

H-200

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD
WASHINGTON, D.C.

ISSUED: January 25, 1980

Forwarded to:

Honorable Joan Claybrook
Administrator
National Highway Traffic Safety
Administration
400 Seventh Street, S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20590

SAFETY RECOMMENDATION(S)

H-80-7

About 9:15 p.m. on April 23, 1979, a compact Ford Courier pickup truck with 12 teenaged occupants was traveling between 64 and 78 mph along a winding country road near Crofton, Maryland, when the driver failed to negotiate a curve to the left. The truck ran off the right side of the road, struck three trees located about 7 feet from the edge of the pavement, and deflected onto the pavement in an overturned position. Ten passengers were killed, and one passenger was seriously injured; the driver was injured slightly. 1/

The pickup truck was equipped with an optional "GT bar" which is a cosmetic metallic bar similar in configuration to a "roll bar." The Safety Board is not aware of any crash performance or accident data which supports or demonstrates the effectiveness of the "GT bar" in a rollover situation and this accident did not provide any additional evidence to substantiate the "GT bar's" performance.

The "GT bar" was located behind the passenger compartment and anchored to the sheetmetal floor in the bed of the pickup. The right front fender, engine, and passenger compartments were in the initial line of impact with the trees and absorbed a major portion of the impact energy before impact with the bar. The bar and its anchorages were subsequently deformed rearward during its minor contact with the trees and final impact with the hard road surface as the vehicle overturned.

1/ For more detailed information about this accident, read "Ford Courier Pickup Truck Fixed-Object Collision, Patuxent Road, Near Crofton, Maryland, April 23, 1979 (NTSB-HAR-79-6)."

Although this particular loading situation is not typical of the loading normally exerted in a pure rollover accident environment, it is still questionable if the bar by itself could have sustained a high magnitude of loading without deforming.

According to a newspaper report, a spokesman for the Ford Motor Company stated that the "GT bar" is sold as a decorative appearance item and is a part of a youth option package. Vehicle sales literature confirms this report. The sales literature does not refer to the bar as a safety device nor does it carry any disclaimer that the bar is not a safety device.

The sale of light trucks and on/off road vehicles has rapidly increased since 1975 despite the recent vehicle sales decline. Light trucks have become a significant percentage of the vehicle sales market and optional "GT bars" have also become a widespread sales item. The Safety Board is concerned that vehicle owners and passengers may be lulled into a false sense of security because the "GT bar" may appear to be a safety item although it apparently was not designed as, tested as, or demonstrated to be a safety item. The situation is similar to that in which NHTSA issued a requirement under Federal Motor Vehicle Safety Standard No. 207 that seats not designed for use while the vehicle is in motion be conspicuously labeled.

Therefore, the National Transportation Safety Board recommends that the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration:

Require vehicle manufacturers to properly label "GT bars" and other optional decorative items that appear to be safety features but have not been designed as, tested as, or demonstrated to be safety features. (Class II, Priority Action) (H-80-7).

KING, Chairman, DRIVER, Vice Chairman, McADAMS, GOLDMAN, and BURSLEY, Members, concurred in this recommendation.

By:  James B. King
Chairman