



Black Boxes

Most people are aware of event-data recorders commonly call “black boxes” in airplanes. Today black boxes are installed in 96% of 2013 model cars. The use of black boxes in cars is not new. These event-data recorders have been in cars for about 20 years now. Automobile companies have been installing them to retrieve data about a car’s movements and driver inputs right before a crash.

What is new is the possible ruling by the (NHTSA) National Highway Safety Traffic Administration to make it mandatory that all new light duty vehicles have black boxes beginning in September 2014. Furthermore, the details of the additional data to be collected is what has some civil –rights groups and some legislators concerned. Right now, event-data recorders keep track of 15 different variables, some of which as to how quickly airbags deployed, the cars speed, accelerator and brake information, other driver inputs and if seatbelts were worn. The idea has been that with this data collected it would help determine if the car malfunctioned or there was driver error. Additionally car companies could use the data collected to help make their vehicles safer.

The new ruling being proposed does not address consumer privacy since these issues are generally subject to state and federal law which is outside of NHTSA’s jurisdiction. Along with the mandatory ruling, will more than likely come some additional parameters as to what data is collected and importantly how that data is to be shared. Part of the new ruling would make it illegal to market a product that would knowingly alter the boxes ability to collect data.

Yes, there have been court cases involving data retrieved from black boxes. Legally the data collected by the black boxes belongs to the owner of the vehicle. However, warrants have ultimately been issued in court cases to prove driver negligence.

I’m sure in the coming months Washington legislators and automotive interest groups will make their voices heard. Stay tuned for the outcome.

Happy Motoring...Ron Couturier

References for this article:



CORRECTION TO HELEN BLAIR BARLETT ARTICLE

Last October I submitted an article I had written on scientist Helen Blair Barlett. She was employed at General Motors as a ceramic research scientist and was granted several patents pertaining to her research. About seven weeks ago I received an email from Mr. Roger Blair, nephew to Mrs. Barlett. He thanked me for writing a very nice article about his aunt. However, he pointed out I had spelled her last name wrong. I spelled it Bartlett and the correct spelling should be Barlett. I responded with an apology and told him that many of the ladies in our car club had enjoyed the article about his aunt.

Respectfully submitted by Ron Couturier Tech Editor

