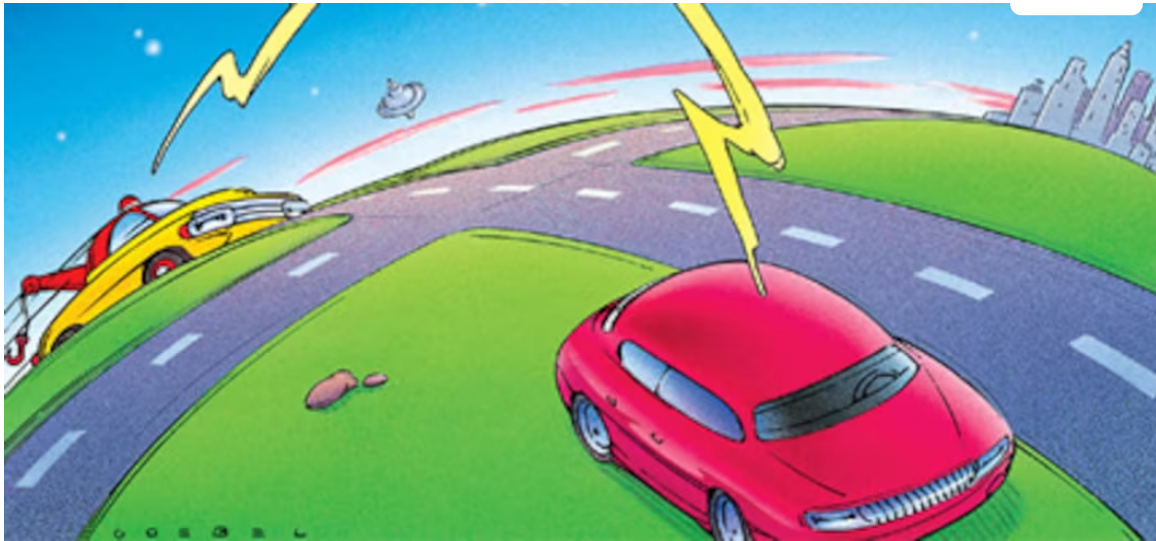




Ford RESCU Program

Satellite Guardian Angels Of The Highway

1 PHOTOS



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Joe Goebel - photographer; Cathy Nikkel - writer | Mar 1, 1996

With carjackings and crash survival becoming rising concerns of car buyers, both the feds and automakers are tapping military spy satellite technology to serve as your highway "guardian angel," instantly pinpointing serious crashes and criminal acts anywhere on U.S. roads.

The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) announced a two-year study of an in-vehicle unit that logs onto the Defense Department's Global Positioning System's (GPS) 24 satellites; the device automatically alerts emergency medical services when a severe auto crash has taken place and indicates the location. Sensors in the system can distinguish between a fender bender and a serious collision.

NHTSA spokesman August Burgette sees this technology as a major breakthrough for automotive safety, but admits "cost is a major consideration. Until now this technology has been limited to the military, where cost is no object." NHTSA expects marketing forces to bring the cost down, however, and a fleet of volunteer drivers over the next year and a half will provide field data on the device's reliability.



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By Hankook Tire

For increased security and faster emergency assistance, [Ford](#) is the first carmaker to offer a satellite-based security system; its innovative RESCU (Remote Emergency Satellite Cellular Unit) feature is available in the '96 [Lincoln Continental](#). The Ford system relies on the GPS and a 24-hour operator response center; it consists of a pair of buttons mounted in the overhead console, a GPS receiver in the trunk, and a voice-activated cellular phone.

RESCU depends on cellular-phone coverage (available in roughly 90 percent of the country), and it isn't automatic; however, drivers simply press a tow-truck icon for mechanical problems or an ambulance icon for medical emergencies. In both cases, an operator answers the call while the GPS system locates the car. (Emergency personnel often complain that many drivers making 911 calls don't know where they are.) If there's no response from the vehicle on the routine return call, the operator will contact the closest emergency service provider.

The FBI reports 25,000 carjackings annually, so Ford's RESCU system includes an anti-carjacking procedure. Each RESCU owner is issued a password. To cancel an emergency call, the driver must give the password when the operator makes contact. If the code isn't given, the operator places a 911 call to the closest police station while the GPS continues tracking the vehicle.

Ford field-tested its system in eight areas covering both urban and rural settings. Connections were made in 96 percent of the calls. Voice contact was made in an average of 58 seconds and an emergency vehicle arrived in an average of 11 minutes. RESCU is currently priced in the same range as

an optional moonroof, but Ford says costs could decrease by 10 percent per year, depending on consumer response.

Response should be substantial; according to a recent J.D. Power & Associates study, 87 percent of consumers say they would buy a vehicle that offered automatic 911 dialing.

Capitol NotesDOT To Try Honor System: Tucked into the National Highway System bill, which killed the national speed limit, is an exemption from federal safety oversight for small commercial trucks. Under this amendment, the Department of Transportation will exempt trucks weighing 10,000-26,000 pounds (about 1.4 million commercial trucks) from federal motor-carrier regulations if the company has a good safety record. The exemption is a pilot program to evaluate whether nonbinding guidelines issued by DOT are enough to ensure safe practices. Safety groups don't believe the unenforced regulations will be enough, and point to crash statistics showing that small commercial trucks were involved in fatal crashes 70 percent more often than larger trucks in 1992 and 50 percent more often in 1993. Delivery companies say federal rules are a duplication of state and insurance-carrier requirements and that the reputation of their companies is enough to keep safety a high priority...HMOs for Cars?: Cost-conscious insurance companies are eyeing HMOs for cars. Car Maintenance Organizations (CMOs) are operating successfully in California, Colorado, and Florida. CMOs offer the budget-minded driver a cheaper insurance premium by prescribing an established network of body shops and garages to repair dents and crumpled fenders. An insurance company contracts with garages and body shops for standard repair prices. Consumers who aren't bothered by the limited garage selection definitely like the lower premiums, but body shops not on the lists aren't too pleased. In 26 states, body-shop lobbyists engineered passage of "anti-steering" laws, which prohibit insurance carriers from dictating where customers have their cars repaired. Insurance companies aren't ready to drop the idea and we may see more "Harry and Louise" ads, only this time they'll be wringing their hands over health care for their car.

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