Cost of Auto Faults Put at $7 Billion

By Jack Anderson

Americans pay $7 billion a year in excess costs for gas, oil and tires because their cars have hidden faults that a simple diagnostic test would turn up.

This is the astonishing finding of Sen. Phil Hart's Antitrust Subcommittee, based on studies of car inspection and repair figures.

Even the new car buyer, Hart found, can't be sure he won't wind up with a wobbly-wheeled, gas-gulping, oil-burning, chrome-plated lemon.

Hart's statisticians found that bad wheel alignment, dirty plugs, faulty carburetor adjustment and the like cost drivers seven-tenths of a cent per mile. Applying this to the trillion miles a year driven by Americans, Hart reached his $7 billion figure.

To stem the costs and the fatalities, Hart wants to set up nationwide self-supporting diagnostic centers to inspect all newly bought cars—old and new models alike—and to check repairs made on cars in crashes.

Hart also plans to cite the shameful $8 billion to $10 billion, by his estimate, that Americans spend on shoddy, unneeded and undone car repairs.

President's News

We recently concluded from studying two of President Nixon's private news summaries that he gets a highly condensed view of the news. This has brought a response from White House aide Pat Buchanan, who prepares the President's news digests.

"Serious consideration has been given," wrote Buchanan, "to putting you on the list for the President's Daily News Summary—both in your interest and ours. Seriously, while the quotes taken from the news summary to date have been accurate, they have not been placed in their proper context, in our view . . .

"(You) noted that the most complex stories had been reduced to single paragraphs, and then went on to quote several. The quotes were accurate. What was in error was that this was not a 'typical news summary' . . .

"The same day . . . the President also received his weekly magazine report running 27 pages double-space, his daily television report running 13 pages double-space, and his news 'top' which I draft at around seven in the morning, covering the major items in the Eastern press that morning and the Chicago Tribune.

"Finally, this is not an effort to engage in a quarrel, or do a little nit-picking or cavil on the ninth part of a hair. We think that seen in its entirety the President's Daily News Summary—a four- or five-part daily briefing running up to fifty pages—can stand the scrutiny of the most objective reporters."

Washington Whirl

Missing Marker—J. Edgar Hoover, already furious over the burglarizing of an FBI field office, has hushed up another humiliating theft. His birth plaque is missing from its place of honor in Washington's Capitol Hill Methodist Church. The bronze marker, commemorating the birthplace of the revered FBI chief, disappeared several weeks ago from beneath the John Edgar Hoover Memorial Window. Rev. James P. Archibald, the pastor, reported the theft to the Washington police, not the FBI.

Alcoholics Insolvent—The White House, which has done a lot of preaching against alcoholism, has failed to request a penny to prevent alcoholism and to rehabilitate alcoholics. This would be possible under the Alcohol Abuse Act, which Congress passed unanimously last year. Congress has also authorized $170 million for the program, but President Nixon still hasn't gotten around to asking for the money. Now Sen. Frank Moss (D-Utah) has appealed to Sen. Warren Magnuson (D-Wash.), a power on the Senate Appropriations Committee, to fund the act without waiting for the President. In a private letter to Magnuson, Moss wrote angrily: "It is unbelievable that this important program has been shoved aside by this administration without a single penny to carry out its urgent objectives."

Forest Foray—The South Vietnamese army's setback in Laos has been offset by unpublicized successes inside South Vietnam. The dreaded Uminh Forest, with its dark mangrove swamps and maze of waterways, has been infested with Vietcong for years. There is still talk in Saigon about an entire French paratroop battalion that made a foray into the forest and disappeared forever. A South Vietnamese infantry division, however, has been quietly clearing the Vietcong out of the forest.

Wiretap Worry—The Justice Department has taken quiet steps to keep its cases from being thrown out of court because of wiretaps. Deputy Attorney General Richard Kleindienst issued an internal memo on March 10 assigning the Internal Security Division to work up the legal justification for telephone taps and electronic bugs. Explains a subsequent internal memo: "The Internal Security Division will review the pertinent materials in connection with the installation and overhearings and will furnish . . . appropriate legal memoranda and other pleadings necessary to deal with the legal contentions relating thereto."

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