If GM loses, front-wheel-drive cars will disappear

I spend a lot of time talking to engineers, not much talking to lawyers. So when I got a call the other day from a lawyer researching a product liability case, I was more or less unprepared for the line of reasoning.

I was ready to dismiss the guy as an idiot, but the more I thought about it, the more I realized he was simply following a routine that characterizes much of the litigation that already has wiped out the light aircraft industry in this country and is slowly chisciling away at the auto business as well.

THE CASE he was pursuing was startling. He claimed front-wheel drive cars — which today account for roughly 80 percent of the cars built in the world — are dangerous

First, of course, he wanted to sue General Motors, although the technology be was questioning (front-wheel drive) was in volume use by Saab, Audi, Volkswagen, Honda and Chrysler long before GM. The reason you sue General Motors is because GM has deep pockets, and foreign companies are much more expensive to take to court — the phone bill alone will kill you.

SECONDLY, HE was convinced SECUNDATE, HE WAS CONVINCED that engineering to Improve safety is driven mainly by guilt. That GM went to the trouble to develop low-cost antilock brakes, he argued, was an admission of guilt that its front-



wheel drive cars are difficult to con-

I mentioned that GM might have tried to develop antilock brakes sim-ply to improve a car's safety, and thought people might buy them, but I was drifting into alien territory.

He pounded away on the guilt theme and laxed me a copy of the GM owners manual that said you shouldn't hit your brakes if your car

was skidding — GM must be hiding something to say that, he said.

By now, I was thinking my high school driver training instructor, who told me the same thing, was probably guilty, too. Maybe I could sue him . . naw, too late, I thought.

THE LAWYER also had an expert witness — a former GM angineer, who has been soliciting liability cas-es for several years, offering to tes-

As it turned out, GM had already prepared a rebuttal to the expert witness, which is the kind of thing that keeps lawyers at GM busy. The liability lawyer pointed this out to me and then asked why would they bother to do that If GM didn't have something to hide? More guilt.

BY NOW, I was starting to feel sorry for GM. Even worse, I was starting to feel sorry for lawers at GM, which is a little like contributing to a fund to save killer bees. The

conversation had gone far enough.

Actually, after I thought about it, I realized this could well be the liability case it on each all liability cases. If the case could be proven sgainst front-wheel drive, in all likelibood it would drive nearly all of the auto companies in the world out of business overnight.

Ridiculous, I thought. Then I remembered the empty Piper Aircraft factory in Vero Beach, Pia...

More or less as an afterthought, I checked with GM to see if anyone had actually filed any similar lawsuits.

GM legal staff said that there are about six pending at the present time.

Dan McCosh is automotive edi-tor of Popular Science magazine.

business people

Alan Van Campen was named di-rector of special group sales at Allnet Communication Services Inc. In Bingham Farms. Before joining Allnet earlier this year, he held sales and marketling positions with Xerox, Kawasaki, Atari and Cable & Wire-less.

Roger Pryor has joined Plan Tech Inc., Troy-based automotive consult-ing firm as a project manager. A na-tive of Manchester, England, Pryor is a graduate of the University of

Robert Kleiman was promoted to associate professor of finance with early tenure at the Department of Accounting and Finance and the School of Business Administration at Oakland University.

Lawyers Title Insurance Corpora-tion announced the election of Charles Martin as senior vice presi-dent, regional manager in Troy.

Donald Edmunds of Troy has joined the Motor Vehicle Manufac-turers Association of the United States Inc. as manager of pollution reduction.

Joseph Nowak has been named vice president of operations for Huron St. Clair, Rochester, a Masco Industries company that manufactures a variety of automotive trim products and metal stampings for original equipment manufacturers and the automotive aftermarket.

Dennis Hoppe, senior vice presi-Dennis Hoppe, senior vice presi-dent/corporate director of Perish-able Sales, was appointed to the Ex-ecutive Committee, now comprised of seven individuals, and Cliff Dit-thary was promoted to senior vice president of Perishable Sales at Paul Inman Associates Inc. in Farming-ton Hills, one of the largest food bro-

Michael McGrath of West Bloom-field was appointed executive vice president of the CDI Transportation Group.





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Thomas Stimac Jr. was appointed to the position of sales manager, in-dustrial products group at De-Sta-Co, the world's largest manufacturer of toggle clamps.

E. Donald Stokes of West Bloom-field was named vice president of Midwest sales and marketing for the Hachette Magazine Network. John Curtla of Southfield was ap-pointed to vice president, materials management at Stroh Brewery Com-

Michael Porter of Birmingham was appointed vice president, mar-celing at the Stroh Brewery Compa-

Ann Lipanski has joined the Somanetics Corporate on Troy as corporate controller. She will be responsible for the implementation and maintenance of internal control systems, management information systems, financial and SEC reporting and the supervision of accounting expension.

Karen Welters has joined RDH Health Serveles in Troy as place-ment consultant and training facili-tator.

Joseph E. Antonioi chairman, president and CEO of the Kmart Corp, Troy, was honored as the "Retailer of the Year" by the Hardware/Home Improvement Industry Council for the City of Hope National Medical Center at the Chicago Hilton & Towers. He received the "Spirit of Life," the most prestigious honor given on behalf of the City of Hope, at a black tie gala marking the tenth amiversary of industry-wide support for the Duarte, Calif., medical center and its Beckman Research Institute.

marketplace

Film Craft Video twice was fea-ored in cover stories of national eleproduction industry trade publi-

Ross Roy Communications of Bloomfield Hills earned a first-place award in BusinessTV's fourth annual Awards for Business Television. There were 75 entries this year.

Scott Specialty Gases Inc. expanded its Troy production facility by 80 percent. The new facilities were designed and constructed by Campbell/Manix Inc. of Southfield.

C&B Scene, a new public relations and event promotions firm in Southfield, has opened.

The J.J. O'Connell & Associates Inc. in Birmingham has been named to SEUURA Insurance's 1991 President's Circle. J.J. O'Connell & Associates was one of the top 75 independent insurance agencies who carned membership to this year's President's Circle.

Yaffe & Co. of Southfield will be ne advertising agency for Faygo

Dr. Eva Yousbock has founded. North Oakland Dermatology, dedi-cated to providing quality compre-hensive health care of the skin, hair and nails. Located in the Beaumont Medical Office Building in Rochester Hills, Saturday and evening hours are available for her patients' con-venience.

Computer & Engineering Consult-ants Ltd. of Southfield, the Pontiac Growth Group, and Weight Watchers of Baltimore hired Stone, August, Baker Communications Cos. for

marketing communications services.

Compuware Corp. of Farmington Hills will acquire system software supplier XA Systems.

The Troy Marriott Hotel received two Outstanding Achievement Awards from Interstate Hotels Corp. The awards recognize unique achievement in several areas of hotel management and marketing.

Zef & Co. of Troy opened a beauty salon at Big Beaver and Dequindre in the Golden-Gate-shopping plaza. The telephone number is 524-9914.

A Chrysler educational video was recognized by the film industry for ris excellence. The video won a Silver Award of Merit and the Award for Creative Excellence from the U.S. Industrial Film and Video Festival. The video was developed by MVP Communications Inc. of Troy.

Garner's Jewelry and Exchange Inc. hired J.S. Sharon Advertising Inc. of Troy to coordinate market-ing, advertising and public relations for the four-store chain.

PRMI of Southfield opened a vi deo-production department devoted to video brochures, info-mercials, television commercials and training and motivational tapes.

Karsan Inc. in West Bloomfield hired filrsch & Co. Inc. of Birming-ham as their advertising agency.

MicroCODE Inc. of Troy bought the assets and hired members of the development team of WRB Associ-ates Inc. of Troy, the developer of the LADDERS and CIMport computaided design and engineering soft-

Kohl's Department Stores opened its Farmington Hills store in West River Centre, 30150 Grand River. Farmington Hills 48336. Phone num-ber is 442-8999.

Derderian, Kann, Seyferth & Salucci CPAs moved its Troy office to 3155 W. Big Beaver, Suite 260. Troy 48084. The phone and fax numbers remain the same at 649-3400 and 649-2187 respectively.

A.R. Brasch Marketing/Brasch Tech Data in Southfield was honored by Ford Motor Co. with its annual Marketing Excellence Award.

Arbor Drugs Inc. of Troy will ex-pand its store on the southwest cor-ner of Orchard Lake Road and "3 Mile in Farmigton Hills. The store will be 2,800 square feet larger than the store being replaced one block south of the new location.

Woodbridge Inoac Inc. in Troy es-tablished an advanced engineering center at its plant in Bardstown, Ky.

Rossettl Associates Architects of Birmingham moved to 280 N. Wood-ward Avenue, Birmingham 48009, Phone number is 544-0777 and fax number is 644-0778.

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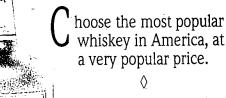
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