

Auto companies zero in on federal fuel standards

Auto manufacturers may be able to exceed the required 27.5 miles-per-gallon federal fuel economy standard in the latter part of the 1980s, a federal task force reports.

The introduction of light weight, more fuel-efficient automobiles by the automakers also could reduce fuel consumption by up to 1.3 million barrels of oil a day by the 1990s compared to 1975, says the task force, even though auto use is projected to increase by nearly 50 per cent in the time period.

The conclusions are contained in a draft report prepared by the Interagency Task Force on Motor Vehicle Goals Beyond 1980 for the President's Energy Resources Council. The task force was set up in March 1975 to study motor vehicle fuel economy goals after 1980, keeping in mind the need for compatibility with environmental, safety and economic objectives.

Automobiles are the largest single consumer of petroleum, using about 41 per cent of the

total U.S. supply—about 5 million barrels a day. The task force consisted of representatives from the U.S. Department of Transportation, the Environmental Protection Agency, the Energy Research and Development Administration, the Federal Energy Administration and the National Science Foundation. The task force manager is Hamilton Herman, Assistant Secretary of Transportation for Systems Development and Technology.

Fuel savings cannot be accomplished without the auto industry making substantial investments and taking large market risks, the report says.

It adds that reaching the fuel economy goals may result in lower levels of occupant protection and higher levels of exhaust emission than wanted, as well as reduced automobile carrying capacity, acceleration and trailer-pulling capability than is possessed by today's typical full-size automobile.

The report concludes the problem facing the federal government and the auto industry

is how to convince the American public of the need for a change-over to more fuel-efficient motor vehicles and to encourage them to purchase cars which will achieve better fuel economy. "Without public acceptance and purchases, the most fuel-efficient design is useless," the task force said. "The mandated 27.5 miles-per-gallon (mpg) fleet fuel consumption standard in 1985, for example, appears to be technologically feasible, but can only be realized with public cooperation and full understanding of the purpose."

The Energy Policy and Conservation act of 1975 sets a minimum average fuel economy standard an auto manufacturer must reach for his entire passenger car production in a model year. The regulation requires 18.0 mpg for 1978 models and increases to 27.5 mpg for 1985 models.

Among the steps the report said manufacturers would be required to take to reach the 1985 standard is a reduction in automobile acceleration below

the current average of zero to 60 miles per hour in 15 seconds. It is possible, the report added, that the consumer will not accept the less powerful cars.

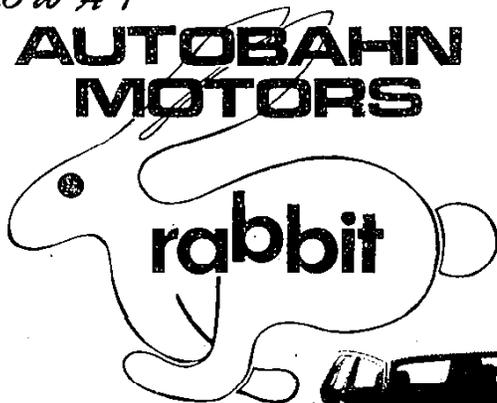
Other required steps outlined by the task force include incentives which would lead to smaller cars taking a larger share of the market than the present 25 per cent, faster development and introduction of upgraded transmissions, and introduction of innovative auto body structures in the early 1980s.

However, manufacturers who build only small cars probably would not have to take any of these steps, the report noted. As a result, the full-time manufacturers, including General Motors, Ford and Chrysler, may be placed at a competitive disadvantage.

The larger auto companies would have to make their smaller cars lighter in weight or, more likely, lower in performance, to raise the mpg level above the 27.5 mpg standard.

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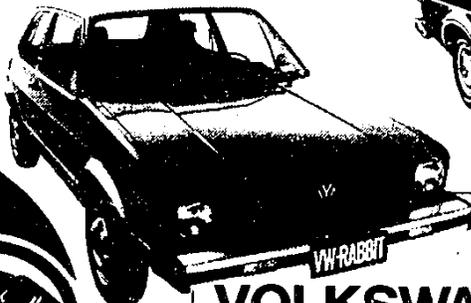
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