

NHTSA Grants Airbag Exemption to SUV Business More Important Than Consumers' Safety?

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The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) has granted a waiver to Cross Lander USA Inc. to sell a rough and ready Romanian off-road vehicle in the United States without air bags until May 2008.

NHTSA allowed the exemption after the agency concluded that Cross Lander could go out of business without the waiver.

Federal safety regulations require air bags for the driver and front seat passenger in vehicles that weigh less than 5,500 pounds unless the manufacturer can establish it will encounter "substantial economic hardship" because of the rule.

Public Citizen has argued that the vehicles are dangerous without air bags and the watchdog group sharply opposed the exemption.

The Cross Lander 244X is manufactured by financially troubled Romanian automaker Aro S.A. Cross Lander USA, which is based in Miami, reports losing more than \$5 million in 2004.



The Cross Lander off road vehicle looks like a 1980s-era Land Rover and the company plans to sell them for roughly \$20,000. NHTSA estimates 9,000 of the vehicles could be sold during the period of the exemption and produce enough revenue to allow Cross Lander to equip vehicles with air bags by 2008.