

# LAWYER CHARGES AUTO SAFETY LAG

## In Book, He Blames 'Traffic Safety Establishment'

The fight to make the nation's highways safer for drivers is being lost to the "traffic safety establishment," according to an adviser to the Senate subcommittee that investigated auto safety last summer.

Ralph Nader, a Washington lawyer, says that auto safety takes a back seat to styling, comfort, speed, power and the desire of auto makers to cut costs.

Behind these considerations, Mr. Nader charges, lie an approving array of industry-oriented committees, associations, foundations and councils that are part of what he named the "traffic safety establishment."

Mr. Nader, a former consultant to the Department of Labor's Office of Policy Planning and Research, says the traffic safety establishment "is not a conspiracy."

"As the only organized constituency in traffic safety, one which represents the interests of the automotive and allied industries, it has been more like a great power with no challengers," he says. "By championing driver safety and resistance to Federal encroachment, and by providing funds to sound recipients, the establishment has enlisted the support or understanding of state and local officials and of volunteer groups and workers."

Mr. Nader states his case in "Unsafe at Any Speed," a book being published today by Grossman Publishers, Inc., of New York.

He identifies the leading members of the establishment as the Detroit auto makers, Akron's tire producers and such groups as the National Safety Council and the American Automobile Association.

### President's Group Cited

At the establishment's summit, he asserts, is an institution "quite without parallel in the history of American government" — the President's Committee for Traffic Safety. This is a White House-directed group whose chief officers are paid by the President's Action Committee for Traffic Safety, a tax-exempt organization that gets most of its funds from the Automotive Safety Foundation and the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety, Mr. Nader writes.

In effect, Mr. Nader charges that the President's Committee for Traffic Safety is little more than a private-interest group running a public agency that speaks with the authority of the President.

He also insists that the chief purpose of the traffic safety establishment as a whole is "to see that the Federal Government stays out of traffic safety and that the entrenched view of accidents and injuries as being due to driver behavior is not disturbed."

Comments like these appear throughout the book and have already drawn a reaction in some quarters receiving advance copies.

The magazine Science, official publication of the American Association for the Advancement of Science, said Mr. Nader went to "the heart of the public policy question" of traffic safety.

"When a society that can put a man in orbit cannot guarantee his survival in a collision at 20 miles per hour," the magazine said, "then the cause is more likely to be an underdeveloped public policy than an underdeveloped technology."

Mr. Nader takes the view that the traffic safety establishment has done little to protect the public from auto accidents, now the fourth leading cause of death in the United States (after heart disease, cancer and stroke).

### Calls Funds Misspent

Conceding that auto companies alone spend an estimated total of \$5 million a year on safety research, Mr. Nader says most of it is misspent on programs "aimed at the driver — at educating him, exhorting him, watching him, judging him and punishing him."

The establishment, Mr. Nader concludes, "sees the basic problem of accident prevention in the light of an existing system that requires the driver to judge and act perfectly without fail . . . when all the first-rate accident research being done is producing mounting evidence that the more that is known about human behavior, the more the fundamental solutions will lie in the engineering of the highway transport system — and the vehicle is the basic unit of that system."

Mr. Nader served last summer as an adviser to a Senate subcommittee on executive reorganization that convened to find out what role, if any, the Federal Government might play in auto safety.

After extensive questioning of auto executives by the subcommittee chairman, Senator Abraham A. Ribicoff, Democrat of Connecticut, and Senator Robert F. Kennedy, Democrat of New York, the panel made no recommendation of policy changes. Instead, it urged the auto industry itself to place greater emphasis on safety.

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