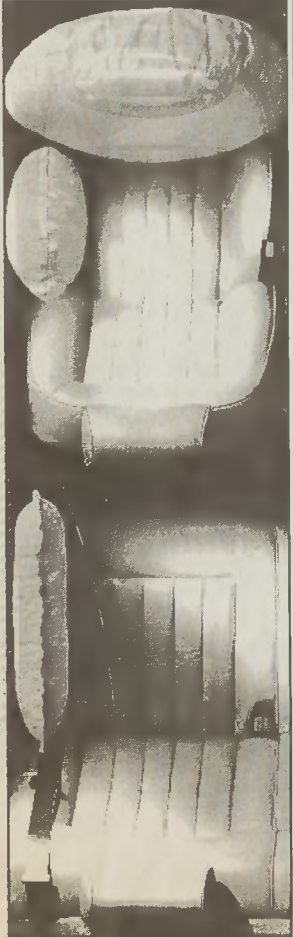


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AUTO SHOWCASE

Automakers defend use of air bags

By Catherine Strong
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS



WASHINGTON — With a loud blast, twin air bags blew open in a test car outside a congressional office building Monday, shattering the vehicle's windshield.

Automakers who staged the demonstration then went inside to tell lawmakers their concerns about the Clinton administration's proposal to make it easier for consumers to deactivate air bags.

The administration proposed the change this year to allay public fears about air bags, which are credited with saving 1,900 lives but also blamed for the deaths of 38 children and 25 adults.

But letting any motorist get an air bag disconnected could lead to many more fatalities on the roads, Chrysler Corp.'s Susan Cischke told a hearing of the House Commerce consumer protection subcommittee.

"We believe millions (of customers) could be at the dealer's doorstep asking for deactivation," added Lou Camp of Ford Motor Co. "We don't have millions of parts."

Domestic and foreign car makers alike said the government should not allow any motorist who wishes it to have an air bag deactivated by a mechanic. They argued instead that the government should define who is at risk and should be allowed to deactivate the devices.

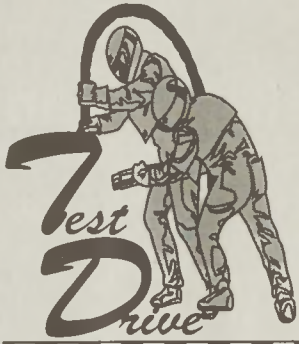
Phil Recht, associate administrator for the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, said a customer would have to sign a waiver before requesting a mechanic to deactivate an air bag.

In March, the safety agency allowed automakers to install air bags that deploy with 20 percent to 35 percent less force.

Government regulators gave lawmakers simple advice about what could be done to protect children and shorter adults from the force of deploying air bags.

"Although the (air bag) has the power to save lives, we have seen that when it is used improperly there are tragic

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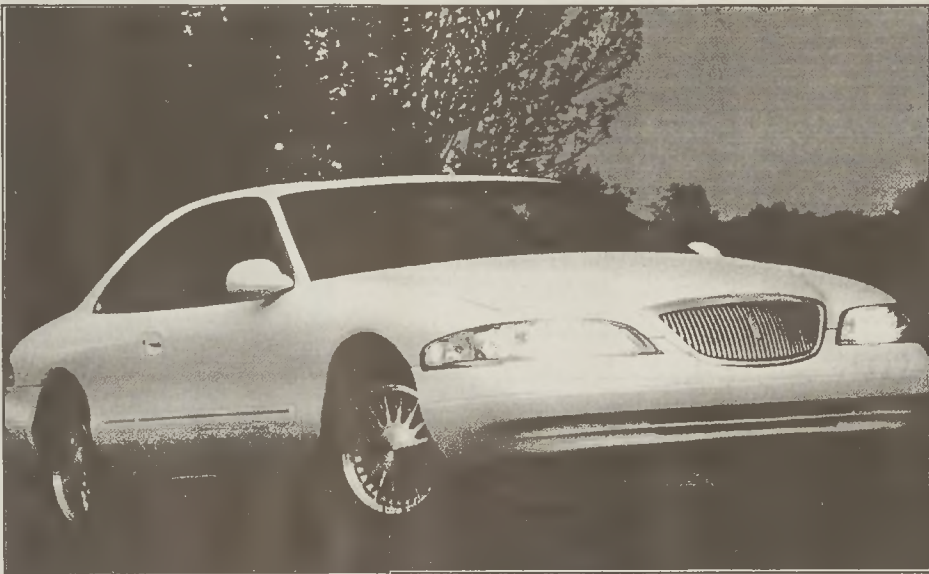
Winfred B. Cross

It's 12:30 a.m. and I'm fumbling through the parking lot of the local Bi-Lo. For some reason I can never make it to the grocery store before the sun sets. Maybe it's just a habit. Maybe it's because I hate grocery stores and I prolong the agony until I absolutely have to go.

Anyway, the parking lot is dimly lit and I park in west nowhere, for reasons that escape me.

Then I remembered. I'm driving Lincoln's new Mark VIII LSC and it has this neat feature I wanted to try. The outside mirrors have LEDs which illuminate the area around the door. I push the remote from across the parking lot and sure enough, it now looks like a Christmas display. Doggone if those security mirrors don't work after all.

That's just one of the many features found on the '97 LSC, Lincoln's answer to the Lexus SC 400 and Cadillac's Eldorado STS. It's a mighty good answer, too.



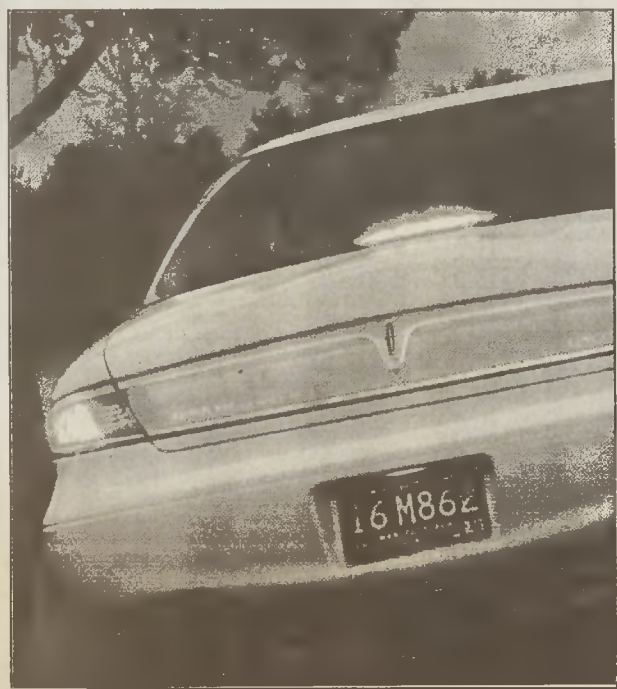
1997 Lincoln Continental Mark VIII

Make my Lincoln Mark VIII black

The LSC has gone through mild restyling for '97. The grill is much larger, looking much like the thing found on the Mountaineer. Only the LSC's grill is body-colored. My car happened to be black, or midnight black as Ford calls it. The headlights are now huge, giving the front a much more aggressive look.

The headlights are also quite bright. High intensity discharge is what they're called. These happen to be the biggest ones you'll find on a domestic car. Turn these puppies on and drivers of o-coming cars blink their lights because they think you have your brights on. The high beams are halogen. The HIDs stay on when the high beams are selected. I'm telling you, it's real bright.

The hood is also new, as are the bumpers and air scoop. The rear end is even more dramatic, featuring neon light technology. The neon tube runs the full width of the



1997 Lincoln Continental Mark VIII

trunk and shines down on a reflective surface which illuminates through a clear lens. The neon light reacts quicker than conventional bulbs. This should help to reduce the chance of a rear-end collision.

I'm not sure what I think about the chrome-dipped wheels. They are nearly as bright as the head lights. Funky, but maybe a bit too bright.

The interior is lavishly appointed. California Walnut rings the dash and doors and is also around the shift lever. The dash sweeps around the front passengers like a cockpit. All the controls are positioned toward the driver and are arranged logically, according to degree of use.

The seats are covered in ultra-soft black leather. The front buckets are Euro-styled and are very comfortable. The driver's seat automatically slides back to make exiting easier. The seat reverts to its original position once the ignition key is inserted. The passenger's seat slides forward electronically once the seat back is pushed forward. It to has a memory.

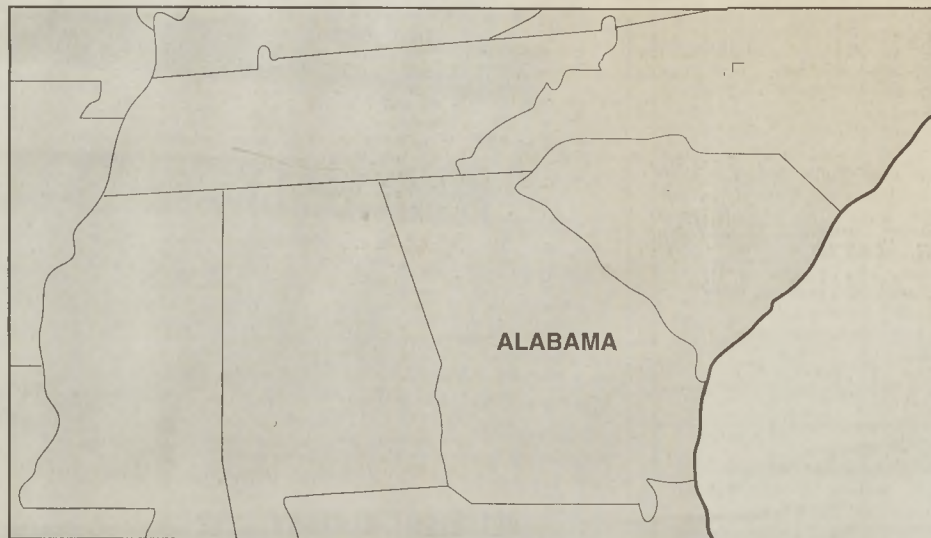
The rear seats? Well, if you've got packages that will not fit in the trunk, toss them in the back. People may find the seats too cramped for more than a quick jaunt around town.

And it will be quick. The LSC has a 290 horsepower, 32-valve V8. Driving the rear wheels, the engine makes the car scoot to 60 mph in less than eight seconds. Top speed is somewhere near 140 miles per hour. The engine makes a glorious snarling sound under hard acceleration.

Motivation seems to be impeded by the transmission. It shifts fairly crisply, but slowly. It doesn't have the smoothness of either the

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Rumors hurting Alabama's recruitment



THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

MONTGOMERY, Ala. — Alabama is being accused in industry-recruiting circles of breaking promises, and the head of a private group working to lure new businesses to the state said the insider talk is hurting.

"Our competitors are using the fact that (the perception (of Alabama) is that it does not keep its commitments," said Neal Wade, chief executive officer of the Economic Development Partnership of Alabama.

Wade oversees the partnership of the state's 62 largest corporations. The organization has been at the forefront of Alabama's successful recruitment of more than two dozen companies, including Mercedes-Benz.

Wade said he was told about the comments by consultants for places to build new plants.

"Other states are telling

them, 'Don't put your project in Alabama because they won't keep their commitments,'" Wade told The Huntsville Times.

Ira Silberman, head of the Alabama Development Office, said he's not heard any indications that the state is getting a bad reputation from any broken incentive promises. But Silberman said he's not surprised that states would use anything — true or otherwise — to get an edge in recruiting new businesses.

"Outside of shooting them in the head, I don't know how you can stop that," Silberman said.

He said any perception that the state is ignoring its promises is based on false information.

"To my knowledge, this administration and the state does everything it can to live up to its obligations — both legally and ethically," Silberman said.

Wade said the allegations may stem from the state's pub-

licized difficulties with an incentive law passed in 1993 to persuade Mercedes to build at Vance and the state's slowness in keeping promises to the German automaker.

"Enough of the stories that came out about this may lead someone who doesn't know any more to conclude that Alabama doesn't keep its commitments," Wade said.

The 1993 law came under almost immediate question when it was disclosed that incentives would be paid by crediting to a new company part of the state income taxes paid by that company's employees. The Alabama Education Association threatened to sue because state income tax revenue pays for education.

Gov. Fob James, soon after taking office in 1995, pushed a rewritten incentives bill through the Legislature and renegotiated with Mercedes over how the incentives would

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Ford to install less forceful air bags in all of its 1998 vehicles

By Catherine Strong
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

WASHINGTON — Ford Motor Co. announced today it is installing less forceful air bags in all of its 1998 model year vehicles, saying the less powerful devices will better protect children and short-statured adults.

Air bags deploying at up to 200 mph have been blamed for the deaths of at least 38 children and 25 adults — mostly shorter women, in lower-speed accidents they should have survived.

In response to the public outcry, government regulators gave automakers the go-ahead in March to install air bags in new cars that deploy with up to 35 percent less force than the current air bags.

The auto industry, which lobbied hard for the change, said then that some of the first cars with the "depowered" air bags could be on the market by late summer.

Ford is the first automaker to announce all its vehicles sold in North America will have less forceful air bags beginning with 1998 models that go into production this summer and fall.

General Motors Corp. will install less forceful air bags on one-third to one half of its 1998 model year vehicles, said spokesman Kyle Johnson. Chrysler Corp. will have the new air bags on more than 50 percent of its vehicles, said spokeswoman Michele Tinson.

Foreign automakers have yet to announce what they will do. A number of foreign automakers will install less forceful air bags, but not all air bags need to be made less forceful since their inflation speeds vary, said George Parker of the Association of International Automobile Manufacturers.

"Some air bags are already very benign compared to others," he said. For example, smaller cars, in general, require more forceful air bags as do many vehicles with stiffer body frames such as sport utility vehicles.

Ford's new full-size sport utility vehicle, the 1998 Lincoln Navigator, will have the new air bags when it goes on sale in July. But every 1998 Ford, Lincoln and Mercury vehicle will have the new system, including the popular Explorer sport utility vehicles, F-series trucks and Taurus and Escort cars.

Ford was the auto industry's first proponent of less powerful air bags in 1995. In August 1996, American automakers

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