Spend a little time talking to another shop owner — whether one from across town or across the country — and you’ll likely pick up an idea or two you can implement in your business. Here are a few examples of ideas shop owners and managers have used to improve their business in some way.

**Change in paint line boosts shop’s performance**

Rudy Romero, director at Gosch Toyota Collision Center in Hemet, Calif., is currently focused on improving parts accuracy, purchasing additional parts carts so that all parts for any given job are on a cart, and employees can quickly compare new parts to the old to ensure, early in the process, that everything is correct.

Romero has also hired a mid-level technician who will be trained to specialize in repair of plastic bumpers.

“We’ll basically be opening a bumper shop within our facility,” Romero said.

“Most collisions involve a bumper, front or rear. If I can take those bumpers off the other techs and give them to a specialty technician to repair and get them into paint, the other guys can focus on the meat and potatoes. I think we’ll see an increase in quality with another reduction in cycle time.”

**In-house training helps build shop’s staff**

Kevin Morse of Elite Collision Center in Battle Ground, Wash., says the in-house training program he now uses to ensure his staff of 15 people always includes an apprentice or mid-level technician to help meet future staffing needs.

“We created a program that shows them...
Nissan chief got dubious payments but says he didn’t know

By Yuri Kageyama

TOKYO — The chief executive of scandal-plagued Nissan on acknowledged receiving inappropriate payments from the Japanese automaker but denied he ordered it or knew about it.

Hiroto Saikawa said an internal company investigation found he had received the money, but he would return it.

“I thought everything was being carried out properly, and I didn’t know anything,” Saikawa told reporters.

Nissan Motor Co. said that the findings from its ongoing internal investigation would be reported to the board of directors Monday, Sept. 9 but declined to elaborate, saying the board was independent.

“We have heard that share appreciation rights will also be part of this report,” the company said, referring to the payments linked to Nissan share prices that executives, including Saikawa, received as bonuses.

Japanese media reports have said that the dates were changed to allow the maximum amount of cashing in on the stock prices, allowing Saikawa to receive tens of millions of yen (hundreds of thousands of dollars) in dubious compensation.

The latest development comes as former Nissan Chairman Carlos Ghosn is awaiting trial on charges of falsifying documents on deferred compensation and of breach of trust in allegedly diverting Nissan money for personal gain. He denies wrongdoing.

Saikawa blamed what he called “the Ghosn system” at Nissan for the payments, and said the system was being reviewed.

Saikawa succeeded Ghosn and in the past was closely allied with Ghosn, who led Nissan for two decades and made it one of the most successful automakers in the world.

Saikawa said he had left the task of overseeing the compensation system to Greg Kelly, a former board director who was arrested last year with Ghosn on financial misconduct allegations. Kelly has maintained he is innocent.

Since the arrests of Ghosn and Kelly, Nissan profits and sales have tumbled. Investors are also worried about Nissan’s relationship with alliance partner Renault SA of France, which owns 43% of Nissan.

Ghosn was sent in by Renault to lead Nissan, and in the years before his arrest had led both Renault and Nissan. (AP) •

Look in next month’s issue for the Fifth - Eighth Gen Corvette steering wheels.
Toyota adds the TRD option to Camry and Avalon

PLANO, Texas – Many Toyota enthusiasts already know the equity behind the TRD badge seen on the brand’s hardcore, off-road-ready pickups and SUVs. Now, Toyota Racing Development (TRD) brings its track tuning that blends greater agility, precision and body control with attention-grabbing design and everyday drivability to the Camry TRD and Avalon TRD.

These two sedans have an appetite for curves and a distinct exhaust note bristling with attitude. With aerodynamic-enhanced styling by Calty, Toyota’s U.S. design studio, and chassis performance fortified by TRD, these revved-up Camry and Avalon models are the track-inspired sedans for which enthusiasts have been asking.

When Toyota introduced the new-generation 2018 Camry, sales of the sporty SE and XSE versions spiked. A year later, Toyota introduced the all-new 2019 Avalon, which came in an available XSE grade for the first time ever. These sedans are stylish and fun to drive. Toyota is pushing the limit even further with Camry TRD and Avalon TRD, both with greater track-inspired handling performance and styling. These models include most standard content from the Camry SE grade and Avalon XSE grade, combined with exclusive TRD chassis enhancements and tuning.

The new Camry TRD and Avalon TRD embody TRD’s holistic approach to vehicle enhancement. Notably, both are powered by Toyota’s renowned 301 horsepower DOHC 3.5-liter V6 and 8-speed automatic transmission with sport mode and paddle shifters. The V6 breathes easier with a TRD-tuned cat-back dual exhaust, giving both models a throatier idle and acceleration sound.

Thicker underbody braces increase torsional rigidity, and unique coil springs lower both vehicles by 0.6 inches for a reduced center of gravity. Specially tuned shock absorbers and lighter 19 x 8.5-inch matte black alloy wheels complement the new springs and lower stance to improve body control, handling agility and steering precision. The front brakes are larger with 12.9-inch diameter rotors and dual-piston calipers compared to 12.0-inch rotors and single piston calipers found on XSE grades.

Brake performance was also tuned to provide more direct feedback, matching the sporty dynamics of the vehicle. Active Cornering Assist was also added to both models, reducing understeering by providing brake force to the inner drive wheel when the accelerator pedal is depressed.

These TRD sedans will continue to deliver all the quality, durability and reliability that is synonymous with Toyota. Both models will come standard with Toyota Safety Sense-P, a suite of advanced driver-assist technologies.
Consumer advocate gives repair industry new voice

By John Yoswick

Ohio attorney Erica Eversman, who has long been a friend of consumers and collision repairers in legal battles with insurers, is now one of about 30 volunteer consumer liaisons to the National Association of Insurance Commissioners (NAIC). The consumer liaisons attend the NAIC's three meetings per year that draw state insurance commissioners and their staffs along with insurance industry representatives.

The NAIC focuses on insurance regulatory issues, often drafting (or attempting to draft) model legislation that states may adopt; in the early 2000s, for example, the NAIC was influential in drafting a proposed regulation for states to consider related to the use of non-OEM parts.

Eversman said the NAIC currently is largely focused on health care issues.

"There is nothing going on right now at the NAIC involving auto insurance in any way," Eversman said, noting that she is the only current NAIC consumer liaison with a focus on auto insurance. "But we intend to change that."

She said presentations made at NAIC meetings are what can lead the organization to charge one of its committees with taking on a particular issue. She presented at NAIC on the John Eagle Collision Center lawsuit, the dealership collision shop successfully sued for not following OEM repair procedures on a vehicle in which a Texas couple were subsequently injured. She said she focused on the need "to have insurance companies pay for OEM procedures that affect safety." When asked if that would drive up insurance rates, Eversman said it may or may not.

"But even if it did, would you rather have insurance rates go up, or would you rather have unsafe cars go back out on the road just so we can keep insurance rates down," Eversman said she asked regulators rhetorically.

She also noted that auto insurers declining to pay for "proper, safe repairs" has repercussions for other insurers, such as the health insurer covering the costs of medical care for the couple hurt in the accident that led to the John Eagle lawsuit, or the garage-keepers’ insurer covering the shop.

She said California Insurance Commissioner Ricardo Lara seemed particularly receptive after her presentation with work with her “on solving some of those issues for consumers,” and she sensed “immediate opportunities to be able to make a change” in New York, North Carolina, Colorado and Mississippi as well.

“This is one thing to say that other states wouldn’t be interested, but I didn’t necessarily have any personal interactions [at the NAIC meeting] with some of the other states,” Eversman said.

One state in which repairers shouldn’t have trouble being paid for OEM repair procedures is Mississippi, Eversman said.

Following her presentation, she spoke with Mark Haire, deputy insurance commissioner of the Mississippi Department of Insurance. "That is the kind of commissioner already mandates the use of OEM procedures. We don’t have that issue," Eversman said Haire told her.

"Now, that was the first I’d heard of that. That could be true. I don’t know. But that was the position that they took."

Eversman acknowledged that many collision repairers and shop associations have become frustrated with trying to get their state insurance regulators to address their concerns about some claims practices by auto insurers.

"Unfortunately, as I think we’ve all experienced, sometimes it seems as if the insurance commissioners are there to protect the insurance companies [rather than consumers]," Eversman said. "I certainly have had that experience."

But she said one message she said she was trying to get across at the NAIC meeting was that shops should file complaints about insurer practices with their state regulators.

"I told commissioners that we sometimes get push-back, that there are some states in which we’ve been told that the department of insurance will not take complaints from collision repairers, only from consumers," Eversman said. "They told me no, that isn’t true. Or at least that is what should be true."

She said if shops are told that, they should contact her so that she can address it with the state agency involved. Complaints directly from consumers may be better, she said, "but how is the consumer supposed to know why a roof needs to be welded rather than glued? They can’t know that. They would need your help to file that type of complaint anyway."

She said one state regulator told her they don’t have the authority to make factual determinations about who is at fault in some disputes, but rather can only get and pass along the insurer’s response to the complaint.

"But do file the complaints," he said, "because we can put pressure on the insurance company, and we will, to stop certain practices, particularly if we see that there’s more than one complaint about it," Eversman said she was told.

Getting complaints from multiple shops around a state — rather than just a lot from one shop — can help demonstrate a pattern or practice and thus trigger an investigation, she said.

When submitting a complaint about an insurer’s refusal to pay for a necessary OEM repair procedure, she recommended to shops, stick to the facts.

"Do not whine," Eversman cautioned. "Just say: ‘Here’s the proper way to repair the vehicle, and this is a safety issue’; if it is. ‘The insurer is refusing to pay for this. I have liability for it. Look what happened in the John Eagle case,” she said.

The NAIC website (https://www.naic.org/state_web_map.htm) offers links to each state’s insurance regulatory agency, including a link to how to file a complaint in each state.

Eversman also suggested that collision repairers support the reelection next year of North Carolina Insurance Commissioner Mike Causey, a retired life insurance executive and a former lobbyist for a North Carolina auto body association. Causey, a Republican, was in the news earlier this year after he alerted federal law enforcement about what he saw as an attempt to bribe him. The chairman of the Republican Party of North Carolina — one of four people implicated in the scheme — allegedly offered campaign contributions to Causey to help ensure special treatment for an attorney party campaign donor) under investigation by Causey’s agency. All those indicted have denied the allegations.

“Mike is the guy who wore a wire for the FBI” after he told authorities of the alleged bribery attempt, Eversman said. “Mike is a friend of this industry. He’s willing to help the industry, but we have to keep him there.”

Eversman said that like the other consumer liaisons, she has a one-year term in the position at the NAIC, but can reapply this fall for another term.

“Some of the consumer liaisons have been with NAIC for 15-plus years and really know the various departments and how they operate,” she said. (AP) •

Carmakers to add alerts to prevent child heatstroke deaths

By Tom Krisher

DETROIT — By the 2025 model year, nearly all new vehicles sold in the U.S. will come with electronic alerts to remind people not to leave children behind in the back seats.

Twenty automakers representing 96% of new vehicles sold have agreed to install reminders in an effort to stop heatstroke deaths.

So far this year 39 children have died in the U.S. after being left alone in cars during hot weather. The advocacy group Kids and Cars says a record 54 children were killed last year.

Vehicles would give drivers audible and visual alerts to check back seats every time they turn off the ignition.

“Automakers have been exploring ways to address this safety issue, and this commitment underscores how such innovations and increased awareness can help children right now,” David Schwietert, interim CEO of the Alliance of Automobile Manufacturers, a trade group that includes a dozen large car companies. Members of the Global Automakers, an association of manufacturers based outside the U.S., also are taking part.

Automakers say the voluntary agreement will get the alerts installed faster than a government regulation, which takes four to eight years.

Only Tesla didn’t agree to the reminders, but it is not a member of either trade association.

Several automakers already are offering such a feature. General Motors, for instance, has a reminder on all of its four-door sedans, trucks and SUVs starting with the 2019 model year. The system issues alerts if the rear doors were opened before the start of a trip.

Hyundai has pledged to make a similar system standard on its vehicles by 2022.

The auto alliance says the agreement is a minimum and doesn’t preclude automakers from coming up with more sophisticated solutions.

The U.S. House is considering a bill that would require such alerts.

Two House Democrats, Frank Pallone Jr. of New Jersey and Jan Schakowsky of Illinois, co-sponsor of the bill, said the industry’s action was a step in the right direction, but history has shown that voluntary commitments don’t necessarily bring meaningful action.

“Congress must be vigilant and continue to pursue legislation that requires these companies to take the necessary steps to protect children and holds the companies accountable,” they said in a statement.

Kids and Cars said that the auto industry’s move is a way to avoid binding government regulations.

An alert every time a vehicle is turned off wouldn’t address nearly one-third of the hot car deaths in which children get into a car on their own and become trapped, the group said in a statement.

“In order for a system to be effective and comprehensive, the system must be able to detect the presence of a rear seat occupant, not just infer that there might be one,” the group said. (AP) •

GM considering $175M Ohio engine plant

DAYTON, Ohio — General Motors says it's considering a $175 million truck engine manufacturing plant in Ohio that could employ more than 100 people.

GM spokesman Dan Flores tells the Dayton Daily News the new plant could open late next year in the Dayton area. It would expand on work being done at the jointly owned GM-Toyota DM352 plant in Moraine in suburban Dayton.

Flores said the new plant and the DM352 facility would both produce diesel engines. He says the company needs more engine production volume.

A briefing sheet for a Montgomery County commissioners meeting includes a resolution for nearby Brookville to encourage GM to build a diesel engine manufacturing plant in the city. (AP) •
DETROIT — A design flaw in Tesla’s Autopilot autonomous driving system and driver inattention combined to cause a Model S electric car to slam into a firetruck parked along a California freeway, a government investigation has found.

The National Transportation Safety Board determined that the driver was overly reliant on the system and that Autopilot’s design let him disengage from driving.

The agency released a brief report that outlined the probable cause of the January 2018 crash in the high occupancy vehicle lane of Interstate 405 in Culver City near Los Angeles.

The findings raise questions about the effectiveness of Autopilot, which was engaged but failed to brake in the Culver City crash and three others in which drivers were killed since 2016.

No one was hurt in the I-405 crash involving a 2014 Tesla Model S that was traveling 31 mph at the time of impact, according to the report.

The crash occurred after a larger vehicle ahead of the Tesla, which the driver described as an SUV or pickup truck, moved out of its lane and the Tesla hit the truck that had been parked with its emergency lights flashing while firefighters handled a different crash.

The probable cause of the rear-end crash was the driver’s lack of response to the firetruck “due to inattention and overreliance on the vehicle’s advanced driver assistance system,” the Tesla Autopilot design, which permitted the driver to disengage from the driving task, and the driver’s use of the system in ways inconsistent with guidance and warnings from the manufacturer, “the NTSB wrote in the report.

Tesla has said repeatedly that semi-autonomous system is designed to assist drivers, who must pay attention and be ready to intervene at all times. The company says Teslas with Autopilot are safer than vehicles without it, and that the system does not prevent all crashes.

CEO Elon Musk has promised a fully autonomous system next year using the same sensors as current Teslas, but with a more powerful computer and software. Current Teslas have more sensors than the 2011 Model in the crash.

The report says the Tesla’s automatic emergency braking did not activate, and there was no braking from the driver, a 47-year-old man commuting to Los Angeles from his home in Woodland Hills. Also the driver’s hands were not detected on the wheel in the moments leading to the crash, the report said.

Cellphone data showed the driver was not using his phone to talk or text in the minutes leading up to the crash, but the NTSB could not determine if any apps were being worked.

A statement from a driver in a nearby firetruck said the driver appeared to be looking down at a cellphone or other device before the crash.

The NTSB’s finding is another black mark against the Autopilot system, which was activated in three fatal crashes in the U.S., including two in Florida and one in Silicon Valley.

In the Florida crashes, one in 2016 and another in March of this year, the system failed to brake for a semi turning in front of the Teslas, and the vehicles went under the turning trailers. In the other fatality, in Mountain View, California, in March of 2018, Autopilot accelerated just before the Model S X SUV crashed into a freeway barrier and killing its driver, the NTSB said.

The NTSB investigates highway crashes and makes safety recommendations largely to another federal agency, the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, which has the power to seek recalls and make regulations.

David Friedman, a former acting NHTSA administration, who now is vice president of advocacy at Consumer Reports, said Tesla has known for years that its system allows drivers to not pay attention, yet it hasn’t taken the problem seriously.

Autopilot can steer a car in its lane, change lanes with driver permission, keep a safe distance from vehicles ahead of it and automatically brake to avoid accidents. It has been designed to keep drivers engaged.

Some drivers will always rely too much on driver assist systems, and the system must be programmed to handle that, Friedman said. Autopilot, he said, gives drivers a warning if it doesn’t detect torque on the steering wheel at varying intervals. But unlike a similar system from General Motors, it does not watch the driver’s eyes to make sure he or she is paying attention, Friedman said.

“It’s unrealistic to try to train people for automation,” Friedman said. “You’ve got to train automation for people.”

Tesla sensors were unable to see the side of an 18-wheeler in previous crashes, he said. “Is it that shocking that it can’t see a firetruck? We’ve known about this for at least three years,” said Friedman, who is calling on NHTSA to declare Autopilot defective and force Tesla to recall it so it keeps drivers engaged.

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The Center for Auto Safety, another advocacy group, also called for a recall.

“There’s simply a vehicle that enables a driver to not pay attention, or fall asleep, while accelerating into a parked fire truck is defective and dangerous,” the group said in a statement. “Any company that encourages such behavior should be held responsible, and any agency that fails to act bears equal responsibility for the next fatal incident.”

The NTSB said it will review the NTSB report “and will not hesitate to act if NHTSA identifies a safety-related defect.”

Tesla said in a statement that Autopilot repeatedly reminds drivers to remain attentive and prohibits use of the system when warnings are ignored.

“Since this incident occurred, we have made updates to our system including adjusting the time intervals between hands-on warnings and the conditions under which they’re activated,” the statement said. Tesla said the frequency of the warnings varies based on speed, acceleration, surrounding traffic and other factors.

In the Culver City crash, the larger vehicle ahead of the Tesla changed lanes three to four seconds before the crash, revealing the parked fire truck, the NTSB said.

“The system was unable to immediately detect the hazard and accelerated the Tesla toward the stationary truck,” the report said. The system did spot the firetruck and issued a collision warning to the driver just under a half-second before impact — too late for a driver to act, the agency wrote.

The NTSB found that a stationary vehicle in the Tesla’s field of view is a challenge for the system to assess a threat and brake. It says that detection of stationary objects is challenging for all manufacturers of driver-assist systems. (AP)

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DETROIT — The United Auto Workers union has picked General Motors as the target company for this year’s contract talks with one of its three automakers.

The move announced means that GM will be the focus of bargaining, and any deal with the company will set the pattern for Ford and Fiat Chrysler. It also means that if the union decides to go on strike, it will be against GM.

Contracts between the union representing about 152,000 workers and GM, Ford and Fiat Chrysler expired at 11:59 p.m. on Sept. 14.

Earlier, the union announced that over 96% of its members voted to authorize strikes against the companies.

The strike authorization vote is a normal part of the bargaining process, and it doesn’t mean that there will be a work stoppage. But tensions are high in contract talks this year because the automakers seek in profit, and workers want a bigger slice.

The companies, though, want to get closer to parity with foreign automakers with U.S. factories that are mainly in the South.

In a statement, the union said 96.4% of workers at General Motors voted to authorize a strike, while it was 95.98% at Ford and 96% at Fiat Chrysler.

Picking GM as the target is no surprise because it’s the most profitable of the three companies, and it also has announced plans to shutter four factories in Ohio, Michigan and Maryland. The union has pledged to fight the closures at two Detroit-area factories, in Lordstown, Ohio, and near Baltimore. Production already has stopped in Lordstown, Baltimore and one of the Detroit-area factories.

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... Shop owner insight

Continued from page 1

"Here’s where you’re going to start, and here are the eight steps it takes to become a journeymen body tech, and here’s what I can guarantee you if you meet all these criteria along these eight steps," Morse said. "It’s enticing. A young person can look at this program and see, ‘Here’s where I start out, and here’s where I am in four years. And the shop is paying me while I’m learning.’"

Stop discounting and instead reward employees

Byron Davis said at one time his company participated in as many as a dozen insurer direct repair programs, but he has scaled that back significantly without hurting the business.

"We needed out," said Davis, owner of Auto Body Specialties in Oregon. "They just weren’t all mutually beneficial. It was a one-way street. And we realized you just don’t have to give the farm away. If you have a good reputation, a great client base and you’re constantly working to build that, that will drive your business."

Fewer discounts to insurers also helps the company offer better benefits to attract and retain quality employees, Davis said. Auto Body Specialties offers its 20 employees full health care and dental coverage, life insurance policies and a retirement plan.

"When you’re so busy trying to outsell the other guys, you can’t take care of the people who have," Davis said. "I can walk out there and shake their hand and look them in the eye and tell them how valuable they are. I work in a lot of shops. Never once did that ever happen.

There’s something about being valued, being part of something bigger than yourself. The grass doesn’t look greener someplace else when you’re a valued person where you are."

Community involvement, keeping techs happy

Jack Brito points to a number of factors that have helped his business, Hot Rod Dreamworks Collision Repair, in Canby, Ore., grow to 12 employees in recent years: taking care of customers through “honest, high-quality repairs,” online reviews, and perhaps most of all, community involvement.

For more than a decade, the shop has hosted a free annual car show in June, attracting hundreds of people by opening the shop for tours and filling its parking lot — and that of the adjacent Ford dealer — with classic and custom cars, including many the shop has restored.

"People can see the type of work we do," Brito said of the event. "We have it catered, and donate 100 percent of the money we get in for the food" to the American Cancer Society.

For a number of years, Hot Rod Dreamworks also has donated a vehicle to a local family in need through its “Wheels to Prosper” program. The most recent recipient was a single mother of four, going to school to be better equipped to support her kids.

"The cars are sometimes donated, or we come across a car that fits the criteria," Brito said. "We fix it up, detail it. As far as finding the right family, we notify a local charity and seek nominations on Facebook. We’re looking for people who are working to get ahead, who maybe have had bad things happen. A lot of bad things happen to good people. We have non-hospital people in the community — like the mayor or city council — pick a winner."

The shop is planning an expansion, but also freed up interior space by placing two shipping containers in its lot for parts storage. Brito said that has helped keep parts clean and damage-free.

Equipping to do more in-house

It’s not all that uncommon to find a collision repair business that has reached its 25th anniversary in business. But there aren’t many that reached that milestone in 1995, and are still operating.

"I’d like to say we’re a modern shop that has been around forever," said Ron Arth of George V. Arth & Son, who operates the business his great-grandfather started — as a blacksmith shop — in 1877 in Oakland, Calif.

Arth said the business clearly has evolved with the times, first shifting from carriage work to putting wagon beds onto truck chassis as motorized vehicles developed.

Decades later, he said, the shop was among the first to bring in unibody frame equipment and computerized estimating. Today, the shop is equipped and certified for Ford aluminum repair, is installing LED lighting throughout the shop to meet Honda certification requirements, and is adding a second Hunter alignment rack.

"The new alignment rack will make us more efficient and allow us to do stability control calibrations here," Arth said. "I don’t waste time sending two employees down and back to the alignment shop. We try to do alignments before a vehicle goes to the paint shop, so if we do need to order parts, they are here. That definitely improves our turn-around time."

New location, delegation seen as smart decisions

Gary Oliver said G.O.’s Collision in Yakima, Wash., probably wouldn’t have survived past his retirement in the not-too-distant future if he hadn’t calculated one specific number that told him it was time to move the business to a new location.

"It was $2,000 a month," Oliver said. "That’s what I was spending just to move cars."

For close to two decades, Oliver operated his business out of a downtown building he’d purchased. He’d added on to the building over the years, but the issue had become parking.

"I had five guys moving cars out for a half hour every morning," Oliver said. "At night, the same thing, moving them back in. I started penciling out how much money I was spending on that, not even counting the cost in lost wages because those guys weren’t doing other work. So it was sort of a no-brainer when this opportunity came up here."

By "here," Oliver means the company’s new location in a former sporting goods store. Since last year, the business has repaired its share of two large adjacent buildings located on several acres on the town’s busiest street.

"We now have room to grow if needed in the future," Oliver said. "There would even be room here to add a tow yard or glass shop."

The move to the new location also helped Oliver realize he can take a step back from his significant involvement in the day-to-day operations at the shop. That started as he focused on the work needed to prepare the new facility, but has continued even after the move.

"I delegated the operations to other people, who were very well qualified to take over for me, but I just hadn’t realized that," Oliver said. "I didn’t give my people enough credit. For the last year and a half, my participation in the day-to-day business is almost nil. It runs itself now. I have a great crew that takes care of it. I was an eye-opener for me, that I was able to do that. That’s great."

That, he said, will help ensure the business survives long past his expected retirement in a couple of years.

Investing in towing

Kelly Whitlock said it just penciled out for A Master & Touch Body & Paint in Portland, Ore., to buy a tow truck.

"When insurance companies quit allowing us to mark up tow bills, we bought a tow truck so we can do all our own tow," he said. "I had tried to talk my dad into getting a tow truck for years. Finally, we had enough money in the account, and I found a good deal on one, and I just went out and wrote a check for it."

In addition to transporting vehicles to and from sublet vendors, the tow truck has helped the shop pull in business from further away, such as when a previous customer had an accident 60 miles away.

"It was a $500 tow bill for an hour-and-a-half to go do it," Whitlock said. "That’s pretty decent. We don’t try to be exorbitant, just get paid for what we do."

Another tool Whitlock has used to help his negotiations with insurance companies is BillableGenie, an online database of claims data searchable by insurance company and estimate line item.

"When an insurance company says, ‘We don’t pay for that,’ it’s usually not true, because they actually do," he said. "I used this last week when an insurance company said they wouldn’t pay for pre- and post-repair scans. I pulled up the system and showed them the claim numbers users had submitted on which that insurance company did pay for those scans. She then said that was in a different part of the country, but I said they don’t fix the car any differently in Michigan than they do here."

Do you know:

...how this symbol “< >” on an estimate could mean a loss of $60+ on many repair jobs?

...how Geico responded when a federal judge asked when the insurer does and doesn’t pay for vehicle scans?

...how much the average painter or body tech in your state is making?

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Trump challenges California power to control auto regulations

By Tom Krisher & Ellen Knickmeyer

DETROIT — The Trump administration has launched an all-out assault on California over mileage rules, opening an antitrust investigation and telling state officials that they appear to be violating federal law in a deal with four automakers setting tougher automotive emission standards.

The outcome of the emissions fight will make or break an effort by President Donald Trump to relax Obama-era mileage standards nationwide. California’s congressionally granted authority to set its own tougher emissions standards under the 1970 Clean Air Act has long prodded automakers to adopt more fuel-efficient passenger vehicles.

Ford and Honda confirmed receiving a letter from the U.S. Justice Department informing them of an antitrust inquiry into a July deal with California, in which the two automakers along with Volkswagen and BMW agreed to stricter emissions standards than preferred by Trump. The Department of Transportation and the Environmental Protection Agency sent a letter to California saying the deal appears to violate the Clean Air Act and other laws.

By Tom Krisher & Ellen Knickmeyer

DETROIT — The Trump administration has launched an all-out assault on California over mileage rules, opening an antitrust investigation and telling state officials that they appear to be violating federal law in a deal with four automakers setting tougher automotive emission standards.

Ford and Honda confirmed receiving a letter from the U.S. Justice Department informing them of an antitrust inquiry into a July deal with California, in which the two automakers along with Volkswagen and BMW agreed to stricter emissions standards than preferred by Trump. The Department of Transportation and the Environmental Protection Agency sent a letter to California saying the deal appears to violate the Clean Air Act and other laws.

Ford spokesman T.R. Reid confirmed that the company received the Justice Department letter on the antitrust issue and said the company is cooperating. He would not disclose which other automakers may have gotten the letter, but Honda confirmed that it also had received it.

The July deal bypassed the Trump administration’s plan to freeze emissions and fuel economy standards adopted under the Obama administration at 2021 levels.

The four automakers agreed with the California Air Resources Board to reduce emissions by 3.7% per year starting with the 2022 model year, through 2026. That compares with 4.7% yearly reductions through 2025 under the Obama standards, according to California.

Emissions standards are closely linked with fuel economy requirements because vehicles pollute less if they burn fewer gallons of fuel.

The Justice Department gave no details of why it believed the deal could have violated federal law meant to prohibit anticompetitive behavior by companies. The EPA refused further comment.

In the letter to California, the EPA and Transportation Department warned the state’s pollution regulator to “disassociate” itself from the deal with the four automakers. “Those commitments may result in legal consequences given the limits placed in Federal law on California’s authority,” the letter said.

Former EPA attorneys who had worked on the emissions standards questioned the administration’s legal arguments.

Congress in the 1970s granted California authority, through a waiver in the Clean Air Act, to pursue tougher automotive emissions standards, in a nod to the state’s battles against the especially tenacious smog in central and Southern California. Lawmakers also allowed for other states to follow California’s tougher standards.

The move over the decades has at times led to two different pollution and related mileage standards, one set by California and the states that follow it, and a federal one. The Trump administration is now challenging whether California has that legal authority under the Clean Air Act.

“It’s crystal clear that it’s very hard to deny California a waiver” from national automobile emissions standards, said John Hannon, a retired EPA lawyer with decades of experience involving emissions standards.

“Congress set it up to give incredible deference to California’s authority to protect the health and safety of its residents,” Hannon said, referring to the Clean Air Act. (AP)  •

GM hires Google to make infotainment systems

DETROIT — General Motors is hiring Google to run key parts of its dashboard infotainment system, admitting that the tech firm can do a better job.

GM says research shows customers want technology embedded in their vehicle, and they want it to match how their smartphones operate.

The company says Google will work to bring its voice assistant into vehicles worldwide as well as navigation and in-vehicle apps. It’s scheduled to happen starting in 2021. The Google system will be better than past GM attempts. The company says drivers will be able to use Google Assistant to make calls, text friends or even set the temperature in their vehicles.

After many lackluster attempts at developing their own systems, automakers have been moving to integrate phones into infotainment systems. Most cars now can project smartphones onto car screens with Android Auto or Apple CarPlay.

GM wouldn’t release terms of its contract with Google. The deal is only with Google and does not cover any other units of its parent, Alphabet Inc., including its autonomous vehicle unit Waymo, GM said. (AP)  •

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By Steve McLinden

Body shop veteran Teresa Armstrong has tried to exit the collision center business on several occasions, but to paraphrase the Al Pacino line in “The Godfather III,” her loyal customers just keep pulling her back in.

When her father, Charles Armstrong, founder of Armstrong Garage and Body on Fort Worth’s Vickery Street, passed away in May 2005, Teresa wasn’t interested in taking over the place at that point in her life. But no one else stepped forward, and customers were begging her to re-open the shop. With some trepidation, she did.

After a family dispute effectively caused the closure of the Vickery operation in 2015 after 45 years, that was that, Armstrong thought. But customer demand, she and husband/workmate Curtis Fuqua determined, again seemed to ordain a replacement shop.

The two opened one, just a year later. So the Armstrong shop lives again, under the new name of Armstrong Garage and Body Shop, this time at 325 N. Grants Lane just off Lockheed Boulevard, across the street from the enormous defense manufacturer Lockheed Martin and adjoining Naval Air Station Joint Reserve Base Fort Worth (formerly Car- swell Air Force Base) in the town of White Settlement. Both are huge employers and provide a built-in customer base.

But the new paint-and-body/mechanic shop almost didn’t happen. Short on capital, Armstrong desperately sought out a replacement shop, but the new landlord, featuring a 30-foot cage with a camera, entered it — ideally a feral hog — allowing the shop to trap it.

The shop also owns an interesting little side business. It took over a service called Wild Hog Removal from the old landlord, featuring a computerized mixer from paint reps and deals on other equipment.

By August 20, 2016, Armstrong was back in business. The place quickly filled with old customers as well as new ones from Lockheed and the base. All ten bays were “full before our official opening,” said Armstrong. “All my old customers followed me; they kept saying they didn’t trust other shops or had somebody else do poor work on their car or got a bad paint job, so they came back to me!”

This time Armstrong didn’t want the pressure of having her name on the title as owner of the business. So her hubby, who her husband worked deals with vendors to retool, getting what was essentially a free PPG computerized mixer from paint reps and deals on other equipment.

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This time Armstrong didn’t want the pressure of having her name on the title as owner of the business. So her hubby, who had joined the previous Armstrong shop in 2012 as head mechanic, did the honors. But that hasn’t stopped Teresa from continuing in her old role as point-painter, painter and office manager, and as de-facto co-owner/operator.

The shop does a healthy mixture of insurance, fleet, and custom work. There were several custom jobs on hand on a blazing hot afternoon in mid-September, including a 1963 Ford Galaxy 500 XL and notably, a pair of like-colored 1972 El Caminos from different owners. A restored 1974 Jaguar and 1973 Chevy Blazer had left the shop in previous days. One curiosity in the shop was an antique, century-old children’s metal playground sliding board that the shop will be painting.

These days, Armstrong doesn’t see adjusters as often as the past, since insurance companies started converting to “virtual adjusting” technology such as All-state’s Virtual Assist. It’s a live, on-demand video chat app. That allows Armstrong and other shops to instantly demonstrate damage in real time via Facetime, a process that expedites the adjusters’ supplemental reviewing and decision-making processes, and helps get jobs started faster.

The shop employs six, including Armstrong’s youngest son, Jeremy, who works in a variety of roles. “He can do it all,” she said.

To save time, Armstrong goes online to order most needed replacement parts, which typically arrive the next day. Instead of a rigid scheduling calendar, Armstrong takes in jobs on the fly.

“I just let things happen,” she jokes, “and it still flows pretty smoothly.”

The shop also owns an interesting little side business. It took over a service called Wild Hog Removal from the old landlord, featuring a 30-foot cage with a camera, set in a rural area that notifies the office when something has entered it — ideally a feral hog — allowing the shop to remotely shut the cage door and trap it.

Not long after Armstrong rented the shop space, the landlord died and a Syrian investment group bought out the shop, which gave the owners a start, though the group has proven to be supportive of the shop, even as it raised the rent, she said.

The business is in earshot of the national anthem that prompted every morning and evening at the military complex across the street.

“It’s pretty cool, being here at this location,” said Armstrong, pointing to aircraft that typically arrive the next morning and stay the day. Instead of a rigid scheduling calendar, Armstrong takes in jobs on the fly.

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73-year-old drag racer back on track after heart surgery

By AP Wire Service

VIRGINIA, Minn. — Nearly 13 months ago, Virginia’s Gus Phillipich underwent quadruple bypass heart surgery in a nine-hour procedure.

His health was, of course, the main concern, but longtime drag racer Phillipich’s thoughts quickly turned to returning to the race track.

He was released from the hospital five days later and his doctor said he could go to the Lucas Oil Nationals at Brainerd International Raceway a few days later and “spectate.”

Phillipich was definitely thinking about it because he didn’t want to miss the event for the first time in 37 years.

“It’s hard enough to get out of the recliner” while still recovering, Phillipich said, so he decided against the venture.

Efforts like that one to get to the track with his family and race over the years haven’t gone unnoticed.

Upon returning to the Lucas Oil Nationals in Brainerd in August, the 73-year-old Phillipich was a class winner in his 1988 Oldsmobile Cutlass and also got a big surprise.

That turned out to be the Never Rest — the biggest trophy that comes with winning the class winner trophies, but is still after the one you have to keep trying to get. We have some time yet to do it,” said Phillipich, who turned 74 last month.

How long does Phillipich plan to continue racing?

He said he’ll do it as long as he can and as long as he still enjoys it. He never wants it to feel like a job, he added.

He still loves the sport, but doesn’t go as often or work as hard on his car. “It takes a little longer to do everything now (like change a transmission) I guess between age and the heart problem.”

While he loves racing, the trips to all the different tracks is more about enjoying the friendships made along the way and visiting with people from other parts of the country, he stated.

As far as racing, Phillipich does have several streaks going.

He missed racing at BIR in August 2018, but he competed in July before his surgery, which kept a mark of nearly 50-straight years alive. “I have raced at that facility every year that it has been opened,” he said, but BIR was closed for a couple years in the early ’70s.

His first race as a competitor after the surgery came in June in Eau Claire, Wisconsin, at the Rock Falls Raceway, which is celebrating its 50th year of drag races.

Phillipich’s health was not a concern back in June because he has been back to doing normal things since October-November of 2018. At the same time, he has noticed he takes naps he never used to and has less energy.

“I keep telling the doctor I used to be an 18-19 hour per day person. And if you fixed me, why am I getting tired after so many hours and have to take a nap? He said it will get better as you go along.”

Phillipich doesn’t let that bother him as he and the family were racing again last month at the Tri State Raceway in Earlville, Iowa.

“And Brainerd has one after that,” said the Never Rest Performer. (AP) •

UAW official in Missouri charged on corruption probe

By Ed White

DETROIT — A Missouri-based official at the United Auto Workers was charged with corruption in an alleged scheme to embezzle union money and spend cash on premium booze, golf clubs, cigars and swanky stays in California.

It’s another blow to the union’s reputation and came just before national contracts with General Motors, Ford and Fiat Chrysler expired at 11:59 p.m. Saturday, Sept. 14. The 40-page criminal complaint against Vance Pearson is certain to raise more questions about UAW President Gary Jones, whose Detroit-area house was searched by agents on Aug. 28.

Continued on page 15
... ‘safe down’ procedure

Continued from page 1

10. When using your CAT III meter, keep a small AA battery with you. There is a three-part procedure for making sure your meter works. Test the AA battery first. Does your meter read 1.5 volts? If yes, test for HV at whatever location you need to test at. Did you get a reading of zero volts? Then check the AA battery again. Did you get 1.5 volts?

11. Wear your safety gloves until you know it is safe. Always wear your HV safety gloves when handling an HV battery pack as even a one percent state-of-charge can be lethal.

12. Re-test for HV if at any point you have left the car and it was out of your view or control.

Although a lot of redundant safety devices are built into EMVs, the potential is there for a technician to be hurt or killed. Most technicians are typically trained for one week on high-voltage systems by the OEMs before they are allowed to work on them. The safety issues are real, so be safe. My company for close to two decades has offered books, webinars and classes on servicing hybrid and electric vehicles. More information can be found at www.fixhybrid.com.

Craig Van Batenburg is a former repair shop owner who is the CEO of Automotive Career Development Center (www.fixhybrid.com), which offers training and consulting related to electric and hybrid vehicles; he can be reached at Craig@fixhybrid.com.
General Motors, University of Michigan show automated safety features preventing crashes

DETROIT – As General Motors moves towards its vision of a world with zero crashes, the company partnered with the University of Michigan Transportation Research Institute to understand the real-world effectiveness of some of its available active safety, driver assistance, and advanced headlighting features that may prevent or mitigate different types of crashes. The results show that several of these features are making a statistically significant impact in helping to reduce crashes.

The study leveraged 3.7 million GM vehicles across 20 different models from 2013-2017. Fifteen different systems were evaluated using police report crash databases available to UMTRI from 10 states.

After comparing the crash instances involving vehicles with and without active safety features, the study showed that certain features evaluated had an impact in preventing the types of crashes the features were designed to help prevent or mitigate.


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Busch criticism highlights NASCAR’s financial disparity

By Jenna Fryer

The massive divide between NASCAR’s Cup Series and the underdog teams just scraping by received renewed attention following Kyle Busch’s damning assessment of how backmarkers ranked in the playoff opener at Las Vegas.

Busch railed from an early incident at Las Vegas Motor Speedway that dropped him two laps off the pace to stunningly position himself for a top-five finish. Instead, he ran into the back of Garrett Smithley, who was 12 laps down in 35th place.

Busch, the regular-season champion, dropped to a 19th-place finish and went from first to fourth in the playoff standings. Clearly aggravated after the race, he was blunt about the incident with Smithley, who was among 23 drivers on the track that day who are not in the 16-driver playoff field.

“Told he was going to go high. I thought he was going to go high.” Busch said of the instructions he received from his spotter. “We went middle because I thought he was going to go high. Killed our day. I don’t know. Should have run fourth probably. Instead 19th. We’re at the top echelon of motorsports, and we’ve got teams who have never won Late Model races running on the racetrack. It’s pathetic. They don’t know where to go.”

The comments have drawn sharp criticism, with some saying they came off as entitled simply because another driver didn’t get out of Busch’s way. Some responses came from some lesser-known drivers on underfunded teams and helped spark a debate on over-track etiquette during the playoffs.

“Nobody is considered ‘in the way’ without them,” Gase wrote. “We all just want to race & be respected. Stuff like this is one-sided.”

Joey Gase penned a similar tale of his struggle to make it in NASCAR. Gase, who was among 23 drivers on the floor who are not in the 16-driver playoff field.

Menard retiring, Wood Brothers hires DiBenedetto

By AP Wire Service

CHARLOTTE, N.C. — Paul Menard has decided to walk away from NASCAR’s top level after more than 460 races and Wood Brothers Racing is replacing him with Matt DiBenedetto in the iconic No. 21 Ford next season.

After spending 16 years in the Cup Series, Menard said he wants to step back from full-time racing to spend more time with his family. The 39-year-old driver, whose only win came at the Brickyard 400 in 2011, has two young children with his wife, Jennifer.

“I’ve enjoyed every moment of my career racing in the NASCAR Cup Series and I’m so thankful for all the great memories and friendships I’ve made,” Menard said. “I’m excited for what the future holds and I’m looking forward to sharing the plans for 2020 and beyond in the coming weeks.”

Menard joins David Ragan in becoming the second veteran driver to retire this season.

His decision is a gift to DiBenedetto, who has been solid this season but learned last month he wasn’t being retained at Leavine Family Racing next year. And with few rides expected to be available this offseason, the 28-year-old DiBenedetto was unsure if he would land a competitive ride.

“Becoming available this off-season was beneficial for the No. 21 Ford, and I’m so thankful for all the great memories and friendships I’ve made,” Menard said. “I’m excited for what the future holds and I’m looking forward to sharing the plans for 2020 and beyond in the coming weeks.”

Beckman gets first NHRA Funny Car victory

BY AP Wire Service

MOHNTON, Pa. — Jack Beckman raced to his first Funny Car victory of the season Sunday, Sept. 15 beating 70-year-old John Force in the Countdown-opening Mopar Express Lane NHRA Nationals to take the points lead.

Beckman had a 3.958-second pass at 330.07 against Force at Maple Grove Raceway two weeks after losing to him in the U.S. Nationals for his fourth runner-up finish of the season.

“Since NHRA, you have zero control over what the car and driver in the other lane are doing,” Beckman said. “I wanted to win. Of course. Did it sting that he beat us in the Indy final? Duh. But none of that is going to help me be any better. Some fans came over before the final and said, ‘Hey, we’ll go razz John.’ And I said, ‘Don’t poke the bear.’”

Richie Crampton won in Top Fuel, Jason Line in Pro Stock, and Jerry Savoie in Pro Stock Motorcycle.

It was a battle of Kalitta Motorsports entries, Crampton topped Doug Kalitta with a 3.738 at 329.10.

While raced to his 50th career Pro Stock victory, beating Fernando Cuadra with a 6.553 pass at 210.60 in a Chevrolet Camaro. Savoie picked up his second consecutive win, edging Steve Johnson with a 6.774 at 198.55 on a Suzuki.

He took down Steve Johnson with his 6.774 pass at 198.55 in the final round and went on to claim the Pro Stock Motorcycle points lead.

Brittany Force breaks Top Fuel time record

MOHNTON, Pa. — Brittany Force broke the NHRA national Top Fuel time record Saturday, Sept. 14 in qualifying for the Mopar Express Lane NHRA Nationals.

Force has a 3.623-second pass at 331.61 mph at Maple Grove Raceway in the first race of the NHRA Countdown to the Championship playoffs.

Ron Capps topped Funny Car qualifying, Erica Enders was the fastest in Pro Stock, and Angelle Sampey led the Pro Stock Motorcycle field, marking the first time three women have been No. 1 qualifiers in an event in the four professional divisions.

That run was just outstanding,” Force said. “I knew before I even got into the car. In the staging lanes (crew chief, David) Grubnic jumped in the tow car with me and had a conversation with me about what the plan was. What we were going to do and how we were going to set a record. He told me to hang on and get the car down there. That surprised me. I didn’t think a .62. I didn’t ask him for a number but he said if we get down there, it’ll be an awesome run and we’ll break some records.”

(AP) •
Under pressure GM recalls 3.8M trucks and SUVs

By Tom Krisher

DETROIT — Under pressure from the federal government, General Motors is recalling nearly 3.8 million big pickup trucks and SUVs in the U.S. and Canada to fix a brake problem.

There have been 113 reports of crashes and 13 injuries related to the problem, according to GM.

The recall covers Chevrolet Silverado and GMC Sierra 1500 light-duty pickups from the 2014 through 2018 model years. Also included are the Cadillac Escalade from 2015 to 2017, and the GMC Yukon and Chevy Suburban and Tahoe from 2015 through 2018.

GM says that as it ages, the pump in the power-assist brakes can put out less vacuum power than needed, increasing stopping distance and the risk of a crash.

The company is recalling 3.46 million vehicles in the U.S., and it recalled another 310,000 in Canada back in June. GM said global numbers for the recall weren’t available.

Drivers will recalibrate the electronic brake control module at no cost to customers. Owners were to be notified starting Sept. 6.

NHTSA, the government’s road safety agency, began investigating the problem in November of last year after getting 111 complaints from owners of poor brake performance. At the time the agency had nine reports of crashes that had caused two injuries.

GM says the problems occur rarely and mostly at low speeds like driving in parking lots. Even with the problem, the brakes “continue to function and exceed the requirements of the appropriate federal motor vehicle safety standard,” GM spokesman Dan Flores said.

The vacuum pump is lubricated with engine oil that flows through a filter screen. In some of the trucks, oil sludge or other debris can clog the screen, reducing oil flow and causing the pump’s vacuum output to drop, Flores said.

The trucks, he said, have a secondary power brake assist system which works when there are problems with the main system, but it is limited at lower speeds. The reprogramming will activate the secondary system faster.

GM isn’t replacing the pumps because pump failures are rare and already are covered by an extended warranty, Flores said. “This remedy will improve brake performance in any situation where brake vacuum drops,” he said.

The recall comes 10 months after NHTSA opened its investigation and over two months after the recall was announced in Canada. Asked why it took that long to do the recall, Flores said only that the company has been cooperating with NHTSA and providing data. He said GM would have done the recall even without the NHTSA investigation.

Drivers could feel a vibration in the brake pedal or a change in pressure required to push the brake pedal if their trucks have the vacuum pump problem. If the problem surfaces, owners will see a message on their dashboard telling them to service the brake assist system, Flores said.

Although the recall is a large number, the cost will not be high enough for GM to report it to the Securities and Exchange Commission as an event that will materially affect earnings, Flores said. He said he didn’t know the cost.

GM also is recalling over 177,000 Chevrolet Malibu sedans from the 2018 model year in the U.S. because the fuel injectors can fail.

The cars have 1.5-Liter turbocharged engines. GM says in documents posted on the NHTSA website that a software error can corrupt data used by the engine control computer. That can cause the computer to send a signal disabling the fuel injectors. Engines may not start, or in rare cases, could stall without warning.

GM began investigating last year after getting higher than normal warranty claims for engine control computer replacements.

Owners were to be notified beginning last month. Dealers will reprogram the engine control computer to correct the problem. (AP)

Probe opened on Rogue auto emergency braking

DETROIT — The U.S. government’s road safety agency is investigating complaints that the Nissan Rogue’s automatic emergency braking can turn on when no obstacle is in the way.

The probe covers about 554,000 Rogue small SUVs from the 2017 and 2018 model years.

The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration says 843 owners have complained to the agency and to Nissan about the problem. Owners reported 14 crashes and five injuries.

The agency says Nissan has issued a technical service bulletin and two customer service actions related to the problem. It will try to find a cause and determine how often the false braking happens, and could seek a recall.

The investigation was opened in response to a March 21, 2019 petition from the Center for Auto Safety, a nonprofit group that represents consumers.

Nissan said in a statement that it has investigated the problem and taken action to tell customers of a free software update that improves the system’s performance. The company says that on some Rogues, the brakes can be activated by unique road conditions such as railroad crossings, bridges, and low-hanging traffic lights. Nissan says it’s cooperating with NHTSA. (AP)

Ram adds 693K pickups to recall for tailgate problem

DETROIT — Fiat Chrysler is adding more than 693,000 Ram pickups in the U.S. to a series of recalls to fix tailgates that can open unexpectedly.

The expansion covers certain Ram 1500, 2500 and 3500 pickups from 2013 through 2018 with power locking tailgates. Affected 2015 through 2017 trucks have 8-foot beds. The 2013, 2014 and 2018 trucks have beds of all sizes and were built before April 1, 2018.

Fiat Chrysler says it’s not aware of any accidents caused by the problem.

A tailgate tab can fracture and cause the gates to unlatch, increasing the risk of cargo falling onto the road.

Dealers will repair the latch. Owners involved in the latest recall will get letters starting around Oct. 18. (AP)

Ford recalls 2017 Explorers for seat frame edge

Ford is recalling more than 300,000 of its 2017 Ford Explorer vehicles because of a sharp seat frame edge.

The automaker said that there have been 31 reports of hand injuries.

Ford Motor Co. said users could come in contact with the sharp edges when reaching between the power front seat and center console. The vehicles were made at a Chicago plant from Feb. 13, 2016 to Oct. 25, 2017.

It is recalling 311,907 vehicles in the United States and federal territories, 23,380 in Canada and 3,045 in Mexico.

Dealers will install flocked tape to the exposed edge and tab on the inboard side of the power seat frames. Users are advised to use caution and avoid contact with the seat frame edge until the repair is completed. (AP)

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Recalls

Compiled from AP, manufacturer, EPA and NHTSA news releases.

CHRYSLER FCA is recalling 3,427 2020 Jeep Gladiator vehicles to replace the driveshaft. The original driveshaft may have been assembled without grease in the monoblock joint.

GENERAL MOTORS is recalling 177,276 2018 Malibu vehicles equipped with the 1.5-liter turbo engine. An error in the ECM could disable the fuel injectors.

GM is recalling 3,420 2020 Buick Enclave and Chevrolet Traverse vehicles to inspect the right-hand frame rail. If sufficient evidence of cracking is found, the vehicle will be replaced.

FORD Motor Co. is recalling 2,624 2019 Fiesta vehicles to flush the brake system. The original fluid in the brake calipers could swell the rubber seals and result in the brakes dragging or not properly releasing.

Ford is recalling 90,644 2013 – 2016 Ford Fusion, Lincoln MK2, and Ford Edge vehicles that were originally sold or currently registered in “salt belt” states, those states north of Kentucky and Virginia subject to frequent road salting for snow. The salt could corrode the attaching bolts for the steering gear electric motors. Dealers will replace the bolts and apply a wax sealer.

MERCEDES-BENZ USA is recalling certain 2018 – 2019 GLA 250 vehicles to inspect and repair, if necessary, the rear seat belt middle anchor plate. The anchor plate may have been left loose during assembly.

Mercedes-Benz is recalling 26,584 2018 – 2019 C series vehicles to secure the 12-volt battery mounting bracket. An improperly secured battery bracket could allow the battery to become disconnected in the event of a crash.

Mercedes-Benz is recalling 17,755 2020 GLE vehicles to inspect the air-conditioner drain hoses and to re-install any hoses that could allow water from the A/C system to enter the interior of the vehicle.

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Dealers will repair the latch. Owners involved in the latest recall will get letters starting around Oct. 18. (AP)

Ford is recalling more than 300,000 of its 2017 Ford Explorer vehicles because of a sharp seat frame edge.

The automaker said that there have been 31 reports of hand injuries.

Ford Motor Co. said users could come in contact with the sharp edges when reaching between the power front seat and center console. The vehicles were made at a Chicago plant from Feb. 13, 2016 to Oct. 25, 2017.

It is recalling 311,907 vehicles in the United States and federal territories, 23,380 in Canada and 3,045 in Mexico.

Dealers will install flocked tape to the exposed edge and tab on the inboard side of the power seat frames. Users are advised to use caution and avoid contact with the seat frame edge until the repair is completed. (AP)
**1972 Italia Spyder**

*By Jay Hirsch*

The 1972 Italia Spyder built by Intermeccanica is not a “kit car.” A kit car is basically a car that a company sells in various stages of “undress” — chassis, body, mechanical components, etc. — and the person who buys the kit can assemble it or the company that sells the kit will assemble it for you with an engine of your choice.

Intermeccanica was founded in Turin, Italy, in 1959. It began as an aftermarket speed equipment company making speed equipment kits, such as carburetors and big-bore exhaust systems, for Fiat, Peugeot, Simca and other smallbore European cars that were underpowered. Frank and Paula Reisner, who started the company, had a particular fondness for anything Italian.

Intermeccanica’s first attempt at producing a car was the Apollo, made from 1967 to 1965. The bodies were aluminum and made in Italy. They were shipped to International Motor Works in Oakland, Calif., where a choice of Buick engines were offered: the 215 cid V-8 or 300 cid V-8. The Apollo weighed 2,300 lbs and 42 Apollo’s were made.

Frank Reisner decided after the Apollo project that the only way to be successful was for Intermeccanica to make their own bodies. In 1967, Frank and Paula Reisner formed Intermeccanica in Turin, Italy, and began manufacturing the Italia Spyder. The first Italas built were called a Torino, Ford had the Torino name registered and so the name change to Italia.

Production began after a long series of events, including name, ownership and engineering changes. This explains why the Italian-American hybrid isn’t more well known but does little to hide the car’s Italian flair and V-8 performance.

The Italia’s chassis was designed by ex-BRM designer John Crosthwaite. The sleek steel body design was by Robert Cumberford with some tweaking by Frank Scaglione from the legendary car design house Bertone.

The Italia has the popular sports car body design of this era, characterized by the long nose and short deck which are elements of the 1969 – 1972 Ferrari Daytona and the first generation 1968 – 1972 Corvette Stingray with the front bumper that was still chrome. The Italia’s body was completely handmade, which was then placed onto the light tubular frame.

This is where the misconception that the Italia is a “kit car” comes from. The Italia is not a car that was built in the 1980s or 1990s to look like a car from the early 1970s. It was built from 1967 to 1972, the same time period of the Ferrari Daytona and the first-generation Corvette Stingray. The gauges in the Italia are Jaeger, which are the same type used in the Jaguar XKE.

As for the engine, a deal was made with Ford Motor Company to supply the 351 Cleveland V-8. The engines were shipped to Turin, where the Italia was built. The Italia was a well-engineered, hand-crafted production car. It is not to be confused with a kit car.

The 1972 Italia seen here represents the final year that the Italia was made. To handle the torque of the 351 C engine a floor-mounted four-speed Top-Loader transmission was used.

The Italia was one of the best of the Italian-American hybrids — Italian design and American V-8 engine power.

Warren Seifer, the owner of this yellow Italia, did not know that much about the Intermeccanica Italia when he bought it, except for the fact he loved the design of the car and that it had an American engine. Warren had the car about three years when he finally knew all about the Italia and that his was not original in some respects. From researching with Intermeccanica Warren discovered the mustard yellow of his Italia was wrong and the vinyl-covered seats, which Warren knew were incorrect, were not even done in the original design.

Warren had the body stripped to bare metal which revealed a very solid body with just a spot of rust on the lower rear quarter of the passenger side. The interior was taken out and the correct leather and pattern design with new black carpet was installed. This was with the help of Intermeccanica supplying the correct information when the car was new.

The Italia has a wheelbase of 94.5 inches, is 175 inches long and is 46” tall, riding on 205/70 x VR14 radial tires mounted on Borroni wheels. To stop the car there are disc brakes at all four wheels. The Italia weighs in at 2,449 lbs.

The price in 1972 was $7,995. In 1972 a Porsche 911 S was about $8,000. The Italia being an unknown had a stiff market to break into.

Top speed was about 140 mph, and the 0-to-60 time was 6.5 seconds. There were 411 Italia’s built.

The word “spyder” comes from a horse drawn carriage that was “sporty” and had a top that could be lowered and usually sat only two people. They were also called “sport phaeton.” Ferrari and some other European car companies liked to call their cars two-seat convertibles “spyder” or “spider.”

Today you can expect to pay $70,000 to $140,000 for an Italia, depending on the condition.
VW to pay up to $87M in Australia for scandal

CANBERRA, Australia — Volkswagen has agreed to pay up to 127 million Australian dollars ($87 million) to settle an Australian class action stemming from the 2015 diesel emissions scandal, the German automaker and a lawyer said reported last month.

The settlement was announced in the Federal Court in Sydney by law firm Maurice Blackburn and has yet to be approved by a judge. Volkswagen will pay between AUS$77 million and AUS$127 million, depending on how many owners of the affected 100,000 Volkswagen, Audi and Skoda diesel vehicles sold in Australia join the class action, the firm’s principal lawyer Julian Schimmel said.

Volkswagen said in a statement that it made no admission of liability in the settlement. Volkswagen has also agreed to pay the plaintiffs’ legal costs, which have yet to be assessed.

Volkswagen has paid 30 billion euros ($33.5 billion) in fines and civil settlements around the world after it was revealed that the world’s largest automaker after Toyota installed software on diesel vehicles to cheat on emissions tests.

Volkswagen announced in May it had set aside 1 billion euros ($1.1 billion) for legal risks related to the diesel scandal. Volkswagen said another settlement was close to being finalized with the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission, the competition and trade law watchdog. Details of that settlement remain confidential.

“Volkswagen views the in-principle settlements as a further step toward overcoming the diesel issue,” the statement said. (AP)
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