

# Health Tests for Ageing Autos

Safety Engineering

EVERY state should have laws requiring a periodic inspection for all automobiles, and a certificate of their fitness before license plates are issued or renewed, was recommended in a report presented to the National Conference on Highway Safety at its recent meeting.

Stressing the need for a periodic health examination for cars, the report states that in the course of special investigations defective brakes were found in about one car out of four. Defective lights were found in from 13 to 25 per cent. of the cars. Steering gears, horns, windshield wipers and other accessories which figure in driving safety were found to be out of order in other cars.

Since so many individuals will not keep their cars fit, the report recommends that every state should have an adequate highway patrol force whose members are trained to recognize the symptoms of mechanical defects. The patrol should inform motorists whose cars are defective and impress on them the need for prompt repair, and cars in really hazardous state should be withdrawn from the highway forthwith, the report states.

**A**UTHORITIES on safety are finding out what to do to curb the increasing number of deaths from automobile accidents by scientifically analyzing accident statistics.

Effective steps toward meeting the problem must be based on statistics comparable in nature and generally similar in classification and grouping, says Dr. Julius H. Parmelee, director of the U. S. Bureau of Railway Economics. Dr. Parmelee directed the gathering of detailed statistics on the 31,000 fatalities resulting from automobile accidents in the United States last year.

As chairman of the Committee on Traffic Accident Statistics of the National Conference on Street and Highway Safety he has just made a report. He said:

"Many things are to be learned of the congestion and accident prob-

lem through such statistics. There is the factor of road and lighting conditions; the type and condition of the car; the element of age, experience and physical condition of the driver; and the primary cause of the accident."

The most important figures from Dr. Parmelee's report were given the conference by Secretary of Commerce Robert P. Lamont, its chairman. Secretary Lamont pointed out that motor vehicle fatalities in the United States have increased from 12,500 in 1920 to 22,000 in 1925, 28,000 in 1928, and 31,000 in 1929. The annual losses now approach our total casualties on the fields of battle in the Great War, he said.

"Analyzing these figures by comparison with the number of automobiles registered we find another fact that is cause of great concern," continued Secretary Lamont. "In 1920, for every 100,000 automobiles in use, motor accidents caused 136 deaths. By 1925 this ratio had been brought down to 110 and in 1926 to 107. Since 1926, however, the ratio has reversed its trend and has constantly mounted. Last year it reached 117."

Secretary Lamont found encouraging signs in the comparatively small increase in the number of railway grade crossing accidents compared with the enormous increase of automobiles registered, and in the relative improvement in the fatality record

among children. He also pointed out the facts that states with strong centralized state motor vehicle administration, including drivers' license systems with mandatory examination, had the best accident records and that 15 of the large cities of the country, including Chicago, showed great improvement.

**A**N economical and practical method of saving the lives of many of the 31,000 people killed in the United States every year by motor vehicle accidents is to provide highway sidewalks. A well-graded concrete walk is desirable but not necessary. The urgent need is for a usable path along the right-of-way of the road far enough from automobile traffic to make walking safe.

Difficulty in building such walks is foreseen by the American Society for Municipal Improvements, which brought their need to the attention of the conference. An investigation made by the society shows that the laws of practically all states make no provision for constructing the walks at state expense.

West Virginia is the exception; its laws permit state expense for sidewalk construction wherever the safety of the public demands it. Illinois and New Hampshire can use state money for grading the walks only, several more states can build walks on bridges and through congested districts, while many permit counties and towns to build walks on state right-of-ways. Massachusetts and Westchester county, N. Y., are already taking steps to provide walks.

Of the 31,000 people killed in 1929, 65 per cent. were pedestrians, it is reported. Many of these were struck while walking along highways, especially at night. In addition to the actual saving of life which highway sidewalks would effect, the pleasure and right of walking beside roads once used entirely by pedestrians would be returned to them, the report declared.

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