at the school's Injury Prevention Center.

Dodd has a master's in safety from the University of Southern California, and is a former employee of the National Transportation Safety Board. Lambert has a bachelor's degree in nursing, a master's in epidemiology, and is an epidemiologist at the Maryland Department of Health and Mental Hygiene.

The award was established by property and casualty insurers in memory of the late Dr. Haddon, former president of the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety.

ZX UNBELTED

The Insurance Institute for Highway Safety says a Nissan sales brochure featuring interior photographs of the 1990 model 300ZX with disconnected automatic seat belts violates a federal requirement that cars be displayed with automatic belts fastened.

In a letter to Jerry Ralph Curry, administrator of the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA), Brian O'Neill, Institute president, says: 'The disconnection is obviously deliberate since Nissan has included, in the smallest print that is still readable, a footnote on the four pages preceding the photographs that states: The passive restraint front seatbelt system has been shown unfastened for display purposes. This system should be fastened at all times in normal use.'

O'Neill added: "The deception of deliberately disconnected automatic belts in manufacturer advertising undermines the purpose of the automatic restraint standard and NHTSA's goal of having manufacturers educate the public about the proper functioning of automatic restraints."

The Institute asked NHTSA to require Nissan to withdraw all copies of the brochure from circulation.

A number of Institute surveys show few Washington, D.C. area dealerships display cars with detachable automatic seat belts with the belts connected as required by NHTSA.
Deadline Proposed For Automatic Restraints In Light Trucks and Vans

The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) is proposing to require air bags or automatic seat belts for pickups, vans, and utility vehicles beginning with the 1994 model year.

The automatic restraint provisions of Federal Motor Vehicle Safety Standard 208 currently apply to passenger cars. The government’s new proposal would extend the regulation to light trucks beginning with the 1994 model year, when 20 percent of the light truck fleet would be equipped with air bags or automatic belts. The proportion would rise to 50 percent for 1995 models, and 100 percent by the 1996 model year.

Extending the rule to light trucks and vans could save up to 2,000 lives each year, Jerry Ralph Curry, NHTSA administrator, estimates.

The proposal contains an incentive to encourage manufacturers to install air bags instead of automatic seat belts: vehicles providing a driver side air bag could use a manual seat belt on the passenger side and still meet the rule through the 1997 model year. Manufacturers choosing to use automatic belts would have to install them in both positions on the tighter schedule.

"We are encouraging air bags as the technology of choice because air bags in combination with existing lap and shoulder belts offer the best protection available," Curry said.

Brian O’Neill, president of the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety, praised the proposal, saying: "The automatic crash protection requirements are, by far, the most important of the passenger car requirements from which light trucks and vans have been exempted. We are delighted by this important proposal," he added. "and are especially pleased that the agency has provided an incentive for manufacturers to choose air bag systems rather than automatic belts.”

Sen. Jack Danforth, Missouri Republican, lauded the Transportation Department announcement, saying, "Transportation Secretary Sam Skinner and NHTSA Administrator Jerry Curry... took a significant step towards saving lives in this country. Literally thousands of lives can be saved by putting air bags in the new generation of family vehicles—small trucks and minivans."

In recent years the number of fatalities and injuries in these vehicles has been rising. In 1984 there were nearly 6,500 deaths in light trucks. By 1988 the toll rose to 8,300, NHTSA says.

The proposal covers all vans, trucks, buses, and multipurpose passenger vehicles with a gross vehicle weight rating of 8,500 pounds and an unloaded vehicle weight of 5,500 pounds or less. Motor homes, convertibles, open body vehicles, walk-in vans, and vehicles with chassis-mounted campers would be included.

School Bus Safety: Lessening the Hazards To Child Pedestrians

The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) announced two rulemaking activities intended to lessen the likelihood of children being struck as they walk to and from school buses.

One proposal would require that new school buses be equipped with swing-out stop-signal arms mounted on the left front side by Sept. 1, 1991.

In addition NHTSA issued a preliminary proposal seeking public comments on improved cross-view mirrors and other measures to prevent bus drivers from running over children crossing in front of school buses.

NHTSA estimates that each year, an average of 35 to 40 children are killed when struck by a school bus or other passing vehicle. Many children are too small to be seen if they stop close to the front of a bus to pick up a dropped paper or book.

In May 1989 the National Research Council, an agency of the National Academy of Sciences, estimated about 800 children are injured annually in school bus loading zones and about 525 are struck by vehicles other than a school bus.

About 38,000 new school buses are purchased each year and NHTSA estimates about 71 percent of the current school bus fleet already is equipped with swing-out stop-signal arms because many jurisdictions require them. In addition many states and school districts already require two cross-view mirrors, rather than the one that NHTSA regulations stipulate.

NHTSA's proposed swing-out stop sign is a scaled down version of the standard roadside stop sign. NHTSA has tentatively concluded the signs should reflect light to promote visibility and should automatically swing out whenever the bus' red signal lights begin flashing and the door is opened. Flashing strobe lights are also under consideration, although they are not included in the formal proposal.

In addition to plans to improve convex cross-view mirrors, the agency also says it is considering possibly requiring other equipment to prevent children from being struck by school buses. Possibilities include crossing control arm barriers that swing out from the front bumper to create an obstacle that students must walk around. Those in use now typically swing out six to eight feet, NHTSA says, serving to keep children crossing in front of the bus in the view of the driver at all times.
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