

Winter CAR CARE

Wheel Misalignment Bad News for Safety

With the hard winter driving-season ahead, motorists are wise to think about the effect potholes and road-ripples have on wheel alignment.

Misaligned wheels lead to premature tire-wear and poor gas mileage. When uncorrected, the problem can substantially shorten the life of an otherwise sound car. Even more seriously, it can affect the steering control and safety of the vehicle.

The stress and strain of driving over rough roads affects the caster of your car's wheels most frequently. The right amount of caster allows wheels to return to a "straight-ahead" position, thereby promoting steering stability. Misaligned caster angles can contribute to wheel shimmy.

Camber, or the tilt of the wheel at the top, provides a true-running wheel when the car is rolling. Fast-wearing tires and a tendency on the part of your car to pull to one side can usually be traced to misalignment of the camber angle. Camber problems are corrected by reestablishing an inboard tilt to the affected wheels.

However, before any correction of these angles can be made properly, tires, shock absorbers and the entire steering linkage should be examined for wear.

Diagnosing the Problem

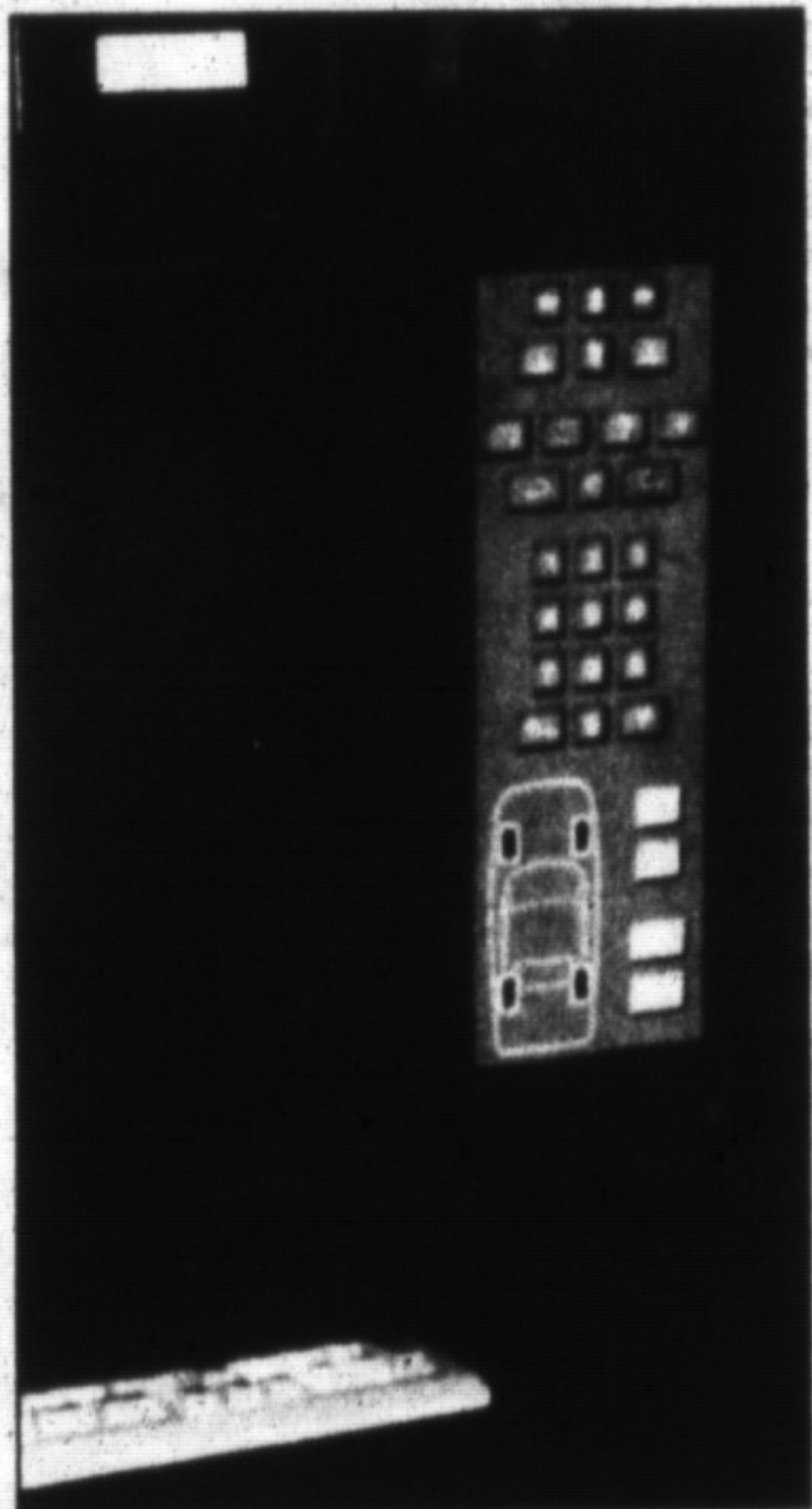
How can a driver diagnose a wheel alignment problem? By checking for the following symptoms:

- Shimmying on a smooth level road—possible caster problem.
- Hard steering and difficulty returning steering wheels to straight-ahead position—possible caster problem.

- Feathering or saw-tooth pattern on tire tread—possible camber problem.

There are no absolutely correct caster or camber angles. Adjustment of these angles varies from car maker to car maker and even within a single manufacturer's car line.

While wheel alignment correction is a relatively simple task, the job should be performed by a reliable mechanic for best results. You'll notice the difference a good job makes in longer tire life, improved fuel economy, a more comfortable ride and, most importantly, a safe vehicle.



Surviving Winter Car Emergencies

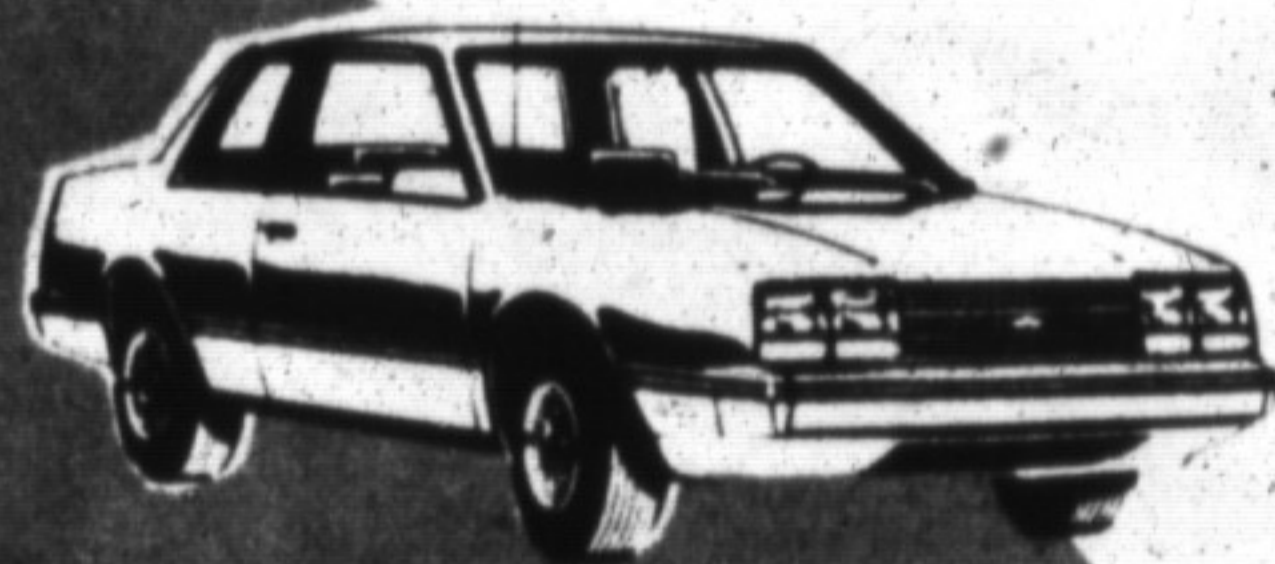


If you do find yourself in the middle of a winter disaster, here are a few safety tips until help arrives:

- Stay inside the car. If you leave the automobile for an extended period, there is a greater chance for frostbite.
 - If your car is stuck, try spreading Kitty litter or using carpet scraps to gain traction. Don't try to push the car out yourself; you may lose valuable energy.
 - Run the heat only when absolutely needed. Burn a candle in a coffee can as a source of warmth.
 - Clear outside heating vents so the car can breathe properly.
 - Avoid alcohol. It will lower your body temperature.
 - Leave one car window cracked. Cold temperatures and wet snow can seal your car quickly.
 - Clear the exhaust to prevent carbon monoxide back-up.
 - Signal to other motorists that you are stranded by using flares or a flashlight, or by turning your dome light on occasionally.
 - To signal distress, tie a handkerchief or bright-colored cloth on the antenna or hang it from a window.
 - Ration food.
 - For added warmth, place newspapers between your skin and clothing.
 - Exercise to maintain circulation. This may be done outside, but do not stray too far from the car.
- When the temperatures drop, you don't want to be stuck in the cold. Your best defense for preventing this inconvenient and possible life-threatening situation is to have reliable transportation. Prevention and preparation can stop many disasters before they begin. Here is a list of preventive winter survival tips:
- Winterize your car—check the anti-freeze, put on snow tires and get a tuneup.
 - Create a winter survival kit. Include the following items in your kit: jumper cables, white handkerchief, first aid kit, nonperishable foods, tools, flashlight with extra batteries, flares, candles and matches, coffee can, shovel, kitty litter, carpet scraps and a warm blanket.
 - Tell friends and family where you are going and when you'll be back. Be sure to let them know what route you'll be taking.
 - If you have a citizens' band radio, keep it on channel nine. It's used for emergencies only. REACT members are tuned into this band for emergency calls.
 - Start your trip with a full tank of gas. You'll use more fuel during severe winter conditions.
 - Try to car pool as much as possible. There is safety in numbers.

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