

MISCONCEPTIONS OF THE AUTOMOBILE BLACK BOX

By Perry J Zucker © 2003

Every few seconds a vehicle related accident occurs. The causes of these accidents rely on the knowledge and the experience of engineers. The latest “buzzword” is called the “Automobile Black Box” data recorder, which various groups try to draw parallel references to the airplane black box; this is the furthest thing from the truth. Unlike, the airplane “Black Box,” which has the capability of recording positioning, actual travel velocity (speed and direction), safety device(s) utilization, mechanical problems, operating errors, as well as audio in the cockpit/compartment.

Leading Criminal Case

In the case of Montreal (Canada) v Eric Gauthier which was tried October 2003 or thereabout, in which Mr. Gauthier was driving his Pontiac Sunfire, when his vehicle collided with another and the driver of the other car died at the scene. Mr. Gauthier was accused of traveling between 130 to 160 km/h in a 50 km/h zone. The police department used the black box exclusively, which was a first in Montreal. The Judge allowed the black box into evidence to determine Mr. Gauthier vehicle’s speed, with no other collaborating evidence.

Mr. Gauthier was convicted of dangerous driving, but was cleared of the more serious charge of criminal negligence.

Potential Errors

These so-called automobile “Black Box” data recorders measure wheel speed and not ground speed; which is the actual speed in which the vehicle in question is traveling. This is an important factor, which is based on road conditions and vehicle positions in relationship to the referenced roadway.

Conclusion

The “Black Box” is currently, not being used for the original intended purpose, which is for diagnosing vehicle related problems by mechanics.

Motorists should be very concerned about this device.

The automobile black box should never be used as a stand-alone device. The use of physical evidence, such as impact data, skid/yaw marks, initial/resting positions of vehicle(s), in conjunction with the black box, as well as the answers to many tough questions will indeed have to be addressed regarding privacy issues, admissibility, and common sense is essential to obtain the correct resultant, the use of “Black Box” data recorders.