

Road hazards

Sport utility vehicles, light trucks pose safety hazard to passenger cars, themselves

They are intimidating, deadly and are the fastest growing class of vehicles in America. Fatalities are more likely when this kind of vehicle is involved in a crash. They are heavier and ride higher than the average car, making them mobile killers. And most people drive them because they seem "safe."



MANISHA PAREKH

They are light trucks and sports utility vehicles. Based on a report released by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) in June 1998, these seemingly "safe" vehicles are deadly for everyone on the road.

Passengers of cars involved in side-impact crashes with sport utility vehicles and other light trucks suffer more injuries than car-car crashes. For every seven deaths caused by car-car collision 30 car drivers died after being struck by a light truck.

Furthermore, drivers of sport utility vehicles are just as likely to die in crashes as passenger car drivers due to roll overs. In fact, according to industry consultants Athan Malliaris and Kenneth Digges, sport utility vehicles are four times as likely to roll over in fatal crashes as passenger cars.

So why are these vehicles allowed on the roads? Why aren't automobile manufacturers taking steps to correct these safety problems?

The answer is money. Light trucks — a class that includes trucks, sport utility vehicles and mini vans — are the fastest growing class of vehicles in America. According to the Automotive News Data Center, over 40 percent of the vehicles sold in 1997 were in the light-truck class.

However, despite the proliferation of these vehicles, automobile manufacturers are still slow in working on making them safer for everyone on the road.

The problem with light trucks lies in design. They were designed for heavy work or off-road conditions, not for daily passenger use. As such, they are heavier, stiffer and ride higher than passenger cars, which leads to disastrous results.

When a light truck impacts a passenger car, more energy is transferred to the smaller car than

is absorbed by the larger truck. Also, since many light trucks have bumpers that are much higher than other vehicles' bumpers, the impact of the collision can be hardest in areas that are not reinforced for collisions — areas such as door windows.

Further, because sport utility vehicles ride so high, their center of gravity is also higher, which leads to roll overs.

Unfortunately, the automakers are not in a hurry to modify the trucks' designs in order to make them safer. As of March 1998, automakers still did not have the correct test dummies to run test crashes.

Also, in order to make sport utility vehicles safer and less likely to roll over, automakers would have to lower the vehicles — which might lead to fewer buyers. The features that make light trucks appealing — heavier materials, higher road clearance — are the same ones that pose the safety problems.

And based on remarks by Barry Felrice of the American Automobile Manufacturers Association, it would appear that money is more important than lives.

"... Not a lot can be done. You can't repeal the laws of physics," Felrice said in an ABC news report.

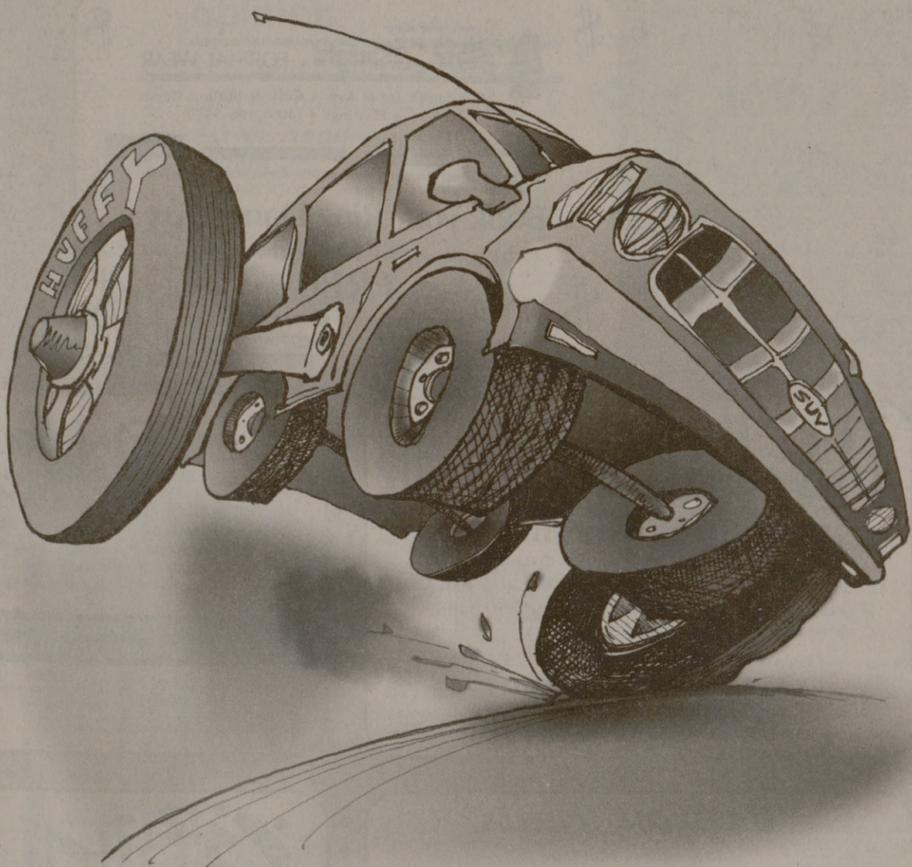
Felrice added that consumers buy light trucks for a reason.

Apparently, safety should not be one of those reasons.

Despite Felrice's pessimism about changing light trucks' safety record, European automakers have taken steps toward making them safer. Mercedes-Benz is working on producing sport utility vehicles that have a second, lower bumper designed to absorb more collision energy.

Apparently, some automakers are willing to spend the money that can make light trucks safer. Now it is up to the consumer to make sure other automakers do not brush the issue under the rug.

Consumers need to voice their concerns using the language manufacturers best understand —



MARK MCPHERSON/THE BATTALION

money. Consumers should not settle for second best. They need to lobby for higher safety standards for light trucks and buy cars from automakers who are willing to spend money on making light trucks safer.

If the automakers are willing to sacrifice lives in

order to have a strong bottom line, consumers must be willing to sacrifice "style" in order to have a safe bottom line.

Manisha Parekh is a junior psychology and journalism major.

Church's recent action against homosexual marriages will follow historical precedents

"It's against nature," "It's against God's law,"



AARON MEIER

"They will burn in hell for these acts!" These are all validations for what was a terrible controversy less than 50 years ago — Interracial relationships. The idea of the mixing of two races was deemed inexcusable to many religions and even today the issue still touches a nerve in society. At the turn of the millennium however, religion has a new abomination de jour — homosexual relationships.

In the past week, the leaders of the Methodist faith have found themselves forced to examine the issue of homosexuals in Christian religions with two cases. Last week, the head of the California-Nevada United Methodist Conference filed a complaint against 69 pastors who participated in the "holy union ceremony" of a lesbian couple that had been together for 15 years.

The other case, just yesterday found an Illinois pastor guilty of performing a holy union ceremony for two men, one of which is the son of a Methodist minister.

Now facing the punishment phase of the

trial which could result in the revocation of Rev. Greg Dell's credentials. Dell, the minister who performed the ceremony, said, "I didn't feel I was being disobedient to the order and discipline of the United Methodist Church. On the contrary, I felt the only way I could be obedient was to conduct that service."

Why is it so difficult for religion to accept the homosexual community? What is that you say? The Bible? Ah yes, the eternal answer to this perplexing question. However, after over four years on this campus, I have yet have anyone be able to quote me the exact chapter and verse where this abomination of nature lies. Commonly cited answers include, "I think it's why Sodom and Gomorrah fell, but I'm not sure," or "It's in Leviticus somewhere, my minister told me so" and finally the ever-impressive response "It's just there, alright, that's all that counts."

In the case of the of the Methodist marriage ceremonies, one third of Dell's congregation is gay or lesbian. Whether it be through God, or Buddha or the Great Pumpkin, just as interracial marriages are now considered commonplace and socially acceptable, a time will come when homosexual marriages will be considered worth nothing more than a double take.

Not only are homosexuals trying to fight for their right to celebrate the love in their relationships, but also the clergy of not only the Methodist religion, but other religions across the world support gay relationships. The 69 ministers and even the bishop who filed the complaint oppose the Methodist church's ban on recognized homosexual relationships. The bishop called the ban an "act of injustice" and said he filed the complaint with "sorrow and regret."

Over the past year, a Shinto shrine in Japan has performed what is thought to be the first marriage of two men. An American Catholic priest has been performing "friendly blessings" of homosexual couples, the Anglican church of Canada has embarked on a two year study of gay marriages and a diocese of New York Presbyterians has voted to allow ministers to perform "holy union ceremonies" as long as they are not confused with marriage ceremonies.

It is just a matter of time before homosexual couples from Ellen and Anne to the gay couple down the hall are accepted and then where will religion turn for their new abomination de jour.

Aaron Meier is a senior political science major.

MAIL CALL

Resurrection Week equals intolerance

"Resurrection Week" has become so much a part of Aggie traditions that it could easily be mistaken for an official event. But while the Protestant majority at Texas A&M University makes joyful preparations to celebrate the resurrection of its savior, the dark side of Resurrection Week is the religious intolerance for which it stands.

Resurrection Week is the celebration of a single, particular and limited doctrine. So far from being universal, triumphant, and eternal truth, it is not even believed by many Christians—to say nothing of non-Christians. Yet for the next few days the doctrine behind Resurrection Week will not merely be majority opinion on campus but like a bullhorn, it will drown out every other voice. The right to be different will evaporate into the widespread unthinking assumption

that everyone on campus believes fundamentally the same. Or ought to! Not only for Moslems, Hindus, Buddhists and Jews, but for Catholics, Mormons and black and "liberal" Protestants, Resurrection Week represents little more than the religious majority's celebration of its majority status.

The doctrine behind Resurrection Week is that of Christian supersessionism. Also called displacement theology, this is the view that God rejected the Jews because they rejected Christ. As a consequence, God nullified the covenant with the people of Israel and made Christians the sole and rightful heirs to his promises. Although the Jews have suffered most from this teaching of contempt, anyone at all who disagrees is, according to the doctrine of supersessionism, not merely mistaken but eternally damned.

Fortunately, the supersessionist logic of convert-or-burn is not

shared universally among Christians. Under John Paul II, the Roman Catholic Church has abandoned displacement theology. Rome has dedicated itself to pursuing what the Pope has described as his own "communal feelings about the Jews." It should surprise no admirer of this Pope that Rome now considers supersessionism a variety of the Marcionite heresy.

Some Protestants have also begun to distance themselves from the myth of displacement. The evangelical theologian Hal Lindsey has warned that supersessionism is (in his phrase) "the road to Holocaust."

When a celebration of religious sameness overrides and conceals the plain fact of religious pluralism on this campus — when it is arrogantly assumed that God listens with favor only to one's own confession and condemns everyone who believes differently — then religious intolerance has replaced the quiet

sincerity of faith. One of my Catholic students described Resurrection Week as "that time when Protestants start rejoicing about the risen Christ while the Catholics are in the deepest mourning over the events leading up to the Crucifixion." And no wonder. For as I understand them, those were events of religious intolerance.

David G. Myers
Associate Professor, English.

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013 Reed McDonald
Texas A&M University
College Station, TX
77843-1111

Campus Mail: 1111
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E-mail: batt@tamvm1.tamu.edu

EDITORIAL

The Battalion

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MORE THAN BEER NUTS

Proposal to force Northgate bars to install kitchen facilities misdirected, ineffective

As a part of recent efforts to limit the harmful effects of alcohol on Texas A&M University students, the A&M administration is working with the City of College Station in requiring that bars earn a certain percentage of income from non-alcoholic products.

More accurately, President Dr. Ray M. Bowen said, at the Jan. 26 Student Leader Advisory Board (SLAB) meeting, the administration would request that Northgate area businesses that serve alcohol also serve food as well.

In implementing this plan, the administration is placing its faith solely in statistics that show patrons of establishments that serve food as well as alcohol are involved in fewer drinking-and-driving-related deaths.

What the administration fails to recognize is that not all Northgate establishments are setup to support kitchen facilities.

The shot bars Coupe de Ville's and Dry Bean are cramped quarters as it is. Forcing them to install kitchen facilities would most likely cause these businesses to shut-down — a result that is not only unwanted but unfair as well.

Furthermore, the administration is naive in thinking that simply because the option of eating while consuming alcoholic beverages is

available to students, the effects of alcohol will be less severe.

Regardless of whether food is available or not, students who are at the bar to drink and socialize will not eat if they do not want to.

Also, in targeting only Northgate area establishments, the administration is overlooking an even larger negative effect of alcohol — drinking and driving. For many students, Northgate is a simple jaunt across campus and drinking and driving is never really an issue. However, there are many more bars and nightclubs in Bryan-College Station that require students to drive home from after a night out.

If the administration wishes to work with the city to reduce the harmful effects of alcohol, then maybe the students would be better served if it pushed for the establishment of a designated driver program in the area.

While the effort of the administration is well intended, it simply is neither a business-friendly or feasible one.

If the administration truly wishes to decrease the harmful effects of alcohol on A&M students, the resources that have been devoted to this plan could be better utilized by focusing on a broader scope of prevention — alcohol awareness and education.