

California Survey Reveals Toll of Repairable Defects

The accident report was terse. Driver — Male — Age 49. Car ran off freeway — rolled down embankment. Weather clear. Pavement dry. D.O.A. (Dead on Arrival.)

To those who read about the single car accident in the next morning's paper, that accident may have looked like another case of a drunk losing control of his car. But the California Highway Patrol wasn't satisfied with the explanation.

They studied the victim and his car as part of their investigation of the relationship between mechanical defects and single car highway fatalities.

A blood alcohol test showed he had not been drinking. A thorough check of the car showed the following:

The power steering belt and fan belt were loose.

The fan hub was loose on the water pump shaft, the right front lower ball joint shank failed at the edge of the right support arm. This caused the suspension at the right front wheel to fail.

Thus the driver lost control of his car and left the freeway, causing the fatal accident.

This case was but one in a detailed study of 409 fatal single vehicle accidents where 29% of the vehicles involved had one or more mechanical defects. Two out of three of these defects either caused the accident or contributed to it.

In 64% of the accidents investigated, a mechanical deficiency was directly responsible.

The two-year study disclosed 172 faulty mechanical systems in 119 vehicles. The

Are You In As Good Shape As Your Car Should Be?

It's one thing to get your car in good condition for that vacation trip. It's equally important to make sure you are in good condition — both physically and mentally — for those long hours behind the wheel.

The following are suggestions on making sure your trip will be a safe one as well as a pleasant one:

- If you are tired, stop driving. Pace yourself; apply common sense.
- Eat lightly to avoid sluggishness.
- Don't rely on drugs or pills to prevent drowsiness.
- Keep something handy to chew. Light snacks help keep you alert.
- If you are driving alone, talk, sing, whistle or play the radio. This also keeps you alert.
- Never drive more than three hours without stopping for a stretch or a cup of coffee.
- Avoid driving at a constant speed. By varying your rate of travel slightly, you can help combat "highway hypnosis."
- Keep at least one window or vent open for a steady flow of fresh air.

FOR THE ROAD

- Rely on reflectorized road markings for visual clues. Use shoulder lines to keep "to the right" of roadway, specially on two-way roads.
- Keep glancing across the road surface between center and shoulder lines to keep eyes alert and functioning properly. Don't focus your vision on a single light or line ahead. This tires eyes.
- Drive slower at night to compensate for darkness.

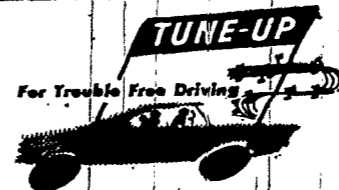
most commonly observed problems were in braking systems, accounting for 35% of all defects found. Next were steering system defects at 26%, with tires ranking third at 21%. Additional factors, lumped together as miscellaneous (lighting, shock absorbers, exhaust systems, windshield wipers and others) accounted for 18%.

Nearly all reported defects were attributed to wear and lack of maintenance rather

than design and assembly flaws.

Another accident reported by the California researchers involved a vehicle whose engine locked up when, at high speed on a freeway, a connecting rod broke. The vehicle went out of control, hit a guard rail and struck a bridge abutment. The driver was killed.

Make sure your car is in top condition before leaving on your trip.



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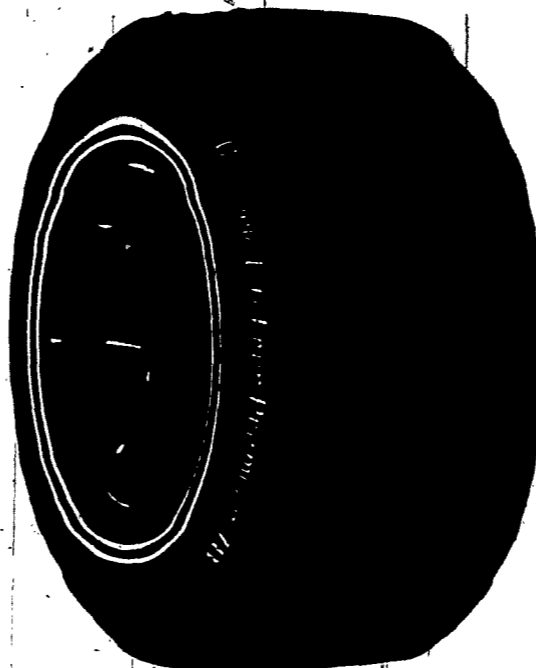
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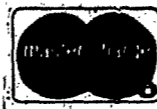
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