

■ **Motor vehicle distribution:
The new deal**

■ **Product trends: glass roofs**

■ **Safety focus in the US
AGR market**

■ **Visionary optical performance**

Motor vehicle distribution: The new deal

On October the 1st 2002, the new motor vehicle block exemption regulation was voted in by the European commission and has come into force in the European Union, Norway, Iceland and Liechtenstein.

This new regulation concerns:

- 1) Sales of new motor vehicles;
- 2) After-sales servicing; 3) Sale and supply of spare parts.

Products affected by this regulation are: passenger cars, light commercial vehicles, trucks, buses and coaches. The new regime is designed to be globally more flexible and brings in new rules in terms of distribution of new motor vehicles and after-sales servicing. It is also designed to create better conditions for competition. Under the new regime, anyone who sells new cars is not obliged to carry out repair or after-sales services. This allows other players to enter the market such as supermarkets, Internet resellers...

Distribution:

The car manufacturer can organise distribution according to several criteria:

- Territorial: with the obligation on the dealer to supply all customers within agreed territory.

- Qualitative: Requirement in terms of training and qualification for sales personnel, in terms of product display...
- Quantitative: Obligation of minimum annual purchase, maximum number of dealers per area...

After-sales servicing:

As dealers do not have an obligation to assume the after-sales servicing anymore, the carmakers have to organise a network that will allow them to meet their warranty obligations. Also, they must allow those repairers who choose to remain independent from specific brands to have access to all necessary technical information, tools, (including diagnostic) and training.



Photographs from the Audiovisual Library of the European Commission.

Sales and supplies of spare parts:

With regard to the distribution of spare parts, the new regulation aims to give consumers the choice as to which spare parts are used to repair their vehicle in an authorised repairers' shop. They can now choose between:

- "Original spare parts" supplied by the vehicle manufacturer
- "Original spare parts" supplied by the spare part manufacturers

or



Product trends: glass roofs

In recent years a number of new techniques have been introduced that make more flexible use of glass roofs in cars possible.

Nowadays cars are not only equipped with a simple sunroof but manufacturers are able to offer options ranging from a sunroof and an almost entirely glass topped vehicle.

Using glass helps create an open and friendly atmosphere in the car. The demand for more glazing in the car and especially larger sunroofs is increasing. The market in Europe for sunroofs is mainly concentrated in northern countries where the quest to maximize daylight could be a factor. Total European production rate will grow from 20.5% in 2000 to 23% in the coming year.

There are various types of sunroof available on the market. The first opening sunroof was the so called "spoiler type", tilting at the rear and even sliding backwards. This type is widely used in the aftermarket because of its easy installation. The glass for such sunroofs usually has a simple, almost flat shape as its main curvature is usually around 15 mm and its double curvature around 4 to 6 mm.

The trend has been for glass sunroofs to grow in size to give panoramic and unobstructed views of the outside to all passengers. The design of sunroofs is expected to evolve into different shapes and positions. Already, a number of vehicles are being introduced with twin panel sunroofs consisting of two tempered glass panes, which are approximately the same size and cover the roof of the vehicle. Instead of being made

of one or two large panels, a canopy may also be made of several tempered glass "blades" or "lamellas" arranged one behind another.

Another technique to create panoramic sunroofs or canopies uses several tempered glass pieces. The simplest version of multi-panel sunroofs is the one which has two standard spoiler-like sunroofs, positioned one behind the other. More sophisticated types consist of three or even four parts.

Because of the increasing size of the sunroofs, solutions need to be found to meet heat absorption as well as privacy requirements. A number of solutions are being developed, such as applying a mineral (electro chromic) coating to the glass surface or using an organic film, that is shade adjustable, sandwiched between two layers of glass. ■

Safety focus in the US AGR market

There is increasing focus in USA on problems with poorly installed windcreens. A windscreen in today's cars is an important part of the integral structural strength of the car body. It must withstand the extreme power of the airbags to prevent the driver or any passenger from being thrown out of the car during a crash. It also prevents the roof from buckling during collisions and rollovers. This means that the quality of the windscreen and the installation has to be taken very seriously. A number of controversial accidents have raised the awareness of this among drivers across America.

ABC 20/20

It became nationwide news when the TV channel ABC brought up the issue in its 20/20 program. They revealed some shocking examples of incorrectly installed windcreens and also showed how this has led to severe injuries and even fatal accidents

The problem is partly caused by a dangerous downward pressure on prices both from the consumers' side and the glass fitters'. In the end this leads to a situation where the quality of the

product and / or installation can be compromised to save cost, potentially jeopardising the safety of the driver and passengers.



The Fransway incident

One of the latest incidents is the death of Joan Fransway. The 25-year-old was killed when she was thrown through her windscreen in a car accident. Experts stated that if the windscreen had been properly installed her life would have been saved.

Her brother who spoke at an independent glass convention expressed concerns that cost had become so important that poor product quality and work risked the life of both drivers and passengers.

The European Market

The US market once played a major role in setting standards for crash tests and the development of urethane fitted windcreens.

It is once again taking the lead in the awareness of improved quality and security standards for AGR.

Are people killed today in Europe for the same reason as Joan Fransway and others? We don't know, but what we do know is that 120 000 people are killed in traffic accidents every year and 2.5 million are injured.

We should make sure that none of that is due to poor quality or standards in the European AGR market. ■

Motor vehicle distribution: The new deal (From page 1)

- The so called "matching quality spare parts" supplied by another spare part producer.

Moreover, spare parts manufacturers will have better access both to the authorised and independent repairer. They will be allowed to place their logo, along with the car manufacturer's logo, on the original spare part sold to the vehicle manufacturer. But the important new initiative is that the part producer will also be able to sell the same part with his own logo without it losing the characterisation of "original spare part".

It will underline that GEPVP members are manufacturing and distributing **original spare parts*** and

spare parts of matching quality according to the specifications and production standards provided by the vehicle manufacturer (OEM standards).

The new rules have been voted in to boost competition between key players of the sales, after-sales and spare parts distribution markets. It should also lead to more competitive prices while securing the same level of quality and security for the customer. ■

*: The Regulation 1400/2002 introduces the new term "original spare part": these parts are of the same quality as the components used for assembly of the new vehicle.

For more information, you can refer to the European Commission's Web Site:
http://europa.eu.int/comm/competition/car_sector/

Some quality steps to think about when you need to replace a windscreen

- **The replaced glass should be produced by an original equipment manufacturer.**
- **The urethane should be approved for your vehicle.**
- **Abide by recommendations for Safe Drive Away Time.**
- **Make sure the fitter is certified to do the job.**

Visionary optical performance

Windscreens have to meet high standards in optical quality because they need to offer an unrestricted, distortion free view. They also play a key role in the body design of a vehicle so require a high level of technological expertise.

Windscreen wipers play an important role in maintaining visibility in bad weather conditions or when the windscreen is dirty. The wiper blades need optimum contact with the windshield to achieve the best results. Many factors influence the contact between wiper and windscreen with dirt being the most important and probably the most recognisable.

During continuous wiping, a clear windscreen and excellent visibility must be maintained. In order to

achieve this, the wiped surface must be regular without any counter bending or big variation of curvature. Any defects can lead to visible traces being left behind during the wiper stroke, which can cause eye strain during driving and even greater visibility problems at night.

Close co-operation between wiper and glass designer is essential to optimise the shape of the windshield and make the contact between wiper and glass its most effective.

In the first stage of glass design the glassmaker analyses the project feasibility, including the ability to bend the glass and verification of the optical properties. The wiper supplier analyses the parameters for wiping and suggests the best solutions for installation in relation to the theoretical shape of the windshield. After this stage the theoretical design is optimised for best wiping results. This is verified in real life testing, the local variations that are found in the glass surface are modified if necessary.

Finally, the carmaker monitors a series of "points of control" on the surface of the windscreen to ensure that all new windscreens fitted to vehicles during assembly will conform to these requirements. This ensures that the wipers will perform to the optimum efficiency during vehicle service.

The combination of high quality (original equipment standard) glazing and good wipers is essential for safe and distortion free visibility! ■