

“KEEPING PACE” - #83

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UNANIMOUS PLAINTIFF JURY VERDICT:

This vehicle was totally destroyed by the ensuing fire. The owner had seen flames at the right side of the engine compartment as he was driving it. This leased vehicle had only 4000 miles on its odometer, and it had never been serviced. I testified in court that no one can determine the cause of a fire in such total destruction by examining the burn patterns alone, because there are no meaningful burn patterns in such destruction.

But I went on to explain exactly how a short circuit arcing fire occurs, in spite of proper fusing, and how the arc can occur months (or years) after the wiring was damaged during manufacture of the automobile. (The engine had continued to run during the fire, essentially ruling out a fuel system problem.) I testified that whatever the exact cause, this was definitely a manufacturing defect.

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FORKLIFT TRUCK BRAKES:

These tire marks were left by the forklift shown in the inset as it careened down this 12% grade on a city street, out of control. The driver had decided to drive this forklift across town, rather than transporting it on a trailer. A person following him saw the driver put the forklift in “Neutral” on this hill, to go faster. Because forklifts are only meant to be used on a level surface, they do not have a very strong braking system.

When the driver applied his brakes, the front tires on this forklift skidded over 90 feet to the point shown by the red arrow in the photograph, when it suddenly rotated. That threw the driver off, and the forklift ran over him, causing fatal injuries.

Afterward, I used my g-Analyst accelerometer to measure a maximum stopping force, μ , of 0.24 g for the forklift’s brakes. This is typical for forklifts. Thus, I opined that the lumberyard which owned the forklift was not responsible for the cause of this accident.

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