

Testimony of

Arthur M. Miller

President Independent Garage Owners of Washington County

Chapter 4 of the Automotive Service Councils of Pa.

on House Bill 562, P.N. 589

Before the Transportation Committee

of the

House of Representatives

Wednesday, August 19, 1981

My name is Arthur M. Miller. My home address is Box 148, R. D. 1 Canonsburg, Pa. 15317. My repair shop is Houston Auto Service, Inc. 18 West Grant Street, Houston, Pa. 15342

My qualifications to speak are listed on the page following my testimony.

I am convinced beyond any reasonable doubt that our present semi-annual vehicle safety inspection program is superior to any annual program one may propose. Twenty-two years of being right there under the vehicle day by day have shown me why. My reasons follow.

First I offer the results of monitoring my own inspection records for 1977 and the first 2 quarters of 1978. Vehicles needing repairs of some kind which related to safety averaged 70.4 percent for the period. Vehicles needing repairs to the brake system averaged 20.9%. Repairs needed to the exhaust system averaged 19.6% and steering & suspension repairs needed, 17.4%.

A more recent survey of our records has given similar statistics which support our convictions.

If one can believe the manufacturer's ads, modern vehicles will practically run forever without problems and very little maintenance. The owner's handbook which comes with each new vehicle is more realistic. It recommends long service intervals for ideal operating conditions and shorter intervals for other operating conditions. Very few vehicles operate under ideal conditions in Pennsylvania.

Nevertheless most people opt for the longer service interval. Until perhaps the 1960s the average vehicle was brought in for lubrication and an oil change every 1000 to 2000 miles. This gave opportunity to detect cracked brake hoses, steel brake lines badly rusted or rubbed almost through by a mis-aligned tailpipe or one with a broken hanger, bald tires, loose steering & suspension parts, leaking axle seals, broken spring leaves & frame and underbody defects. This gave 4 to 6 more opportunities to prevent trouble than the present service intervals.

Most experienced service people discount the validity of the published results of some surveys which show accidents are seldom caused by the mechanical condition of the vehicle. A vehicle in good condition can be very forgiving of driver error. You have all seen black tire marks on the pavement. You also have seen black mark-space-black mark-space-black mark-space for considerable distances on the pavement. Some one drove too fast, too close & couldn't stop properly. The dots and dashes were caused by faulty shock absorbers. The primary function of shock absorbers is to keep the tires on the road, not to give a soft ride as is commonly believed.

Dropping off the pavement, due to our poorly maintained berms, and then swerving across the center line into an on coming vehicle or overturning in the medial strip, are common accidents. Many could have been prevented with better tires, shock absorbers or other properly functioning steering & suspension parts. These mal-functioning parts will go undetected up to twice as long with just one safety inspection per year.

Some vehicle safety related parts fail in proportion to time as well as mileage. In our area floor pans, frames, brake lines, fuel lines and fuel tanks and exhaust systems rust more rapidly than they do in most areas in the U.S. When rust reaches an advanced stage it needs to be checked at least twice a year to avoid fires and accidents.

Tires get cut and broken anytime and may fail suddenly. This is especially true with our pot hole situation. We see more bent wheels and broken tires since the deterioration of our highways. One year is too long an interval for checking such components. Many people believe they have lots of tread left because you normally see only the outer edges. This is especially true of winter treads. Looking from underneath is is easy to see the tire is worn out or soon will be.

The ressurection of older vehicles from salvage and recycling yards since gasoline and car prices have gone "sky-high" is another reason for maintaining our present twice per year safety inspection.

Pennsylvania traffic conditions demand more of the vehicle than many areas. More stopping, starting and accelerating into fast traffic lanes accelerate wear on brakes, tires, steering, suspension and turn signal bulbs, switches and flashers.

Exhaust components are weakened more from internal corrosion than external. This is especially true of mufflers and low spots in tail pipes. This goes undetected until a leak develops loud enough for the motorist to hear or breaks off and drags on the pavement or falls off altogether. Twice per year inspection is none too often to examine the average exhaust system to avoid carbon monoxide poisoning of the occupants.

More miles are being driven than ever before. While the rate of increase has been slowed, nevertheless the most conservative figure I have seen from any study is a 3% increase in highway miles traveled. Items such as brakes, tires, and steering wear proportionate to miles traveled under average conditions.

Just a few years ago Carnegie-Mellon students conducted a survey of the Pa. inspection system. Most prominent in their findings, which received great publicity, was the conclusion that new vehicles needed no safety inspection for the first 2 years of use. The very day the news media announced their findings I had in my shop a Ford station wagon less than 2 years old. It needed not only new front disc brakes, but also a brake rotor. The old brake rotor was worn too far to resurface. I knew the vehicle belonged to a mechanical engineer who was very highly regarded in his field and a professor at Carnegie-Mellon. When he picked up his vehicle I said, "I bet you were the faculty advisor to the students who did the study of the inspection program." He said, "I was." I will let you imagine the spirited and lengthy discussion which followed.

New cars have misaligned exhaust sometimes; sometimes brake hoses installed so as to rub on adjacent surfaces; often improperly adjusted headlamps; sometimes body sheet metal not joined properly underneath; sometimes fasteners are missings.

Even those persons who intend to take the best care of their vehicles often do not because of busy schedules and personal and business problems which arise.

Twice per year safety inspection is the incentive and motivation most people need to keep their vehicles in safe, economical operating condition.

Most motorists will save money through the preventative maintenance encouraged by mandatory inspection twice each year.

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Business: Houston Auto Service, 18 W. Grant St., Houston, Pa. 15342

Inspection Station: 3910, since 1959.

Clean record.

First certified automotive repairman in U. S. 1969. Certified and recertified by CARS (Certified Automotive Repairman's Society), now merged with NIASE (National Institute for Automotive Service Excellence). Certified in first series of tests by NATCB (National Automotive Technicians Certification Board). Certified in first series of tests by NIASE in all areas tested and recertified in 1978.

S. K. Tool Mechanics Hall of Fame in 1973.

Compiled training manual and film for instructing inspection mechanics in 1968 for IGO Pennsylvania.

Charter member Independent Garage Owners of Washington County; served as president three times. Held every office, including two years as president of IGO Pennsylvania (now ASC Pennsylvania); Co-founder of ASC Federal Credit Union and president for eleven years. Editor and publisher of the Keystone Independent from 1967 to 1974.

Attended first of several meetings with the Inspection Division in 1963.

Initiated Powder Puff Mechanics classes with materials for IGO Pennsylvania.

Perform vehicle repairs and inspections at least eight hours every working day.