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WEEKLY INSIGHT INTO THE AUTOMOTIVE AFTERMARKET FROM LANG MARKETING

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FOCUS THIS WEEK: All Miles Driven Are Not Equal

"Annual mileage by the average car and light truck in the U.S. declined during 2005 and is doing the same in 2006, as the light vehicle population grows at a faster pace than total miles on U.S. roads."

"While this would seem to be negative for the aftermarket, the changing nature of vehicles in operation as well as changing driving habits of Americans are causing more vehicle wear per mile driven today than in the past."

Jim Lang

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Miles Can Differ Significantly In How Much Vehicle Wear They Generate

Driving by Americans today is different than ten years ago, along with the average age and typical engine size of the vehicles they operate.

Stop-And-Go Driving

Americans are increasingly engaged in stop-and-go driving, rather than highway travel. Urban driving accounted for nearly two-thirds of 2006 vehicle mileage in the U.S.

This reflects increased vehicle use by Americans as they commute to and from employment. Today over 90% of commuter vehicles carry only the driver. Over the past ten years, commuting mileage (increasingly stop-and-go driving) climbed at a much faster pace than total driving.

Greater Vehicle Wear

Stop-and-go driving results in greater vehicle wear per mile than highway travel for a wide variety of automotive components.

For example, engine idling (as vehicles are snarled in traffic) causes engine wear, even though the vehicle odometer is not turning. Stop-and-go driving also contributes to higher engine temperatures and results in significantly greater brake wear per mile traveled than highway driving.

Increasing Vehicle Age

Over the past ten years, the average age of light vehicles on U.S. roads increased nearly one full year.

Domestic passenger cars, in particular, climbed dramatically in average age. At the beginning of 2006, the average domestic car in the U.S. was 10.9 years old, compared to 9.3 years in 1996.

As the average age of vehicles on U.S. roads increases, and the number of older and high-mileage vehicles grows, driving these vehicles results in

greater wear per mile traveled than mileage on newer vehicles.

Accumulated Vehicle Mileage

In 2006, the average light vehicle in the U.S. had an odometer reading approaching 100,000 miles. This emphasizes the increased potential for mechanical wear which stop-and-go driving presents for today's light vehicle fleet.

Smaller Engines

Smaller engines in the average vehicle today operate at higher RPM levels than the larger powerplants typical of vehicles ten years ago.

Smaller, harder-working engines in older vehicles mean that mileage by vehicles today often results in greater mechanical wear per mile traveled than in the past.

Implications For Vehicle Wear Per Mile

Urban stop-and-go driving, an aging vehicle population, along with smaller, harder-working engines mean that vehicle wear per mile traveled by today's vehicle fleet can be significantly greater than wear per vehicle mile five or ten years ago.

This underscores that proper vehicle maintenance is more important today than ever before. Greater attention should also be paid to maintenance intervals, with special consideration to the time between maintenance jobs in addition to mileage alone.

See Lang Marketing's [2006/2007 Aftermarket Annual](#) for analysis of the changing age of vehicles, annual driving levels and other aspects of changing vehicle use.

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