positioned at one of the rear seating positions, with its tether strap attached to the tether anchorage.

Although the Swift owner's manual does not mention that user-ready tether anchorages are provided as standard equipment and does not show all of the seating positions that are equipped with a tether anchorage, the illustrations in the manual do show the tether anchorage location for one of the rear seating positions. Suzuki believes that vehicle owners will assume, based on the illustrations, that anchorages are provided for both rear seating positions. In addition, when you look at the actual vehicle, it is obvious that user-ready anchorages are provided as standard equipment for both rear seating positions. Since the tether anchorages are easily recognizable in the vehicle, Suzuki believes that failure to fully illustrate the location of each tether anchorage in the vehicle owner's manual is inconsequential.

The Swift owner's manual also does not fully comply with the requirement for ''...provide a step-by-step procedure, including diagrams, for properly attaching a child restraint system to the tether anchorages...''. Typically, because there are differences in child restraint system design, the vehicle owner's manual can only provide general instructions to hook the tether strap hook into the anchor bracket and tighten the tether strap. These steps are somewhat obvious, and should be intuitively understood by vehicle owners.

Also, each child restraint system is required to be accompanied with its own installation instructions. S5.6.1 of FMVSS No. 213, Child Restraint Systems, requires that each child restraint system ''...must be accompanied by printed installation instructions in the English language that provide a step-by-step procedure, including diagrams, for installing the system in motor vehicles...''. Suzuki believes that vehicle owners rely on the installation instructions provided with the child restraint system, rather than those provided in the vehicle owner's manual, for information about how to install the child restraint system in their vehicle. As a result, Suzuki believes that failure to provide a step-by-step procedure, in the vehicle owner's manual, for attaching a child restraint system to the vehicle's tether anchorages is inconsequential to safety.

Interested persons are invited to submit written data, views, and arguments on the application of Suzuki described above. Comments should refer to the docket number and be submitted to: U.S. Department of Transportation Docket Management, Room PL–401, 400 Seventh Street, SW, Washington, DC 20590. It is requested, but not required, that two copies be submitted.

All comments received before the close of business on the closing date indicated below will be considered. The application and supporting materials, and all comments received after the closing date, will also be filed and will be considered to the extent possible. When the application is granted or denied, the notice will be published in the **Federal Register** pursuant to the authority indicated below.

Comment closing date: May 25, 2000.

(49 U.S.C. 30118 and 30120; delegations of authority at 49 CFR 1.50 and 501.8)

Issued on: April 19, 2000.

Stephen R. Kratzke,

Associate Administrator for Safety Performance Standards.

[FR Doc. 00–10245 Filed 4–24–00; 8:45 am]

BILLING CODE 4910–59–P

DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

National Highway Traffic Safety Administration

Petition for Exemption From the Vehicle Theft Prevention Standard; Ford

AGENCY: National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) Department of Transportation (DOT).

ACTION: Grant of petition for exemption.

SUMMARY: This document grants in full the petition of Ford Motor Company (Ford) for an exemption of a high-theft line, the Mercury Sable, from the parts-marking requirements of the Federal Motor Vehicle Theft Prevention Standard. This petition is granted because the agency has determined that the antitheft device to be placed on the line as standard equipment is likely to be as effective in reducing and deterring motor vehicle theft as compliance with the parts-marking requirements of the Theft Prevention Standard.

DATES: The exemption granted by this notice is effective beginning with model year (MY) 2001.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Ms. Rosalind Proctor, Office of Planning and Consumer Programs, NHTSA, 400 Seventh Street, S.W., Washington DC 20590. Ms. Proctor's telephone number is (202) 366–0846. Her fax number is (202) 493–2290.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: In a petition dated December 13, 1999, Ford requested an exemption from the parts marking requirements of the Theft Prevention Standard (49 CFR Part 541) for the Mercury Sable vehicle line beginning in MY 2001. The petition is pursuant to 49 CFR Part 543, Exemption From Vehicle Theft Prevention Standard, which provides for exemptions based on the installation of an antitheft device as standard equipment for the entire line.

Review of Ford's petition disclosed that certain information was not provided in its original petition. Consequently, by telephone call on February 28 and March 15, 2000, Ford was informed of its areas of deficiency. Subsequently on February 28 and March 17, 2000, Ford submitted its supplemental information addressing these deficiencies. Ford's February 28 and March 17, 2000 faxes together constitute a complete petition, as required by 49 CFR Part 543.7, in that it met the general requirements contained in § 543.5 and the specific content requirements of § 543.6.

In its petition, Ford provided a detailed description and diagram of the identity, design, and location of the components of the antitheft device for the new line. Ford will install its antitheft device, the SecuriLock Passive Anti-Theft Electronic Engine Immobilizer System (SecuriLock) as standard equipment on the MY 2001 Mercury Sable. The system has already been installed as standard equipment on its MY 2000 Sable.

In order to ensure the reliability and durability of the device, Ford conducted tests, based on its own specified standards. Ford provided a detailed list of the tests conducted and stated its belief that the device is reliable and durable since it complied with Ford's specified requirements for each test. The environmental and functional tests conducted were for thermal shock, high temperature exposure, low-temperature exposure, powered/thermal cycle, temperature/humidity cycling, constant humidity, end-of-line, functional, random vibration, tri-temperature parametric, bench drop, transmit current, lead/lock strength/integrity, output frequency, resistance to solvents, output field strength, dust, and electromagnetic compatibility. Ford requested confidential treatment for some of the information and attachments submitted in support of its petition. In a letter to Ford dated August 4, 1998, the agency granted its request for confidential treatment of certain aspects of its petition.

The Ford SecuriLock is a transponder-based electronic immobilizer system. The device is activated when the driver/operator turns off the engine by using the properly coded ignition key. When the ignition key is turned to the start position, the transponder (located in the head of the key) transmits a code to the powertrain's electronic control module. The vehicle's engine can only be started if the transponder code matches the code previously programmed into the powertrain's electronic control module. If the code does not match, the engine will be disabled. Ford stated that there are seventy-two quadrillion different codes and each transponder is hard-

coded with a unique code at the time of manufacture. Additionally, Ford stated that the communication between the SecuriLock control function and the powertrain's electronic control module is encrypted.

Ford stated that its SecuriLock system incorporates a theft indicator using a light-emitting diode (LED) that provides information to the driver/operator as to the ''set'' and ''unset'' condition of the device. When the ignition is initially turned to the ''ON'' position, a 3-second continuous LED indicates the proper ''unset'' state of the device. When the ignition is turned to ''OFF'', a flashing LED indicates the ''set'' state of the device and provides visual information that the vehicle is protected by the SecuriLock system. Ford states that the integration of the setting/unsetting device (transponder) into the ignition key prevents any inadvertent activation of the device.

Ford believes that it would be very difficult for a thief to defeat this type of electronic immobilizer system. Ford believes that its new device is reliable and durable because its does not have any moving parts, nor does it require a separate battery in the key. If the correct code is not transmitted to the electronic control module (accomplished only by having the correct key), there is no way to mechanically override the system and start the vehicle. Furthermore, Ford stated that drive-away thefts are virtually eliminated with the sophisticated design and operation of the electronic engine immobilizer system which makes conventional theft methods (*i.e.,* hot-wiring or attacking the ignition-lock cylinder) ineffective. Ford reemphasized that any attempt to slam-pull the ignition-lock cylinder will have no effect on a thief's ability to start the vehicle.

Ford stated that the effectiveness of its SecuriLock device is best reflected in the reduction of the theft rates for its Mustang GT and Cobra models from MY 1995 to 1996. The SecuriLock antitheft device was voluntarily installed on all Mustang GT and Cobra models, the Taurus LX and SHO models, and the Sable LS model as standard equipment in MY 1996. In MY 1997, the SecuriLock system was installed on the entire Mustang vehicle line as standard equipment. Ford notes that a comparison of the National Crime Information Center's (NCIC) calendar year (CY)1995 theft data for MY 1995 Mustang GT and Cobra vehicles without an immobilizer device installed with MY 1997 data for Mustang GT and Cobra vehicles with an immobilizer device installed, shows a reduction in thefts of approximately 75% for the vehicles with the immobilizer. Additionally, Ford stated that its SecuriLock device has been installed as standard equipment on the entire Mustang vehicle line since MY 1997.

As part of its submission, Ford also provided a Highway Loss Data Institute (HLDI)'s theft loss bulletin, Vol. 15, No. 1, September 1997, which evaluated 1996 Ford Mustang and Taurus models fitted with the SecuriLock device and corresponding 1995 models without the SecuriLock device. The results as reported by HLDI indicated a reduction in overall theft losses by approximately 50% for both Mustang and Taurus models.

Additionally, Ford stated that its SecuriLock device has been demonstrated to various insurance companies, and as a result AAA Michigan and State Farm now give an antitheft discount of 25% and 10% respectively on premiums for comprehensive insurance for all Ford vehicles equipped with the device.

Ford's proposed device, as well as other comparable devices that have received full exemptions from the parts-marking requirements, lacks an audible or visible alarm. Therefore, these devices cannot perform one of the functions listed in 49 CFR Part 542.6(a)(3), that is, to call attention to unauthorized attempts to enter or move the vehicle. However, theft data have indicated a decline in theft rates for vehicle lines that have been equipped with antitheft devices similar to that which Ford proposes. In these instances, the agency has concluded that the lack of a visual or audio alarm has not prevented these antitheft devices from being effective protection against theft.

On the basis of comparison, Ford has concluded that the antitheft device proposed for its vehicle line is no less effective than those devices in the lines for which NHTSA has already granted full exemptions from the parts-marking requirements.

Based on the evidence submitted by Ford, the agency believes that the antitheft device for the Mercury Sable vehicle line is likely to be as effective in reducing and deterring motor vehicle theft as compliance with the parts-marking requirements of the theft prevention standard (49 CFR part 541).

The agency believes that the device will provide four of the five types of performance listed in 49 CFR part 543.6(a)(3): promoting activation; preventing defeat or circumvention of the device by unauthorized persons; preventing operation of the vehicle by unauthorized entrants; and ensuring the reliability and durability of the device.

As required by 49 U.S.C. 33106 and 49 CFR part 543.6(a)(4) and (5), the agency finds that Ford has provided adequate reasons for its belief that the antitheft device will reduce and deter theft. This conclusion is based on the information Ford provided about its antitheft device.

For the foregoing reasons, the agency hereby grants in full Ford Motor Company's petition for an exemption for the MY 2001 Sable vehicle line from the parts-marking requirements of 49 CFR part 541.

If Ford decides not to use the exemption for this line, it must formally notify the agency, and, thereafter, must fully mark the line as required by 49 CFR parts 541.5 and 541.6 (marking of major component parts and replacement parts).

NHTSA notes that if Ford wishes in the future to modify the device on which this exemption is based, the company may have to submit a petition to modify the exemption.

Part 543.7(d) states that a part 543 exemption applies only to vehicles that belong to a line exempted under this part and equipped with the anti-theft device on which the line's exemption is based. Further, § 543.9(c)(2) provides for the submission of petitions ''to modify an exemption to permit the use of an antitheft device similar to but differing from the one specified in that exemption.'' The agency wishes to minimize the administrative burden that § 543.9(c)(2) could place on exempted vehicle manufacturers and itself. The agency did not intend in drafting

Part 543 to require the submission of a modification petition for every change to the components or design of an antitheft device. The significance of many such changes could be *de minimis.* Therefore, NHTSA suggests that if the manufacturer contemplates making any changes the effects of which might be characterized as de minimis, it should consult the agency before preparing and submitting a petition to modify.

Authority: 49 U.S.C. 33106; delegation of authority at 49 CFR 1.50.

Issued on: April 19, 2000.

Stephen R. Kratzke,

Associate Administrator for Safety Performance Standards.

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