

Endangered species

Lawsuit against Consumer Reports could put safety of Americans at risk

Sometimes the cases that the U.S. Supreme Court decides not to hear are the ones that make the largest impact. On Nov. 3, the Supreme Court refused to hear an appeal from Consumers Union Corporation, the publisher of Consumer Reports magazine. The charges leveled at the consumer magazine, which were brought by the carmaker Suzuki, state the corporation used libel and rigged tests to gain publicity and ruin the reputation of Suzuki's Samurai sport utility vehicle.



HAYDEN MIGL

The lawsuit that Suzuki has brought against Consumers Union Corporation should have been heard by the Supreme Court, and it should have ruled in favor of the magazine publisher, thereby protecting news organizations from unnecessary lawsuits. Instead it has allowed the case to go back and be tried in the district courts. The results of the trial could potentially threaten the First Amendment rights of journalists who write product reviews, and it could affect consumers everywhere.

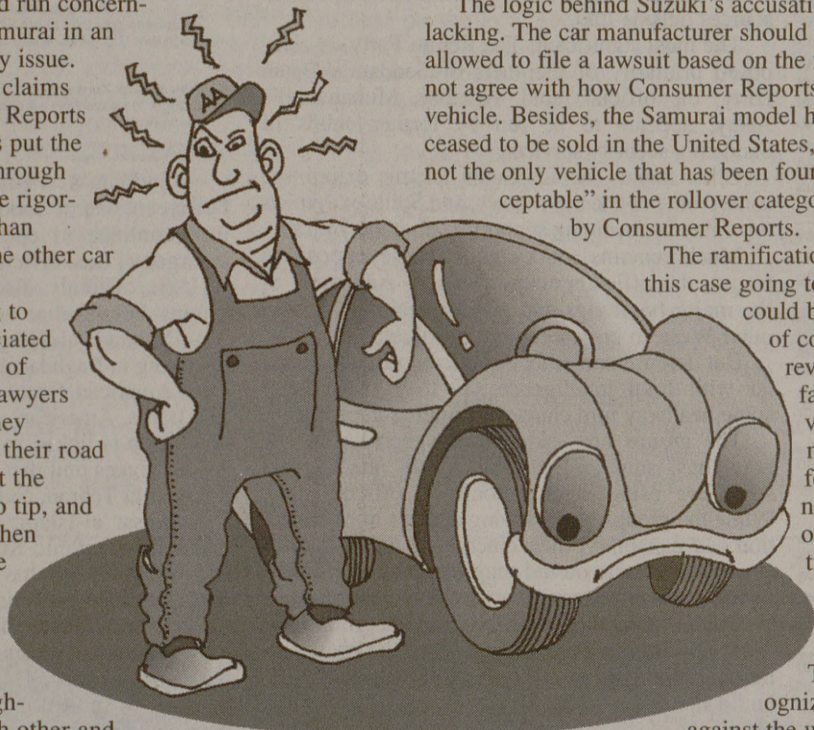
Consumer Reports ran an article in its July 1988 issue warning consumers about the tendency of the sport utility vehicle to tip over when it had to turn sharply. This article caused sales of the Samurai to drop drastically in the United States, according to Suzuki. Suzuki also claims the magazine has been using the Samurai

story as a marketing tool for more than a decade. Consumer Reports argues it is only presenting its readers with objective information about vehicle risks, including rollover hazards. The actual lawsuit was filed in 1996 after an article in Consumer Reports mentioned the past story it had run concerning the Samurai in an anniversary issue.

Suzuki claims Consumer Reports employees put the Samurai through much more rigorous tests than some of the other car models. According to The Associated Press, one of Suzuki's lawyers claimed they "designed their road tests to get the Samurai to tip, and cheered when the vehicle did so." It is hard to imagine a group of people high-fiving each other and patting each other on

the back when they get a car to flip on its side. The actual test was a series of sharp turns driven at around 40 mph and has been in place since 1988. Suzuki claims Consumer Reports took these actions to produce publicity and sell more magazines.

The logic behind Suzuki's accusations is lacking. The car manufacturer should not be allowed to file a lawsuit based on the fact it did not agree with how Consumer Reports rated its vehicle. Besides, the Samurai model has already ceased to be sold in the United States, and it is not the only vehicle that has been found "unacceptable" in the rollover category tested by Consumer Reports.



MAHESH NEELAKANTAN • THE BATTALION

The ramifications from this case going to trial could be the end of consumer reviews. This fact has provoked many different journalistic organizations to back consumers Union. They recognize a verdict against the well-respected Consumer

Reports magazine could prove disastrous to the industry of consumer reviews and cause investigative reporters to be more wary of publishing their findings of particular products. This could mean a decrease in the number of product evaluations and an increase in the number of uninformed consumers.

The Supreme Court should have realized these consequences and stopped the trial instead of passing it back to the federal district courts. Suzuki claims no consumer review organization should be above the law if it uses false tests and rigged results. This may be true, but if all review groups are vulnerable to being sued by a disgruntled company after a bad critique, it will be the end of product reviews.

The Supreme Court has traditionally been known for protecting the rights of the First Amendment, including free speech and freedom of the press. The recent dismissal of the Consumers Union-Suzuki case was not typical of the high court, and it should have ruled differently. The Court's refusal to hear the case may signal the end of consumer reviews and a decrease in consumers' rights. The big losers if Suzuki wins this trial are the consumers who are forced to make purchases without the knowledge they need to purchase intelligently.

Hayden Migl is a freshman political science major.

Police go too far during a drug search in high school

Every now and then, a story leaks out from the borders of some despot's police state about a commando-style raid on an innocent household, police violently tearing through belongings, shouting and throwing children to the ground while waving loaded firearms.



MIKE WALTERS

It was a blow to Americans, who count themselves lucky not to have to live in a land of insanity and sadistic abuses of police power, to hear that all of this happened on American soil, when police burst into Stratford High School in Goose Creek, S.C., weapons drawn and eager to rough up a few drug dealers. They left that day empty-handed, but what they left behind among hallways littered with emptied lockers and scared students was an injustice that is inexcusable in a country that values freedom, justice and the concept of one being "innocent until proven guilty."

"I was frightened because they had guns in their hands," student Maurice Harris told NBC. "I thought one of the guns was going to go off and shoot or kill somebody, so I just got down to my knees and covered my head for protection."

With bomb threats, school killing sprees and acts of terrorism being real possibilities in the United States, it would be understandable if the police were called in to use extraordinary measures to save the lives of students by stopping a gun-toting student from going on a rampage or setting off a bomb. Instead, the police went in that day throwing students to the ground and handcuffing them because their principal reported a suspicion of drug activity. He based his suspicion on surveillance video of students entering bathrooms and talking secretly and an arrest made the week prior when a student was found with 300 prescription pills on him.

"I don't think it was an overreaction," said Lt. Dave Aarons from the Goose Creek police department. "Anytime you have qualified information regarding drugs and large amounts of money, there's a reasonable assumption weapons are involved."

In a raid against the Columbian drug cartel, yes, one could expect to arrest professional criminals who may defend themselves against the police with lethal force. But did they have to come in with their guns drawn looking for a 15-year-old with his mom's bottle of Xanax?

"You absolutely cannot bring police with guns drawn into a school," said Graham Boyd, director of the drug policy project for the American Civil Liberties Union. Calling the search illegal, he rightly suggested that if certain students were suspected of drug dealing, they should have been quietly called to the principal's office to have their bags checked for illegal substances. Instead, the police used the excuse to pretend they were U.S. Special Forces, pushing students to the ground, yelling, rummaging through bags and lockers and watching students cower at the sight of guns and barking police dogs.

The fact is police officers work every day to stop crimes and protect the lives of civilians, often at the cost of their own. Like any other profession, they must be held accountable when their actions express incompetence or the use of poor judgment. Unlike other professions, however, they are trusted with the legal ability to use force against other citizens. As such, it is

important that they do their jobs well and consistently. On Nov. 5, those members of the South Carolina Police Department failed to live up to that standard. Despite employing rough and invasive tactics against those teenagers, they discovered no evidence of illegal activity and acted upon a poor lead, another fact for which they should be ashamed.

"When parents entrust a child to the care of the government to receive an education paid for by their tax dollars, they should be able to expect their kids to be treated with a certain decency and safety by school officials who are supposed to be competent enough to provide these things."

Though students' lockers are on the government property of a public school, there is no excuse for causelessly breaking into and rummaging through them. Just because an American citizen is under the age of 18, his constitutional rights are still valid, as the Constitution protects every citizen from illegal search and seizure of his private property, particularly the innocent ones. When parents entrust a child to the care of the government to receive an education paid for by their tax dollars, they should be able to expect their kids to be treated with a certain decency and safety by school officials who are supposed to be competent enough to provide these things.

If the United States is going to accuse countries on the other side of the world of ruling by unjust force and tyranny, it's important that Americans never act like those they call their enemies, or Americans will be no better than those they fight against.

Mike Walters is a senior psychology major.

MAIL CALL

Students need to remember Bonfire

In response to a Nov. 12 mail call:

Students need to let go of Bonfire, you say? Lots more people die in cars and planes every year too. And lots of people get sued over it. However, driving and flying aren't nearly as much of a cherished tradition as the Bonfire. If everyone forgets about the Bonfire, then those who died would still be remembered, but will have lost their lives to a forgotten tradition.

I am not sure about everyone else, but I would hate to be the guy who had to tell those 12 people in 10 or 20 years that Aggie students know nothing of the Bonfire except that it's a bus route.

William Turner
Class of 2005

Feminist women should not be selfish

In response to a Nov. 12 mail call:

Ms. Clancy may have thought that Mr. Auter failed to address an important issue, but the truth is she

failed to address the most important issue of all. It is irresponsible of her to make the assumption that a child who is the result of a rape is somehow less valuable than any other child. The issue here is not the so called "rights" of women, but much more importantly the rights and lives of children. If feminist women could stop being so concerned with themselves and for a minute think of the future, they might realize the importance of the child. One can never tell what a certain child might achieve during his life if he is given the chance to live.

Donovan Ripley
Class of 2006

Aggies for Life did not promote protest

On behalf of the officers and members of Aggies for Life, I must make clear that we were not and are not affiliated in any way with the pro-life activists on campus Wednesday. Along with the rest of the student body, we were surprised by the protesters' sudden appearance on campus and frustrated by their approach to the pro-life message. Aggies for Life is committed to

ending abortion, but only through peaceful, non-intimidating education, activism and discussion. That is why we host events such as the Physicians Panel, which will be held this Tuesday evening (Koldus 111, 7:00pm). Insensitive, hurtful approaches are callous and ineffective, and we do not approve of them.

David Dunton
President, Aggies for Life
Class of 2005

Protest bad way to get opinion across

As many on campus, I was surprised and disturbed by the many abortion protests Wednesday. The group combined confrontational methods of protesting abortion and preaching Christianity. I am a Bible-believing Christian, and I am pro-life, yet I disagree with the means used on Wednesday (and an end never justifies the means).

Jesus Christ managed to hang out with the lowest of the low in society while at the same time speaking truth. The group on Wednesday had no interest in spending time with anyone on our campus, as is evidenced by their one-day stint. Jesus

Christ warned the sinner of his sin, yet he loved the sinner and some sinners returned his love. The group on Wednesday seemed only interested in telling Aggies how evil they were. We cannot let abortion go by the wayside, but using confrontational methods is the not a Christ like way to confront this issue.

I exhort the pro-life population on this campus to engage the people around them without despising these people. The group on Wednesday hated the campus without even knowing the campus, and we ought to act differently.

Stephen Weir
Class of 2004

A&M not the place for anti-abortion displays

After purchasing a scantron at the Memorial Student Center bookstore, I headed to Sul Ross to deposit a few pennies for good luck. On the way I was handed a pamphlet by a small child, who probably wasn't old enough to read its contents. To my surprise, the pamphlet contained graphic images of an aborted fetus. I couldn't even tell you what the brochure said

because quite frankly, I was too disgusted to read. Three more times on the way to my class, I was approached by people handing out the pamphlets. Not to mention the four times after class the brochures, images and words were shoved down my throat.

I am furious that our beautiful campus was plastered with images of dead and dismembered fetuses. I believe in freedom of speech as much as the next person, but to be able to show such graphic pictures on our campus is ridiculous. I pay too much money to have to take a detour to class just to avoid this sort of thing. What those people believe is up to them, but there is a time and a place. Texas A&M University is not that place.

Tawny S. Alonzo
Class of 2003

The Battalion encourages letters to the editor. Letters must be 200 words or less and include the author's name, class and phone number. The opinion editor reserves the right to edit letters for length, style and accuracy. Letters may be submitted in person at 014 Reed McDonald with a valid student ID. Letters also may be mailed to: 014 Reed McDonald, MS 1111, Texas A&M University, College Station, TX 77843-1111. Fax: (979) 845-2647 Email: mailcall@thebattalion.net