

GM's Head Apologizes To 'Harassed' Car Critic

PHOTO 128/16
By Jerry T. Baulch
Associated Press

General Motors' president, James M. Roche apologized yesterday for any part his firm may have had in private-eye harassment of a critic of auto safety, author-lawyer Ralph Nader.

But Roche disclaimed any GM responsibility for "sex lures"—the strawberry blond in the supermarket Nader says tried to lure him to her apartment and the strange brunette in the drug store who wanted to discuss foreign affairs.

Deploring "the kind of harassment to which Mr. Nader has apparently been subjected," the GM head told a Senate committee, "I am just as shocked and outraged" as the senators.

Roche said he hoped the senators and Nader would accept his apologies.

Later in the hearing Vicent

Gillen, the head of the detective agency which investigated Nader, took the stand and contended Roche had not apologized. "Let's get this clear," he said. "Mr. Roche apologized if they (the events described

See NADER, A6, Col. 4



JAMES ROCHE



ALOYSIUS F. POWER

Staff Photos by Ken Feil

... "upset" by whole thing' ... takes full responsibility



By Ken Feil, Staff Photographer

SENATE PROBERS—Members of a Senate Government Operations subcommittee listen to answers from General Motors executives. From left at yesterday's hearing are:

Sen. Abraham Ribicoff (D-Conn.), chairman of the subcommittee; Sen. Robert F. Kennedy (D-N.Y.); Sen. Fred R. Harris (D-Okla.) and Sen. Henry M. Jackson (D-Wash.).

by Nader) happened, and they didn't."

Subcommittee members then turned to Roche, sitting in the spectator section, and asked whether he was "sorry it (the investigation) happened." Roche replied that "was the correct interpretation" and took the stand for a second time to stress that he was apologizing and hoped the apology would be accepted.

(Nader, who sat a few feet behind Roche, told United Press International he accepted Roche's apology. But when he took the witness stand he called the investigation "an attempt to obtain lurid details and grist for the invidious use of slurs and slanders that goes well beyond affront and becomes an encroachment upon a public interest.")

The 32-year-old crusader for auto safety, author of "Unsafe at Any Speed," testified earlier this month about peculiar events that happened to him after his book was published. Nader told of gumshoes following him and sleuths quizzing his friends and old college acquaintances about his sex life, asking whether he was antisemitic, if he belonged to any left-wing groups.

Sorenson GM Counsel

Roche's chief counsel in answering the charges was Theodore (Ted) Sorenson, former special assistant to President John F. Kennedy. And one of Roche's chief interrogators was the late President's brother, Sen. Robert F. Kennedy (D-N.Y.), who suggested that the GM investigation might have involved blackmail.

Roche said GM had started an investigation of Nader before his book came out and before he was scheduled to appear before the subcommittee. Roche said GM wanted to determine if Nader had any connection with damage claims against the corporation.

Roche said "while there can be no disagreement over General Motors' legal right to ascertain necessary facts preparatory to litigation . . . I am not here to excuse, condone or justify in any way our investigation" of Nader.

The GM head said he was surprised to learn only two weeks ago of his firm's investigation of Nader although it was begun last November by GM's legal department. But Roche held himself fully responsible for "any action authorized or initiated by any

officer of the corporation which may have had any bearing on the incidents related to our investigation" of Nader.

Subcommittee chairman Abraham A. Ribicoff (D-Conn.) said Nader was put under surveillance after it was announced he would testify before senators and that this continued until the press learned of it. Ribicoff asked Roche whether he didn't consider this "most unworthy of American business."

"Yes, I would agree," Roche replied, adding that this was "a new and strange experience for me and for General Motors."

As for the things that happened to Nader, Roche told the senators to the best of his knowledge the "investigation initiated by GM, contrary to some speculation, did not employ girls as sex lures, did not employ detectives giving false names, did not employ Allied Investigations, Inc., did not use recording devices during interviews, did not follow Mr. Nader in Iowa and Pennsylvania, did not have him under surveillance during the day he testified before this subcommittee, did not follow him in any private place and did not constantly ring his private telephone number late at night

ing the investigation because he said Nader was something of "a mystery man" because as a lawyer he did not have a law office.

Also, he said, GM wanted to know about a man who wrote a book charging that one of its products was inherently unsafe.

Kennedy said there was no mystery about Nader, that he was a young lawyer who had just gotten out of law school.

Ribicoff referred to the in-

vestigators surveillance of Nader and the questioning of former teachers, employes, and friends about his sex habits and said this is not "a pretty issue."

Holding the investigation report in his hand, Ribicoff contended there was little in it about Nader's legal associations or any possible connections with Corvair litigation. He contended the investigation "was an attempt to downgrade and smear a man."

with false statements or anonymous warnings."

Sen. Kennedy praised Roche for a "forthright statement," but said he questioned whether the GM investigation of Nader got into intimidation, harassment "or possibly blackmail."

The subcommittee also should know, Kennedy said whether a GM statement of March 9 acknowledging the investigation was misleading or false in denying harassment.

But Kennedy agreed that GM was justified in the face of charges about the Corvair to make an investigation to protect its name and its stockholders.

Roche said the March 9 statement may have been misleading but added that might have been due to lack of communications in GM.

Kennedy expressed doubt that a firm such as GM could be that inefficient and added: "I like my GM car, but you kind of shake me up."

A 'Mystery Man'

Committee members sharply questioned General Motors chief counsel Aloysious Power and his chief assistant, L. B. Breitenstein.

Power acknowledged order-