



INDUSTRY TRENDS

KEEPING ABREAST OF THE AUTOMOTIVE INDUSTRY

The automobile industry is on the edge of many changes and developments that will once again thrust it into the forefront of industrial America.

Because so many of these changes are rapidly taking place and a number are influenced by outside sources, *Outlook* believes it would be in the best interest of NAPA Jobbers to keep you informed of some timely developments and projections concerning the automobile industry.

Periodically we will take a look at developments and changes, as well as key legislation, that will play a major role in shaping the future of the automobile industry.

1986 CAR SALES & PRODUCTION FORECASTS

The Automotive Market Research Council (AMRC) says car sales and production for 1986 are expected to drop somewhat from predicted 1985 levels, but the automotive aftermarket will grow. The AMRC forecast for 1985 projects total U.S. sales of 10.6 million vehicles and North American production of 9 million units. For 1986 the AMRC forecasts a slight drop to 10.5 million autos sold and 8.7 million produced.

CAR BREAKDOWN SURVEY

The American Automobile Association (AAA), in a recent survey, says that car starting problems made up almost 50% of their 17.8 million emergency calls in 1984. Other problems included mechanical failures (36%), flat tires (10%), and members who locked themselves out of their cars, lost their keys or ran out of gas (3%).

WINDSHIELD IMPROVEMENTS SAVING LIVES

According to a recent report by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA), compulsory windshield improvements, directed by the Federal government, are saving lives and preventing serious facial injuries.

NHTSA's report looked at the costs and benefits of two requirements: the use of high penetration resistant (HPR) glass in windshields and the replacement of rubber gaskets with adhesive bonding mountings in domestic autos and trucks and clips inside the rubber gaskets of Volkswagens.

The report showed that HPR glass stayed whole at double the speeds of pre-HPR glass and prevented numerous serious cuts and fractures. The use of clips and adhesive bonding cut the number of passenger ejections in half and did not increase the risk to those passengers not ejected.

Another important factor the NHTSA study found was that HPR glass only added \$6.75 to the cost of a car (over its lifetime).

WOMEN WANT BETTER PROTECTION

Auto makers have come to realize the big role women play in pur-

chasing the majority of cars sold today — whether it's buying the car for themselves or influencing their male companion's decision. Contradicting the widely held belief that men and women look for different features when buying a car, studies now show that the tastes of males and females are similar in purchasing a car except for one area — security.

A majority of women have stated that their major concerns with the purchase of a car are intrusion, breakdown and what happens when they bring their car into the repair shop. Car manufacturers are attempting to undertake all three.

Very shortly manufacturer-installed security systems will hamper thieves by automatically locking car doors all the time and if anyone tries something suspicious a built-in "panic" button will start the car's lights flashing and the horn honking. Manufacturers will also make available a push-button, pocket-size remote control device for easy entry by the owner.

Detroit car-makers are taking two approaches to the threat of breakdowns. The first approach relies on "fail soft" parts that allow a car to creak home in all but the most adverse circumstances. For example, run-flat tires, engine-controlled computers that are able to compensate for under-the-hood problems and parts that give plenty of warning before breaking are just some of the solutions auto makers have implemented or plan on implementing to solve the problem of breakdown.

The second overall solution to breakdowns by Detroit auto makers is aimed at increasing a car's ability to take misuse. American made cars used to be able to take horrible abuse, get fixed cheaply and go on running for years to come. But that has changed with the swing to smaller, more efficient models. Therefore, engineers are working to widen the range through which parts will work. Early warning lights are being added to warn when something is going wrong before it actually happens. Also, fluid capacities are being expanded.

Finally, some manufacturers are pushing for "modular repairs." Instead of trying to decide what is wrong, the future might see car parts and components grouped in modular sub-assemblies. In other words, a power booster and anti-lock system would be built into the master cylinder, there might be self-contained air conditioners, or a module responsible for all lighting functions. Should something go wrong with one of these components, it would simply mean pulling it out and replacing it with a new module.

AVERAGE AGE OF CARS STILL GOING UP

The average age of cars and trucks on the road has gone up despite recent increases in new car sales. The average age of cars is now 7.2 years and the average age of trucks is now 7.4 years (the highest age of trucks since 1960).

