

Fiery Pintos fixed, too late for some

By Kim Wilt

Last week, in this column, I asked for suggestions on what to write. I received a letter from a gentleman late this week, addressed to "Mr. Wilt" suggesting that I do a story on mail fraud. I appreciate the letter for two reasons. First, the suggestion was a good one, and I will probably look into it for next week's column. Secondly, it gives me an opportunity to clear up a small misunderstanding—namely, I am not a "Mr." In fact, I never have been, and the last time I looked, my birth certificate correctly identified me as "female."

consumer byline

With that cleared up, the subject of this week's column is Ford Pintos. The placement of the gas tank in the Ford Pintos produced from 1971 to 1976 has been the subject of much controversy in the past few months.

Recall ordered

Ordered by the federal government to recall these defective cars, Ford has sent out statements to Pinto owners allowing them to go to their Ford dealers and get the cars fixed.

According to two Ford dealers in Lincoln, Meginnis Ford and Dean's Ford, the procedure involves placing a fiberglass shield between the gas tank and the rear axle. A longer gas tank pipe is also being installed on the car, and a different gas cap will be used. Fixing 1975 and 1976 Pintos, which use unleaded gas and need different repair parts, will be delayed because repair kits have not yet arrived.

Both Dean's Ford and Meginnis Ford service managers said that in the past two or three weeks they have

serviced ten to fifteen Pintos a day. There is no charge for the service.

Fire and death

Public awareness of the Pinto issue began because of the fires and resulting deaths and injuries caused by the placement of the gas tanks. National news programs, local news programs, and shows like CBS' *60 Minutes* all have dramatized the problem and brought it to the public's attention.

There has been at least one serious accident which occurred last month in Omaha, involving a Pinto.

According to a UPI story, a 1972 Pinto was rear-ended on Interstate 480 and "exploded in flames." According to police reports, "the gas tank on the vehicle ruptured and exploded during the collision." The two young women in the car were badly burned, the story said.

Told to wait

A later UPI story revealed the grim fact that the driver and owner of the Pinto had tried "at least twice to convince the Ford Motor Company to repair the fuel tank on her Pinto."

Apparently Norma Hughes, who received first and second-degree burns in the accident, had called the customer assistance office in Omaha after becoming worried about the Pinto's gas tank design and was told that she "would get a recall letter in two or three months." She called again, after her car was almost rear-ended, and was again told to wait for the letter. That second call came a few hours before the accident.

Ford parts and service department public relations manager, George Trainor, said the Omaha office "had no record of Mrs. Hughes' calls," according to the UPI story.

Trainor said that the fuel tank modifications could not be made when Hughes called because the letters were just beginning to go out.

It appears that the safety modifications came too late for some.

University Police will get \$10,000 grant

University Police will receive a \$10,000 grant from the Federal Law Enforcement Assistance Administration to use in a crime prevention program.

Sgt. Joe Wehner said the grant, awarded through the State Crime Commission, will be used for officer training and community education.

"We applied for this grant because of the rising crime rate on campus," Wehner said.

The money will be used to develop printed and audio-visual material to educate on-campus students on preventing theft and violent crime.

Wehner said the program, the first of its kind at the university, will begin in December and last for one year.

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