

opinion

Good news on traffic deaths and a word of warning

Last week, the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration reported that the number of traffic fatalities in the United States last year—32,881—represents the lowest people killed on U.S. roads in a year since 1992. That's good news. It's even more encouraging: The fatality rate fell 1.1 deaths per 100 million miles driven, the lowest it has ever been.

But that still isn't our only source of good news. Through the year, the industry has made substantial gains in developing vehicles that can avoid crashes and improving the odds that drivers and passengers can survive crashes that happen. Among the many advances and upgrades have been provided by government regulations, enforced by consumer demands for safety and advanced by technological advances.

A century ago, long before rollover standards, passive restraints, air-bag brakes and mandatory seat belt laws, the biggest potential safety concern for a family was coming along in the unrelenting congestion while sitting on a tank filled with a highly flammable, explosive liquid. Theoretically, that concern faded.

Now, as society embraces the information age and the battery burden into the age of electrification, there are other safety concerns.

The Chevrolet Volt has been subjected to investigations into the safety of lithium ion batteries, as well as the way the batteries are handled and protected in vehicles. Ultimately, consumers must be assured that electric vehicles are as safe as our cars and trucks powered by gasoline or diesel fuel.

There may be the end result, but the industry will make it happen, just as automakers have made the viability of gasoline and diesel engines a reality.

Meanwhile, NHTSA has identified driver distraction as the most safety concern. The agency says distracted driving deaths totaled at least 10,000 in 2010.

While automakers and regulators can mitigate some of the risk by handling infotainment hardware and software that limit distractions, the agency acknowledges that much of the danger comes from drivers making poor choices.

How society educates drivers and regulates behavior will be the biggest factor in handling distracted driver deaths.

Confidence at Ford

The decision by the Ford Motor Co. board to restore a long-term stock dividend sends a vote of confidence in the future of the company and in the assumption that the U.S. auto recovery is sustainable. The company has not paid a dividend since 2006.

Analysts say GM CEO Mike Delfino says light vehicle sales are on track to reach 16 million units a year, though it may take two or three years. Industry volume topped 16 million from 2009 through 2007 before dipping to 16.1 million in 2008. Evidence is mounting that the recovery in U.S. auto sales is on the mend.

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A remarkable career, below the radar

It's a self-confident fellow. Though he's not well known in the automotive industry, he does know his way around a car.



Luis Cardero

When you consider that the global automotive industry will manufacture and sell more than 70 million cars and trucks this year, you can see why it's important to have someone who is responsible for the quality of the cars that we drive.

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Recycled plastics are not inferior

To the Editors: In reference to the Nov. 28 article about Japanese cost-cutting ("Japanese play the risky game of removing content"), I disagree with the implication that automotive components made from lower-cost recycled plastics are inferior to those made from virgin material. That's far from the truth, and unfortunately that misconception is prevalent in the automotive industry.

For more than 15 years, AGS Technology Inc. has produced economical, top-quality automotive plastic components based on recycled plastics. We at AGS have fought long and hard to overcome the mistaken belief that recycled plastics are substandard.

We believe that it is important to set the record straight so that designers and engineers feel confident that there are no quality or performance

compromises in the judicious use of recycled plastics. In fact, the performance characteristics of recycled plastics can be enhanced so that superior automotive components can be manufactured at a much lower cost.

A better product at a lower cost while improving our environment—that's where it's at.

GEORGE STANIULIS
 Vice President
 AGS Technology Inc.,
 Schaumburg, Ill.

A rebadge of a rebadge?

To the Editors: Perhaps I'm missing something, but the article "Top job for Chrysler 2011's rebadged Lancia Thema" (Nov. 21) is no exception.

According to Scott Chubb, CEO of the Chrysler and Lancia brands,

"It's a Lancia platform, a Chrysler that fits the Lancia name, a rebadged Chrysler 300."

According to *Automotive News Europe*, "While the Lancia name is a venerable Italian name, it's not a household name in the U.S."

So, if the Lancia name is not a household name in the U.S., why is it being used to sell a rebadged Chrysler?

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A better product at a lower cost while improving our environment—what's there not to like?

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