

H-208

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD
WASHINGTON, D.C.

ISSUED: January 25, 1980

Forwarded to:

Honorable Michael Pertschuk
Chairman
Federal Trade Commission
Sixth and Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20580

SAFETY RECOMMENDATION(S)

H-80-8

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. 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.

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)."

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.

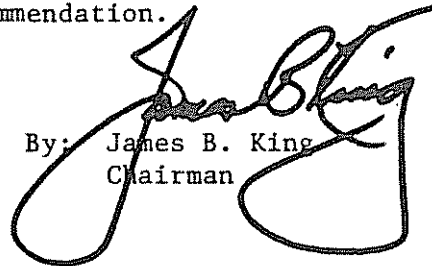
The sale of light trucks and on/off road vehicles has rapidly increased since 1975 despite the recent vehicle sales decline. Light trucks have become a significant percentage of the vehicle sales market. Optional "GT bars" have also become a widespread sales item. Because the "GT bar" is similar in appearance to a roll bar which does provide crash protection, the Safety Board believes that sale of the GT bar without disclosing that it is merely decorative may mislead vehicle owners and passengers. Without disclosure that the GT bar is cosmetic only, consumers are likely to be given the false impression that the GT bar is what it appears to be: a functional safety device. At a result of these findings, the Safety Board recommended that the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration require vehicle manufacturers to properly label "GT bars" that appear to be safety features but have not been designed as, tested as, or demonstrated to be safety features. The Safety Board also believes that the Federal Trade Commission can help in protecting consumer interests with respect to the advertising of these items.

Therefore, the National Transportation Safety Board recommends that the Federal Trade Commission:

Require vehicle manufacturers to include appropriate disclosure information or a disclaimer in all consumer advertising that mentions or depicts accessory items similar in appearance to roll bars (known popularly as "GT bars") which have not been designed as, tested as, or demonstrated to be safety features. (Class II, Priority Action) (H-80-8).

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

By: James B. King
Chairman

A large, stylized handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "James B. King". The signature is written over the typed name and title.