



# Automation Investigation

An Automotive Supplement

Automatic Staff Box

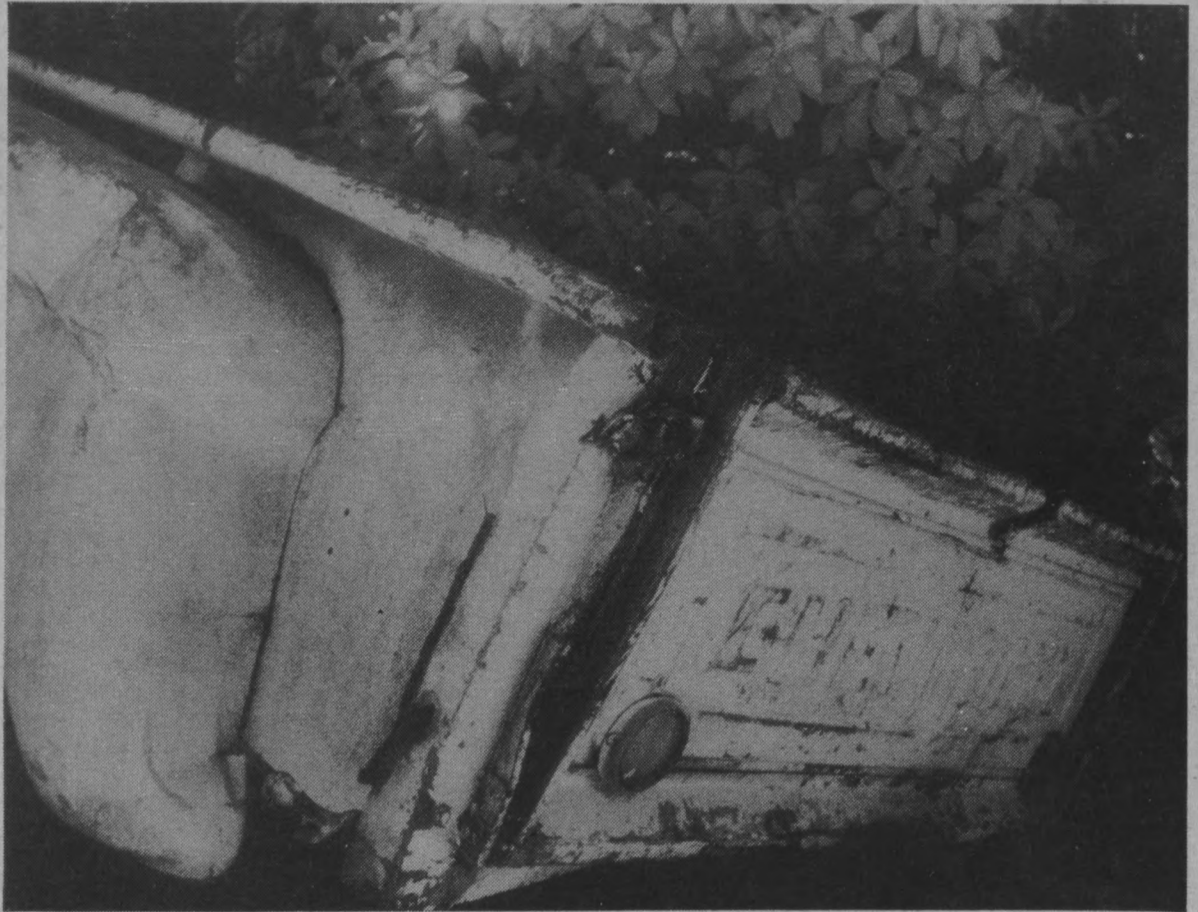
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INTRIGUED?  
SEE PAGE 6A



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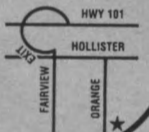
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**USED BUT NOT ABUSED**

**By Garrett H. Omata**  
Special Sections Editor

Among the many decisions a budding adult has to make in his lifetime, there are three or four that are really frightening. One of these is picking a career. Another is finding a mate to spend your life with. And finally there is buying a used car.

People may have a dozen different reasons for selling you their car, and you may be ignorant of all of them. They might just want a new model or a different color, or there may be some reoccurring defect that they just refused to deal with any longer. It turns to you to become a suspicious buyer and take all the precautions available to you. When you buy a car from a private seller, find out as much information as they will give to you. Ask about the car's condition and mileage, and why it is being sold, and ask if they will let you see their repair bills. Naturally, you'll also want to be aware if the car was in an accident.

If you plan to buy from a dealership, the first question you'll want to ask yourself is whether you want to buy from a new car dealership or an independent used car lot. New dealers will usually sell the best of the cars they take as trade-ins, and will be a good source of late models in good condition. They might also feature service facilities and warranties, but you're definitely going to have to pay for all these privileges.

Used car lots are often a lot cheaper than

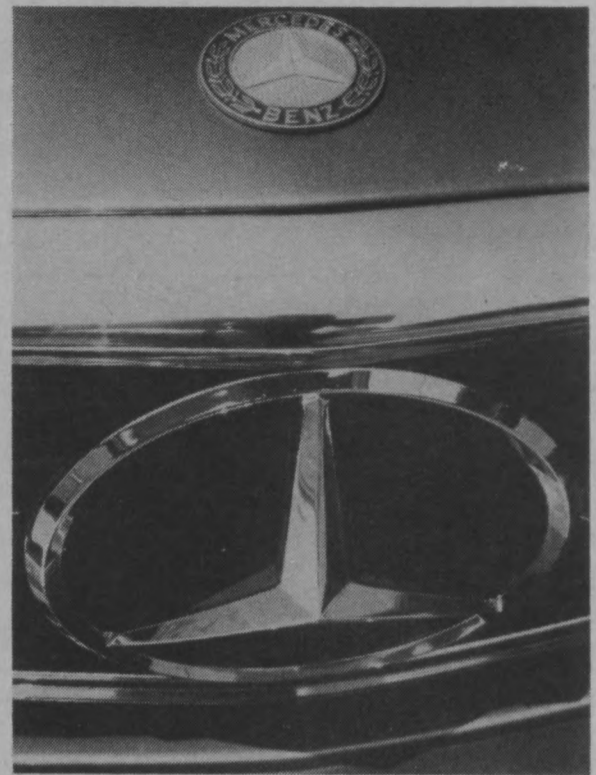
dealerships, but also feature a lower grade of automobiles. Their repair facilities aren't going to be as complete, also. Beware of "gypsy" dealerships which come and go out of low-income neighborhoods. Try to deal with lots that have been there for a while.

Paying for a used car is always a hit and miss technique. To know whether or not you are getting a bargain can depend on reading up on the "National Automobile Dealers Association (N.A.D.A.) Official Used Car Guide." This volume, which is updated monthly, can be found in most public libraries. It provides you with a basic overview of the going rates for most models in trade-in deals and retail purchases.

Now, what do we do about looking at the car itself? Whether or not the seller is being straight with you, a careful examination is crucial. Start out on a clear day, since bad weather or darkness may hide some indications of trouble.

Uneven wear on the tires may suggest an alignment problem or an accident. Make sure that the spare is in good condition and that the tire-changing equipment is there. While you're squatted down there, check the pavement for suggestions of leakage. Oily stains show for trouble, naturally. Also, green-white stains around the radiator may signal pinholes.

The body of the car should be examined for fresh welding or areas discolored by heat. And if the body panels don't quite match the color of the rest of car, or if it has a fresh paint job on a less than three-year-



old car, then it may have been involved in an accident.

To check the suspension, grab the tops of each front wheel and push and pull. If there is some movement or clunking, then the suspension joints are probably worn down. Another thing to do is to bounce the car with your body weight on the fenders. If the car bounces more than once after it is released, then new shock absorbers could be needed.

As for the interior, it would do you well to check everything: the window wipers, the safety belts, the seat adjustments, the brakelights, the cigarette lighter, radio, and even the floor mats. Look for water stains in the trunk and passenger compartments, as well as smell for mildew. And here's a little tip: look at the rubber pedal covers. If they are well-worn, there is a more than probable chance that it wasn't owned by a little old Pasadena choir director who only drove it to church every Sunday.

Okay, enough admiration of American or Japanese ingenuity, let's take it for a ride. Before you start it up, unlock the wheel and turn the wheel. It ought not to have more than a few inches of play. And then watch out for vibration or play during the drive. The engine should start and accelerate smoothly without skipping, hesitating, bucking or noisiness. The transmission shouldn't slip and a manual clutch shouldn't grab suddenly.

Watch the brakes for firmness. If on an empty road, apply the brakes and be aware of possible vibration or grabbing. Sponginess as you press the brake may indicate a lead in the brake fluid. The drive all around should always be comfortable. Be alert for poor steering, leaps, squeaks or rattling. The suspension could need some looking at.

And never put your John Hancock on a contract before taking the car to a trustworthy mechanic (don't go to one they recommend). Any inconsistencies you may find could be a negotiating tool against the price of the car.

Does this sound like fun? Of course not, but it will insure that you do not end up with a 1500 pound citrus fruit. So don't jump into buying a car just because you're in a hurry. That time might well be lost later while you sit on the highway waiting for the CHP to pick you up.



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# Fear and Loathing While Riding in a Toyota

By Steven Elzer  
Editor In Chief

There was a time when the Toyota was a car one could swear by. Oh yes, there was a time. Today, my Toyota is something I prefer to swear at, often and with much vigor.

I used to be one of those defenders of the foreign auto, telling one and all that Toyota was the only way to travel. But then came the trek down the freeway with my car joyously ablaze. Let's just say I tuned up my attitude.

I remember the first incident distinctly: The Santa Monica Freeway, 60-plus miles an hour and I asked Bill, my passenger, if he smelled smoke. "No," he replied. Well, that was fine with me, so the warning was defused and merrily we rolled along, an unsuspecting Roman candle.

I still smelled the smoke, but Bill didn't and I figured, "We're just in downtown Los Angeles. It's a common phenomenon." Other cars were honking, flashing their headlights in the morning traffic, trying to alert us to our pending doom. Finally, I caught on. Perhaps it was the USC Security Patrol flashing his lights in my direction that helped. But always quick to react, I pulled over and got out of the car.

Now, I'm a journalist by trade, not an auto mechanic, and I wouldn't know an engine mount from a loaf of bread. The point is that all those helpful people who bothered to honk, et cetera, kept on going. No one was there to say, "Uh, excuse me, sir, but flames are licking dangerously close to your gas tank." The bottom line: I didn't see flames leaping from under my car, nor did I smell smoke, so I figured, gee, no prob here.

I got back in the car and took off again. Bill was smiling in his seat, probably singing Billy Joel tunes when I started to smell that weird smoke odor again. More cars were honking and I wondered, "What the hell do these people want?" Passengers in other cars were pointing at my Supra and I decided to pull over again. But this time, I told Bill to get out of the car. "I think it's on fire," I said.

And it was. As I opened the hood, I was greeted with flames and smoke and all the fun stuff associated with fires like heat and destruction. Then, an 18-wheeler pulled over and a trucker with a fire extinguisher jumped out and saved my precious baby.

Then came the fire department and the police department and the horrors of confronting my father. After several rounds of kudos and thanks, I walked to a phone booth and contemplated the phone call home.

"Hello Dad, would you believe...?" His reply was something like, "What are you on? Dope?" So I said something like, "No, dad, I'm on Hoover and thanks anyway, I'm not dead, I'm fine."

Then came the tow truck, and my father in his beat-up 1967 convertible Chevrolet Malibu that had never caught fire. We took the crispy critter to the nearest Toyota dealership and only several hundred dollars and several days later, we were back on the road.

What caused the fire? I still don't know. I've been told it is a common occurrence in the late model Supras, something like Pintos blowing up or Audis accelerating without cause. Anyway, since that fleeting moment when I felt like a crew member in the space shuttle Challenger, I have not been so anxious to drive the car at full throttle up.

No, I prefer the easy rider kind of driver. And I don't consider myself to be particularly hard on the auto. But a year later, again while on the freeway, I lost my clutch. It wasn't supposed to happen for another 10,000 miles or so but hey, when you're on the leading edge of modern technology, anything goes. And I mean that literally.

Another tow truck, another phone call, this time to my dad's fiance and another couple of hundred bucks to line the bulging pockets of the now familiar "authorized Toyota stealer."

So now we're up to date. Fire rages, clutch drops and just a few weeks after the latest trauma, I took the car in for a tune-up. The clutch seemed a little sluggish and I wanted the car to perform like it had in its glory rookie days.

The "service counselor" told me the car would be ready the following day and I received a \$100 estimate. Until of course, the fateful phone call. "Uh, Mr. Elzer, we're having a little problem with your car." Those words will live forever in infamy.

"What little problem?" I inquired. "Nothing major; we're going to take care of you. Don't worry," the counselor told me. It was only my electrical system, my radiator, my car alarm, my window wipers, left door lock, fog lights and something about my master gasket.

"Well, what does that mean? How much will it cost? Why do you have to fix my muffler? It sounds fine."

Again I was told I would be taken care of, and I sure was. Several days later, I clutched my chest and swallowed my \$1,200 bill with minimal argument. I was just pleased to drive off the lot and have the car back.

It drove like a fine tuned piano, for about 10 minutes, until I noticed the temperature gauge taking the express line to the red area of hazardville.

"This is not happening. It's a cruel joke," I said as I drove back toward the dealership. The counselor greeted me with a friendly wave and a gracious smile. "Forget something?" he asked.

"Uh yeah, it looks like I forgot to have my \$1,200 in work done," I told him as I pointed to my predicament.

An hour later, I was told to go home and wait for a phone call, which came later that afternoon. "Uh, Mr. Elzer, we're having a little trouble with your car," the guy said during the second round of fun with the dealer.

Fuel injection system something like that.

Another \$600 in repairs. Don't ask what the never begin to detail returned to me, in dri-

"I was pleased to ea-

coast back to the Sant-

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## You Want To Know About

By Wade Daniels  
County Editor

Let's face it: Most of us are semi-impoverished students who drive old heaps Uncle Chester pawned off on us for beer money when we turned 17. We also live amidst the salty mist air of the Pacific. We're prime candidates for body rot.

It usually takes five or six years for corrosion to set in, according to Dave Boytis of McLean's Auto Body and Paint in Goleta. One of the most common factors that contributes to body rot is design flaws which allow water to accumulate and eat at the paint and then the metal. Windshield moldings and fenders are the easiest targets for this. Water often accumulates in the bottom of car doors which become clogged.

Although some body shops boast that they guarantee their work, repairs done on these areas cannot truthfully be guaranteed since the problem is design-oriented, Boytis explained. These sorts of problems have for the most part been eliminated in newer model cars.

Salt in the Isla Vista air is a more indirect culprit. It attacks the paint, thus making the body itself more vulnerable to the elements. For this reason it has been widely recom-

mended that one should avoid areas where salt is poured on roads in winter conditions.

Perhaps the best advice for keeping your car in good condition is to keep it washed and waxed. This may sound like a lot of work, but hey, it's only advice.

Beer cans, careless drunks, metal shavings, and all scratch problems in I.V. and all scratches lay bare their flesh of iron ore to the elements. But we ourselves can at least slow down the decay until we graduate and can either fix it ourselves or have it fixed by someone who knows what they're doing.

For scratches and nicks you can use fine-grained sandpaper and paintsticker remover. You'll probably take out some of the paint, but that's all right.

Then, take a spray can of silicone (both available for a few bucks at a hardware store) and apply it on a couple of coats. You can also use a wax or polish which helps, but it tends to fall off after a few washings.

Both of these methods leave your car in showroom condition, but slowing down the decay will save you a good deal of cabbage in the long run.

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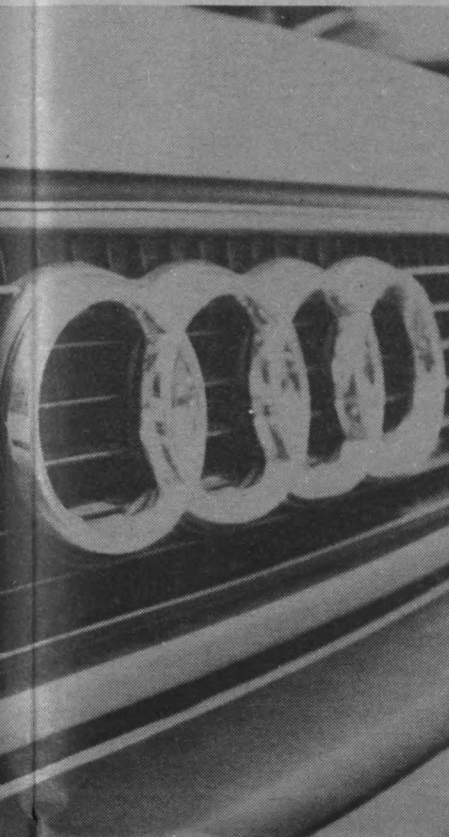
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ction system and exhaust manifold or ke that.  
500 in repairs and I was a rollin' Gaucho. hat the additional problems were, I could to detail the list. But I finally had my car me, in drivable shape nonetheless.  
sed to ease into my seat and cruise up the the Santa Barbara experience.  
I was in hell when I turned on the much- o and a low static growl haunted my ears. e would not work and the equalizer only tatic through one speaker.  
igned myself to a life of Toyota torment; I dump the hunk of metal for a Yugo or mparable. Until then, I'm hoping I'll get a eo for graduation. Perhaps I'd be better off Sale" sign.



TONY POLLOCK/Daily Nexus

**By Garrett H. Omata**  
Special Sections Editor

Aah, you're finally buying that brand-new car you've wanted ever since you had to settle for the '65 VW bug your father gave you for your sixteenth birthday. They didn't pay much attention to comfort that year, did they? But you've scraped and scrounged, and now you've just barely got enough money for a down payment and that sheepskin seat cover. And as if the quarter-ton of papers you need to sign isn't enough, they also push an auto service contract on you. It's a good thing to have, they say. You'll get an extension of your warranty service, right? A little more insurance never hurt. Except when it costs \$200 to \$1000 extra.

Are service contracts REALLY necessary? And are they serving the purpose they set out to do? Let's face facts. Dealers really aren't there for the public good, to fill the world with happy customers with nice running cars. They want profits! They wouldn't be offering the contracts if they were losing money on it.

The American Warranty Corp., for example, said that in over 10 years, service contracts provided \$300 million to dealers and cost only \$60 million in claims. Not bad. The contracts are usually sold by either the original automobile maker,

such as Chrysler or General Motors, or through third party contractors, like Lincoln National Bank or Mitsubishi Motor Sales. They cover an automobile over a present period of time

available on used cars and almost always have a deductible tied on.

The benefits of the contract include things like unexpected problems inherent in the construction.

car. But there are cars that are known as high risks and need repairs more often. But statistics show more in favor of nothing happening to your new car in the related time

covered in the policy. And some contracts have a loophole that doesn't include labor in the deal. Items like brakepads and shocks that normally wear out are not usually covered. Also things like failure due to misuse, fluid replacement, or lack of proper maintenance will not be covered in the contract. It doesn't really leave a whole lot left.

So, do you think you really need it? The dealers will always push you to take it as part of the package, since a good part of it goes to their commission. But really, there's no rush. A good thing to do is to make sure that a contract can be cancelled in the first 30 or 60 days, with full money back. Also you should be able to buy the contract up to a year after you buy your new car. However, postponing it won't give you an extra year of coverage; it will be retroactive to the date that you bought the car. And though any sound consumer already knows this, make sure you get an actual copy of the contract and are able to read the fine print. There's always some of that around to decorate the borders.

## Service Contracts: Friend or Foe?



TONY POLLOCK/Daily Nexus

after the warranty expiration by the date, or by mileage. Contracts are also

Of course these can be "weasel" clause that will not circumvented simply by cover malfunctions caused by parts of the car not



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## About Body Rot, Don't You?

avoid buying automobiles from ed on roads for traction in icy con-

e for keeping your paint intact is to l. This may seem a litte far-fetched

unks, meteorites: All are common scratch and dent our fair autos iron ore to the monsters of the sky. least slow down the progress of and can either trash the hunk or get nows what they're doing.

ks you can buy some very fine-painstakingly remove all the rust. some of the surrounding paint but

of silicon coating or paint primer bucks at car part stores) and layer can also purchase aluminum tape fall off and looks really tacky.

is leave your car in less than slowing down the decaying may obage in the long run.

When body rot is initiated internally, the exterior will have a sort of bubbled appearance without affecting the paint much at first, but you can bet there's water in there working away. If you can, feel the other side and see how far it has progressed. If not, start sanding. If the metal is "bubbly," you may end up making a hole all the way through.

There is a good demonstration of do-it-yourself hole filling in the May 1984 issue of *Popular Mechanics*. For starters, you have to tear or snip off every bit of rust or it will start spreading again immediately. It's kind of like operating on a cancer patient.

Now comes in the infamous Bondo. It either takes a lot of luck or an artistic hand to make this look good. You have to gob it in there, smooth it as best you can and wait for it to dry. Then start sanding and do your best to make it match the rest of the car. This is where the luck or skill come in handy.

Some people do body work with a blow torch and a sheet of fiberglass but Boytis said this does not work especially well on metal cars.

If your car decay is at a very advanced stage, you will either have to spend a lot money to get it fixed or just live with it (Maybe plant some flowers in there).

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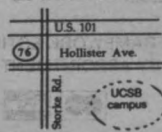
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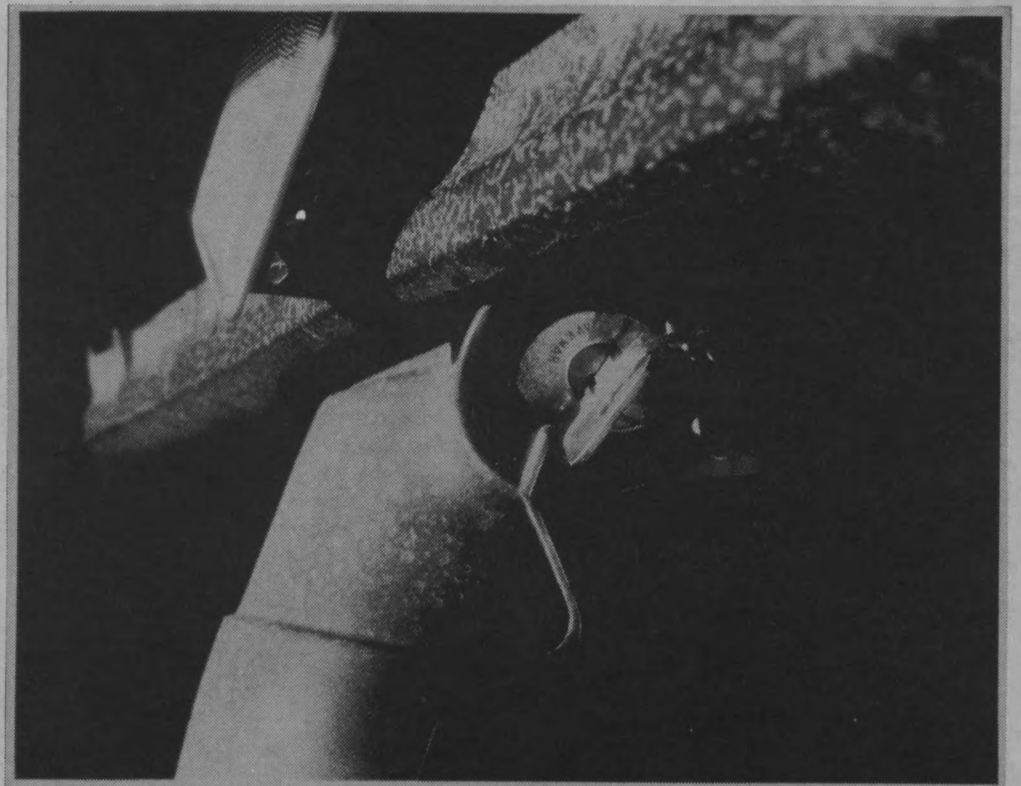
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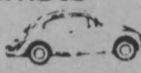
# Sargasso Sea of Forgotten Transportation

Photos by  
**Richard O'Rourke**

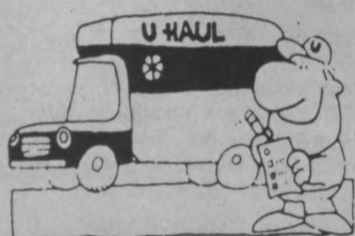


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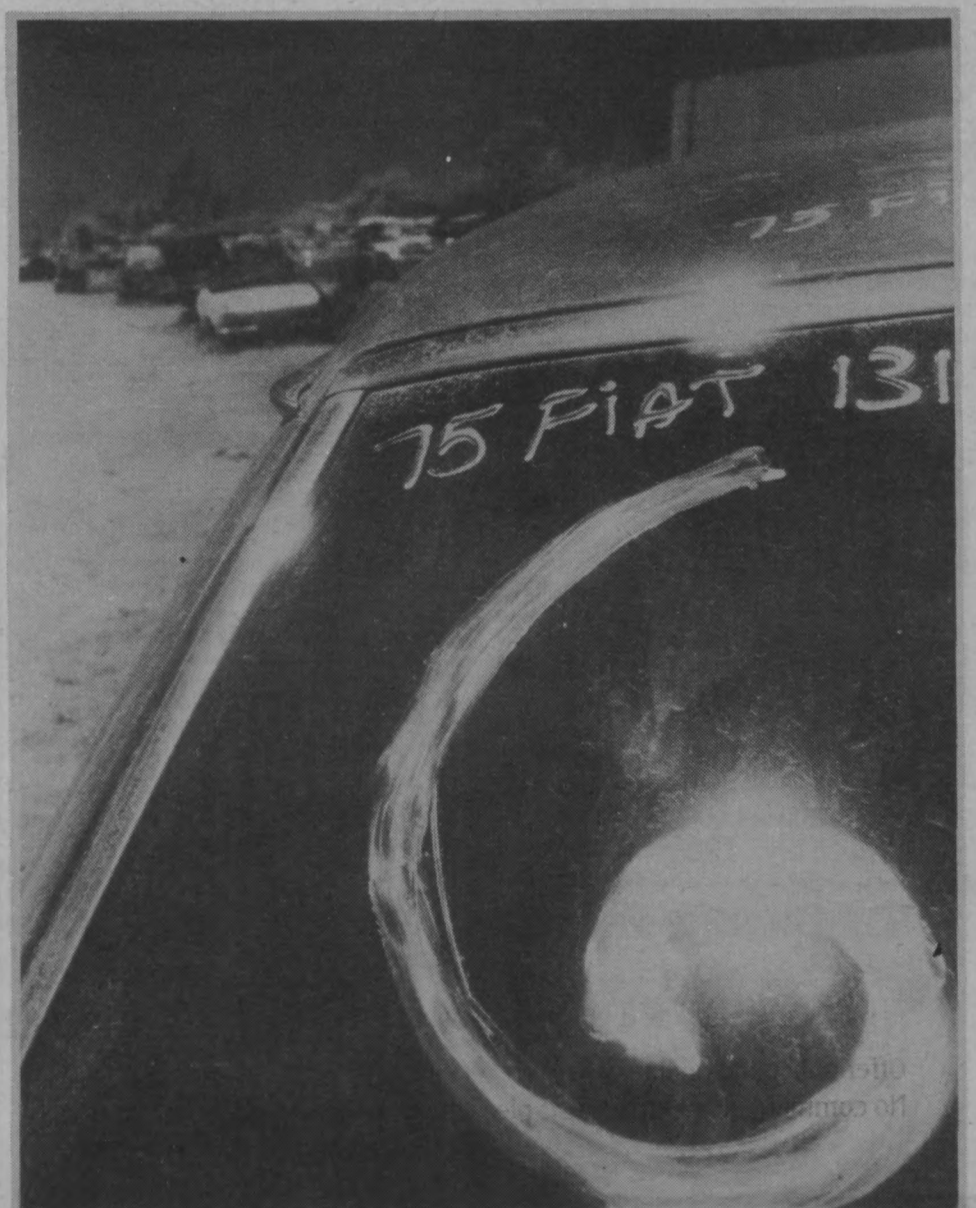
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# Burglar Detection: An Alarming Act

By **Garrett H. Omata**  
Special Sections Editor

Security has become an important factor in car ownership in America. In 1985 there were over three and a half million crimes reported against automobiles and \$915 million taken off in bounty. So it comes as no surprise that over \$400 million was also spent on car alarm systems. But the question is, what is it being spent on?

There are four basic forms of defenses in most car alarms. Usually, a system is a combination of a few or all of them. The first is the foundation of alarm systems, the electronic control module. The power for the module comes from the car battery, unless the module is designed to accompany a backup battery. The module taps into the electrical system and monitors opened car doors or trunks with lights. The next defenses are switches located in the hood and trunk that are primed to react when open.

Motion or vibration detectors are popular in several new systems. These activate when there is extreme agitation in the car, such as when the car is driven. The sensors are adjustable so that they become more or less sensitive. Another defense disables the electrical current from the ignition to the engine so the car won't move. The other defenses are characterized by the activation of a siren or the car horn and sometimes the parking lights. Sirens are usually in the range of 92 to 96 decibels, and draw their power from the car battery.

There are two types of alarm systems that utilize these defenses: professionally installed and do-it-yourself. The professionally installed systems run anywhere from \$300 to \$600 and have the advantage of being more reliable, since the installers are experts, and have a more complex, complete set of safety functions.

Do-it-yourself kits cost about \$75 to \$300. They are cheaper, but require that the buyer have a good knowledge of his car and electrical systems. Also they are known to lack necessary hardware at times, and their reliability depends a lot on how good an electrician the do-it-yourself installer is.

An important consideration to many people is the arming and disarming of the alarm. Car alarms may have a switch that is connected to the ignition switch, so that it turns on automatically after all the doors are shut. Others require an external switch, such as a toggle switch, a keypad or an additional key. Currently popular are the remote control switches that can activate the system from outside the car and also act as a beeper to notify the car owner when security is breached.

Those are the basics. But what happens when you're picking out a system? *Consumer Reports* has several suggestions concerning particular models. The magazine preferred the professionally installed alarms for several reasons. As stated before, experienced people install them, ensuring their reliability. They include more all around features, some of them including the activation of parking lights and panic buttons that can activate the alarms from inside the car. The do-it-yourself models tended to occupy the CR staff for a while and they predicted that the buyer should plan on spending the better part of the day putting it in.

Another factor to be aware of is the quality of the installation by car dealers. *Consumer Reports* found a great inconsistency in the price of installation by different dealers, ranging anywhere from \$110 to \$250. So it is obviously a good idea to get a large range of estimates. But an important thing to note is that Texas is the only state that requires installers to have a license to operate. Incompetent installation is not a rare occurrence.



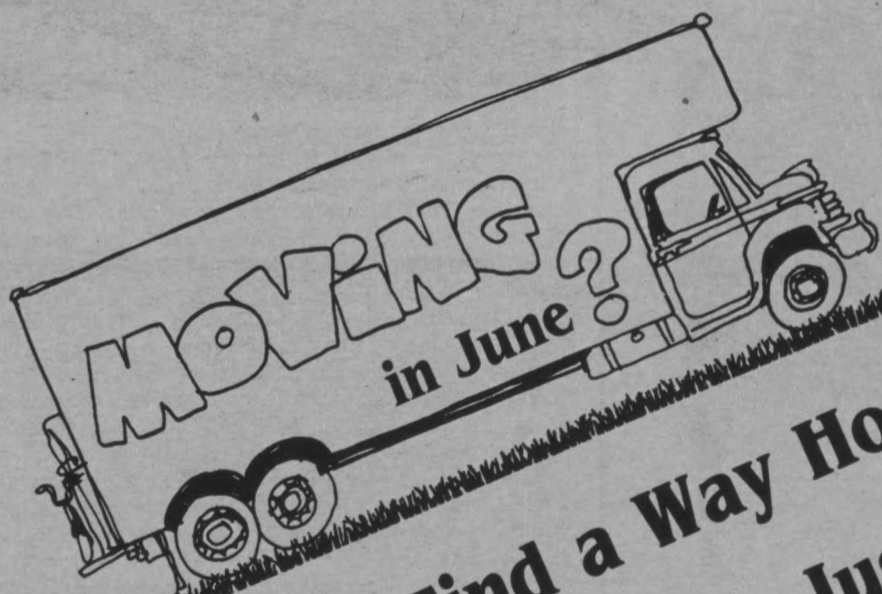
TONY POLLOCK/Daily Nexus

A few noted companies of quality systems include Crimestopper Products Inc., Clifford Electronics Inc., and Alpine Electronics of America Inc. Crimestopper is the only one of these companies that is distinguished for the do-it-yourself models.

Alternatives to these crime deterrents involve extensive achievements in microprocessors. More discriminating computers are being developed that will aid the motion detectors to distinguish between actual theft and the force of the wind or people accidentally brushing up against it.

Other microchips will be able to inform the owner of the car of its security status via the remote control. This will tell the owner all perturbations the car encounters, but will indicate whether it is a theft attempt or something else. And not only that, but the Lo-Jack Corp. has developed a microchip transceiver that will broadcast a signal to the authorities so they can pinpoint its location.

And of course, there is one deterrent to crime that doesn't strain your wallet or your brain extensively: lock your door!



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the last minute!"

# Looking Out For The Safety Of Your Car

By Liahna Gordon  
Contributor

Imagine driving home on a Saturday night with your best friend. You make a left-hand turn, and suddenly you are blinded by bright lights. You slam on your brakes, but the road is still wet from this afternoon's rain. The brakes lock, sending you skidding out of control. Before you even have time to breathe, the bright lights and the car they are attached to barrel into you, head on. The passenger's seat

moves forward, increasing the speed and force with which your friend hits the windshield. Although your seatbelt keeps you from flying into the dash, the force of the impact drives the steering column up and back, crushing your skull.

Unfortunately, this scenario is not uncommon. No matter how much we like to think serious accidents can't happen to us, there is a grave possibility that they will. We may, however, help protect ourselves from serious injury by taking some preventive measures.

The most important of these measures is to buy a car that is structurally safe. Cars of different sizes, makes and models perform differently in accidents. Sometimes, it can

determine life or death for its passengers. Every year the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration conducts crash tests of the new cars released on the market. The cars, occupied by dummies belted into the driver's seat and front-passenger seat, are crashed into a wall at 35 miles per hour. Instruments record the force of the crash on the dummies.

Although these tests determine an automobile's crash-worthiness in head-on collisions (the most common type of crash in the real world), they say nothing about its performance in a side collision or roll-over. Nor does it rate the car's ability to avoid an accident. Nonetheless, it is currently the most reliable test of a car's structural safety.

Every year, *Consumer Reports Magazine* reviews the tests performed by the NHTSA, and publishes the results. Autos are categorized by size, and ranked according to the seriousness of injury to the driver and passenger probable, as determined by the NHTSA test.

In the small car category, the cars allowing either minor or no injury to both its passengers include the 4-door Chevrolet Nova, 2-door Ford Escort, 2-door Toyota Celica, and 2-door Toyota MR2. Those reporting virtually certain severe or fatal injury include the 2-door Chevrolet Spring, Dodge Colt Vista wagon, Plymouth Colt Vista wagon, 2-door Yugo GV. (Car model is given, because even a slight variation on the angle of the shoulderbelt, as sometimes exists between 2- and 4-door models, can dramatically change a car's crash protection.)

The 2-door Ford Mustang, 4-door Pontiac Sunbird, 4-door Volvo DL and Volvo DL wagon performed best among compact cars. The worst in this category were the 2-door Dodge Shadow, 2-door Merkur XR4Ti, Nissan Maxima wagon, and 2-door Plymouth Sundance.

The medium-size category was headed by 4-door models of the Buick Century, Chevrolet Celebrity, Olds Cutlas Ciera, and Pontiac 6000. The most dangerous were 4-doors Audi 5000S, Chrysler Le Baron GTS, Dodge Lancer, and Peugeot 505, as well as 2-door Chrysler Le Baron.

Among large cars, the 2-door Buick Le Sabre and Olds Delta '88 won out, while the 4-door Buick Electra and Olds Ninety Eight had some serious problems.

Vans of all models performed poorly, the worst being Chevrolet Astro and GMC Safari. Because they do not have much up front to protect the occupants, vans habitually perform poorly in the test. Their sheer mass, however, may cause them to do better in real-world accidents.

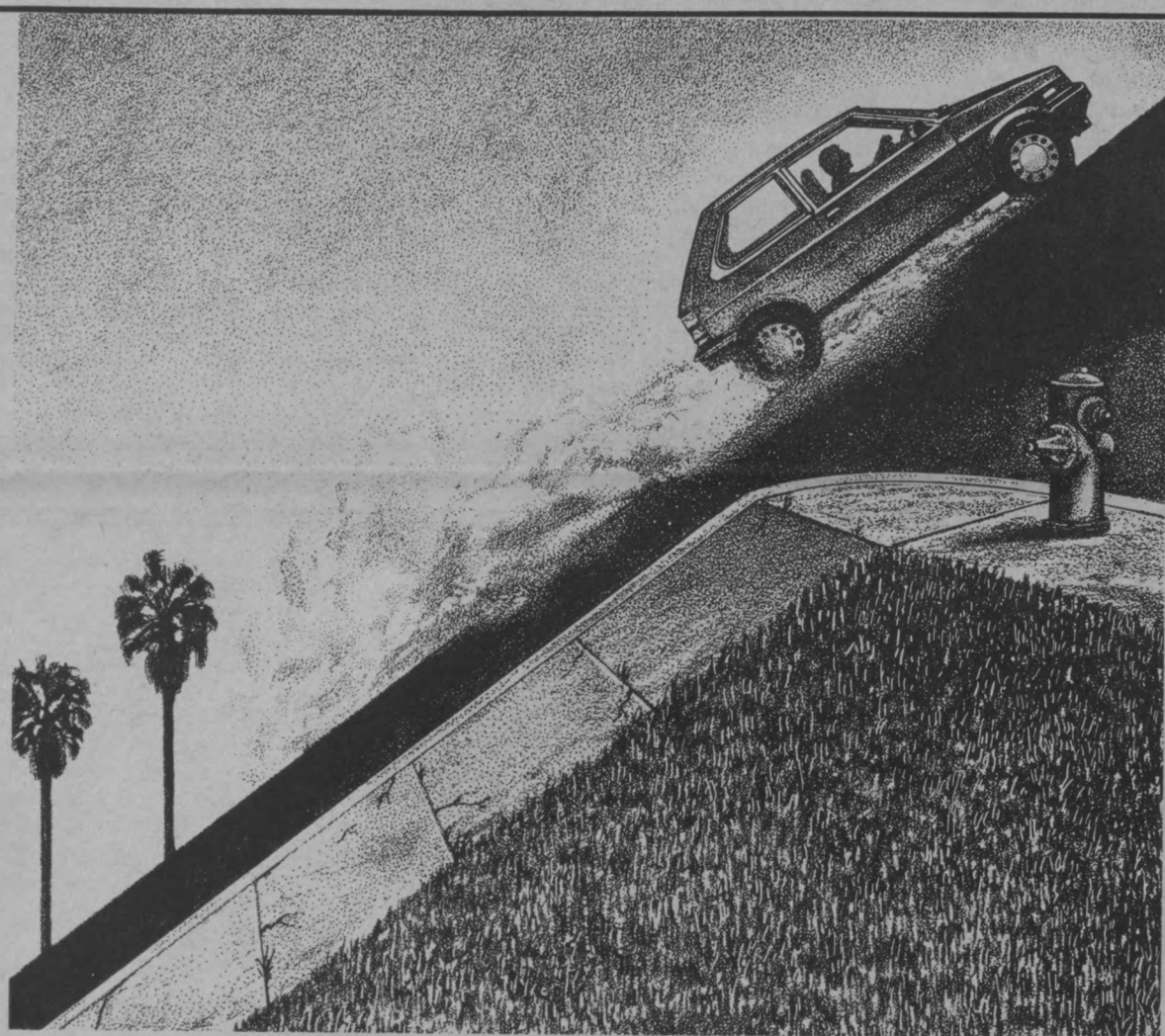
One of the main factors in determining a car's crash protectiveness is the steering column. On many of the cars listed as causing nearly certain severe or fatal injury, the steering column moved up and back, or rotated into the path of the driver's head upon impact. Whereas a driver may have otherwise escaped an accident with minor injuries, a structural problem like this can cause death.

Remember that size of the automobile is also important. If a small car collides head-on with a large car, the large one will fare better every time. The extra metal simply provides more resistance to the crash.

All the major American car companies are now starting to install new equipment to help prevent accidents and reduce injuries to accident victims. One such preventative measure is the antilock brake, which prevents accidents by allowing for safe, straight stops during panic braking situations or on slippery surfaces. They are especially effective in otherwise difficult braking situations: in snow or ice, on a curve, etc. When normal brakes are applied in these situations, they are likely to lock, sending the car skidding or spinning out of control. Antilock brakes prevent this. A sensor at each wheel can determine when a brake is about to lock. A computer takes over the braking at this instant, lessening the pressure on the wheel until deceleration ceases, and then applies pressure again. Ford plans to have anti-lock brakes as an option available to all customers by the mid-1990s, while Chrysler hopes to do the same by 1991.

Many companies are also aiming to make air bags optional or standard equipment on their automobiles. While in the past attention has been called toward installing automatic seatbelts, car makers are now moving toward air bags. The reason is that many automatic seatbelts are detachable, and will be used less often than manual belts. As for those that are not detachable, they may interfere with getting in and out of a car. Thus, manufacturers are looking toward the more unobtrusive air bag. Chrysler will offer airbags as standard equipment in most of their 1990 passenger cars, while General Motors will install them in three million cars by 1992.

Antilock brakes, air bags, and most importantly, basic structural strength are important factors to consider when buying a car. Not only are they psychologically comforting, but they may save your life.



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