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EUROPE TO SET COMMON AUTO, TRUCK STANDARDS

Washington

Enter the European Car. Also the European Truck.

Not a single model for all of Europe's automobile industry, but a single set of safety and efficiency standards.

Agreement on all aspects of the European car should be reached by the end of next year, according to the Common Market's Commission--the body which proposes and executes policy.

One aim is to enable cars and commercial vehicles produced in any of the nine Market countries to sell in any of the others without adaptation. Another is to make driving safer and quieter.

The new proposals aim at making the auto market more open still, by setting single standards for such elements as headlight power, rear-view mirror positioning, exhaust emission, mufflers, or the strength of brakes and shock absorbers.

There will be common standards for driving tests and mandatory vehicle examinations.

Despite opposition from traditionalists who feel Common Market "harmonization" plans go too far, progress has been steady. The European Commission consults automakers and users before drawing up proposals for the Council of Ministers of the nine member countries. The Council then consults the European Parliament and the Economic and Social Council.

These consultations usually take about a year. Then the Council must approve new legislation unanimously. Then, each of the nine governments has to draw up national legislation applying the "European" laws.

Finally, a delay -- usually eighteen months -- is given to the industry affected to apply new legislation.

First plans for harmonizing Europe's truck and auto standards were approved in early 1970, and turned up in late 1971 models.

The latest proposals should reach the Council of Ministers by the end of this year and be adopted by the end of 1976, the Commission says.

Harmonization plans will affect crash protection, noise control, clean air standards, visibility, antitheft devices, driving mirrors, signals, brakes, shocks, horns, and lamps. Standards will fix the size and position of license tags and gas tanks, radio efficiency, the accuracy of speedometers.

There'll be standards for production tests and limitations as to how far door handles can project.

Two subjects still under dispute concern the mandatory introduction of shatterproof windshields and lead-free gasoline. Shatterproof shields are already a legal requirement in the U.S. Canada, Australia, Two Common Market Countries -- Denmark and Italy -- as well as in Norway and Ireland. Shatterproof glass is also standard in two German makes -- BMW and Mercedes -- and in France's Citroen series.