

Horsepower, Speed Said Not Important Factors In Highway Traffic Deaths

Editor's note: Following is the fourth in a series of articles dealing with traffic fatalities on highways of the nation.

By ROBERT J. BERLING
United Press Correspondent
New York—(U.P.)—Is high speed the chief cause of America's frightening traffic toll?

Is the automobile industry contributing to highway slaughter with its race to build more and more horsepower into new cars?

Many Americans would promptly answer yes to both of these questions.

There have even been demands in Congress for such drastic actions as setting a national speed limit of 40-50 miles per hour, and requiring manufacturers to limit the top horsepower and speed of the cars they build.

Speed Not Much Important
But virtually every reliable statistic gathered on the nation's highway accidents points away from speed as the most important factor in causing injury and death. Cornell University's auto crash injury research program, which has investigated more than 8,000 accidents, reported the following facts on speed:

1. The average travelling speed of cars involved in injury-producing accidents is about 48 miles per hour. The average speed at impact is 41 mph.

2. People can get hurt as easily and as severely in an accident at 30 mph as they can at 50 mph. Severity of injury as related to speed does not begin to increase to any marked degree until 60 mph is reached. Then the ratio takes a sharp jump.

3. In the thousands of accidents studied, 60 per cent of the extremely severe and fatal injuries would still have occurred if the speed of the vehicles involved had been held to 50 mph.

An Expert Speaks
The director of the Cornell project, John O. Moore, says: "All evidence points to the fact that speed, as an injury-producing factor, is only one segment of the accident problem and then only in a restricted sense. Control of the very high speeds unquestionably would reduce injuries and deaths to some extent. But many more drivers get into trouble at speeds of 50 and below than they do at much higher speeds, and those who believe control of speed is a panacea to the whole safety problem are doing the nation an injustice."

The Cornell researchers have concentrated on what causes injuries in an accident rather than on what causes the accident itself. But their data indicates that the injury and death rate can be reduced more readily by proper designing than by making slower automobiles.

Parallel Effort Needed
"There must be a parallel effort put forth to de-lethalize the car itself," says Moore, "or the simple factor of controlled speed will be only partially effective."

By "de-lethalizing" an automobile, Moore refers to such devices as padded instrument panels, improved door locks and recessed steering wheels.

Some safety officials might reply that even if speed isn't necessarily a factor in determining how badly a person gets hurt, it's definitely a factor in causing accidents. But even this conclusion is open to question.

The accident rate on high-speed highways like the Pennsylvania and New Jersey turnpikes is far under the national rate.

Most safety experts point to excessive speed, rather than speed itself, as an important factor in causing accidents.

Different Factors
A car doing 30 on glare ice may be guilty of excessive speed while one going 70 mph on the Pennsylvania turnpike in perfect weather is not.

Weather and road conditions, traffic intensity, driving ability and the condition of the car itself—say the experts—are all factors in determining whether speed is excessive.

That is why safety organizations like Cornell's research group are against setting a national speed limit applicable to all regions, all drivers and all cars.

"I'm positive," says Moore, "that if you established and enforced a national speed limit of, say, 40 miles an hour, you'd wind up with such traffic congestion that you'd have to redesign the entire national highway system."

What about the frequent charge that Detroit has contributed to the worsening accident rate by making cars too powerful for the roads they drive on?

Here's the automotive engineers' reply:—Horsepower has little relation to top speed. The horsepower of a modern car has doubled in the past 10 years but its top speed averages only 15 mph higher.

—Horsepower is needed more for acceleration than for high speeds. You can get more speed by changing a car's gear ratio than by upping its horsepower.

—More horsepower is needed for such innovations as automatic transmissions, power steering and braking, electric window lifts and air-conditioning. On a 200 hp car, only 120 hp goes to the rear wheels.

The last dispatch in this series will examine the part our roads play in causing accident.

Medford Students on OSC Play Stage Crew
Corvallis—Mary Kay White of Medford will be on the stage crew of the Oregon State college presentation of "The Desperate Hours," Feb. 28 through March 2, according to E. S. Cortright, director and associate professor of speech.

Miss White, a sophomore majoring in elementary education, is the daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Harold H. White of 3654 Pacific highway south, Medford. She is a 1955 graduate of Medford high school.

The death rate from pneumonia and influenza together decreased from 140.6 per 100,000 in 1911 to 8.6 per 100,000 in 1955.

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Pear Canning Group Plans Annual Meeting

The annual meeting of the Washington - Oregon Canning Pear association will be held March 7 at the Nob Hill Grange in Yakima, Wash.

Featured speakers at the meeting will be J. E. Klahre, manager of the Apple Growers association of Hood River, and J. K. Samuels, director of the marketing division of the Farmers Cooperative service, Washington, D.C.

Also scheduled during the meeting are panel discussions and speeches on topics relating to the pear industry.

Peddigord Loses Suppression Motion

Portland—(U.P.)—A motion by William Clarence Peddicord, blind bomber of the Meier & Frank department store here, to suppress certain evidence against him in a mail fraud case has been denied.

U. S. Judge William East ruled that a study of testimony taken in hearing the motion failed to show that Peddicord's constitutional rights were "in any way encroached upon in seizure of his records."

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