

GM program speeds accident analyses

In a move to unify and simplify traffic accident analysis, General Motors will sell its own computer software program for accident reconstruction.

Alexander C. McKeen, director of engineering analysis for GM's current engineering and manufacturing services staff, said the decision follows a successful pilot test of the program last month with the Illinois State Police.

The copyrighted program, called FotoGram®, is the first of its kind offered by GM.

Illinois troopers were first introduced to FotoGram at a training session earlier this year at the GM Proving Ground in Milford.

ILLINOIS State Police Superintendent Lalmulla A. Nargelenns said, "This technology allows us to

examine an ordinary photograph of a traffic accident scene and extract more detailed and more precise information, thus permitting more detailed analysis.

"The Illinois State Police first utilized troopers to reconstruct traffic accidents in 1981. Presently, there are 20 trained state police accident reconstructionists. These officers investigate over 300 fatal and serious injury traffic accidents annually. The GM FotoGram will increase the efficiency and speed of these investigations.

FotoGram draws on photographs

of accident scenes to chart road and tire marks made during an accident.

Accidents on most road surfaces produce distinctive marks that can be analyzed through FotoGram.

By converting these marks to mathematical reference points, FotoGram allows users to plot a car's course in an accident and gain a better understanding of the accident and its cause.

"THIS SYSTEM is ahead of others in the field," said McKeen.

"Instead of analyzing only four photographic reference points, the program will analyze up to 10 refer-

ence points, selecting from that number those four that best display the photo field.

"With these photographs and the data they generate, investigators can produce a two-dimensional plan view or map of road conditions and vehicle movement faster, simpler, and more accurately than through conventional means," he said. The program also can reduce or enlarge the scale of accident data for easier map and model reconstruction.

The program will accept photographs from any clear negative. It works on IBM or IBM-compatible

personal computers. "With these tools, our engineers can complete in a day what it took more than a week to accomplish through accident reports and conventional analysis," McKeen said.

ACCIDENT investigations typically have been done by hand with little or no computer assistance. Accident investigators don't always have time to take detailed notes, often the key to understanding the events leading to multiple or complicated accidents.

"If an accident occurred at a busy intersection, traffic can quickly

erase evidence of the accident, as can highway construction or road repair," McKeen said.



Terry Gibb

Drivers should check cars oftener

Two interesting facts from Maggie Van Hatten of the Michigan Energy Administration:

- 70 percent of all gasoline purchased is at self-serve pumps.
- October is "Car Care Month" in Michigan.

What do those two facts have in common other than the obvious? According to Van Hatten, because of the increasing popularity of self-serve gas stations, people are not having their cars checked out regularly or following a regular maintenance schedule.

MANY OF US can remember when buying gas also meant getting your oil checked, tire pressure looked at and windows washed. And in the process of checking the oil, a visual "once-over" sometimes spotted minor problems before they became major ones.

A few vehicle maintenance tips will be useful anytime — not just during car care month. With proper maintenance you'll also lower your fuel costs, which is why you switched to self-serve in the first place.

Check tire pressure during pre-drive and service routine. Do any of the tires appear low? Check with a good tire gauge once a month before driving, as the pressure increases with the heat produced from driving. Proper inflation means inflating tires to the upper level of the recommended range.

For the best price and fuel economy: Buy only the octane level your vehicle needs. Use the octane level recommended in your owner's manual or just high enough to prevent "knocking" while driving. Using a higher octane gas will not make up for lack of maintenance or increase a car's mileage per gallon.

Use the new high-mpg motor oils. Reports indicate that these new "slippery" oils may improve mpg by 3-5 percent. Oil that is too thick will increase friction among engine parts. The increased resistance causes the engine to work harder and results in lower gas mileage.

Check your owner's manual for recommended schedule of maintenance checks for your car.

A simple tune-up can improve your car's fuel efficiency by up to 12 percent. For a badly neglected car, a routine tune-up has increased that percentage by twice that amount.

TUNE-UP TIME Test:

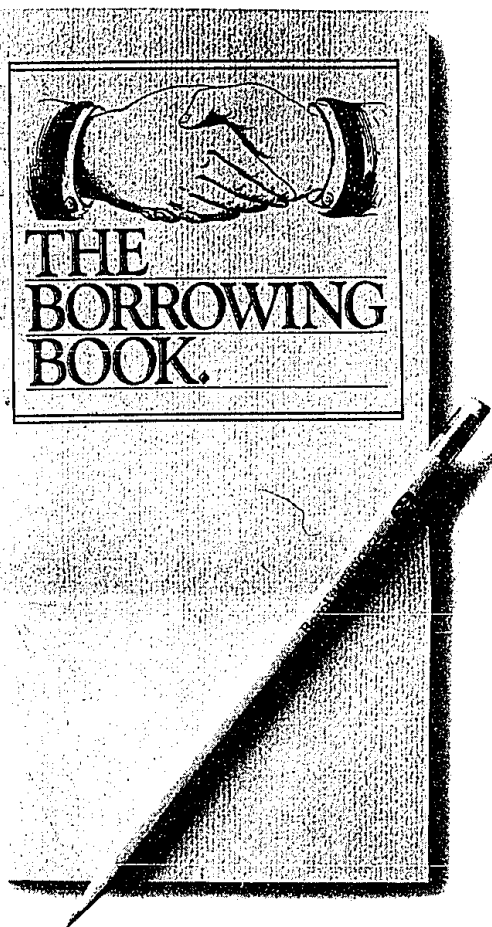
1. If your mpg has started to slip gradually, a tune-up might be needed.
2. Check your tires. Low or uneven tire pressure can cause the reduced mpg.
3. Your engine should perform smoothly — no sputters, coughs or hesitations — and be responsive in normal driving conditions.
4. A well-tuned car should pull away without stalling after only a 30-second warm-up.
5. To pinpoint specific problems, take your vehicle to a diagnostic center. Diagnostic testing can eliminate unnecessary repairs.

THE FREQUENCY of your maintenance depends on your driving habits, road conditions, the type of vehicle.

Keep maintenance and gas mileage records for your car to help determine your car's needs.

Eco-Up: For a free car-care litter bag and three brochures on car care, send a self-addressed, stamped envelope to Concern Detroit at the address below. These brochures are especially useful to new drivers and/or people unfamiliar with car engines.

The Consumer Mailbag answers your questions. Address mail to The Consumer Mailbag, Concern Detroit, 1025 Shelby, Detroit 48226.



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