

Resolving the driver-car-road complex

The manner in which vehicles follow each other on a highway is a current subject of theoretical investigation at the General Motors Research Laboratories. These studies in traffic dynamics, coupled with controlled experiments, are leading to new "follow-the-leader" models of vehicle interaction.

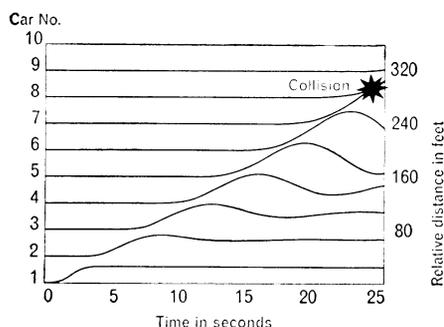
For example, conditions have been derived for the stability of a chain of moving vehicles when the velocity of the lead car suddenly changes — a type of perturbation that has caused multiple collisions on modern superhighways. Theoretical analysis shows that the motion of a chain of cars *can be stable* when a driver accelerates in proportion to the relative velocity between his car and the car ahead. The motion is always unstable when the acceleration is proportional only to the relative distance between cars.

Experimentally, GM Research scientists found that a driver does react mainly to relative velocity rather than to relative distance, with a sensitivity of reaction that increases with decreasing distance.

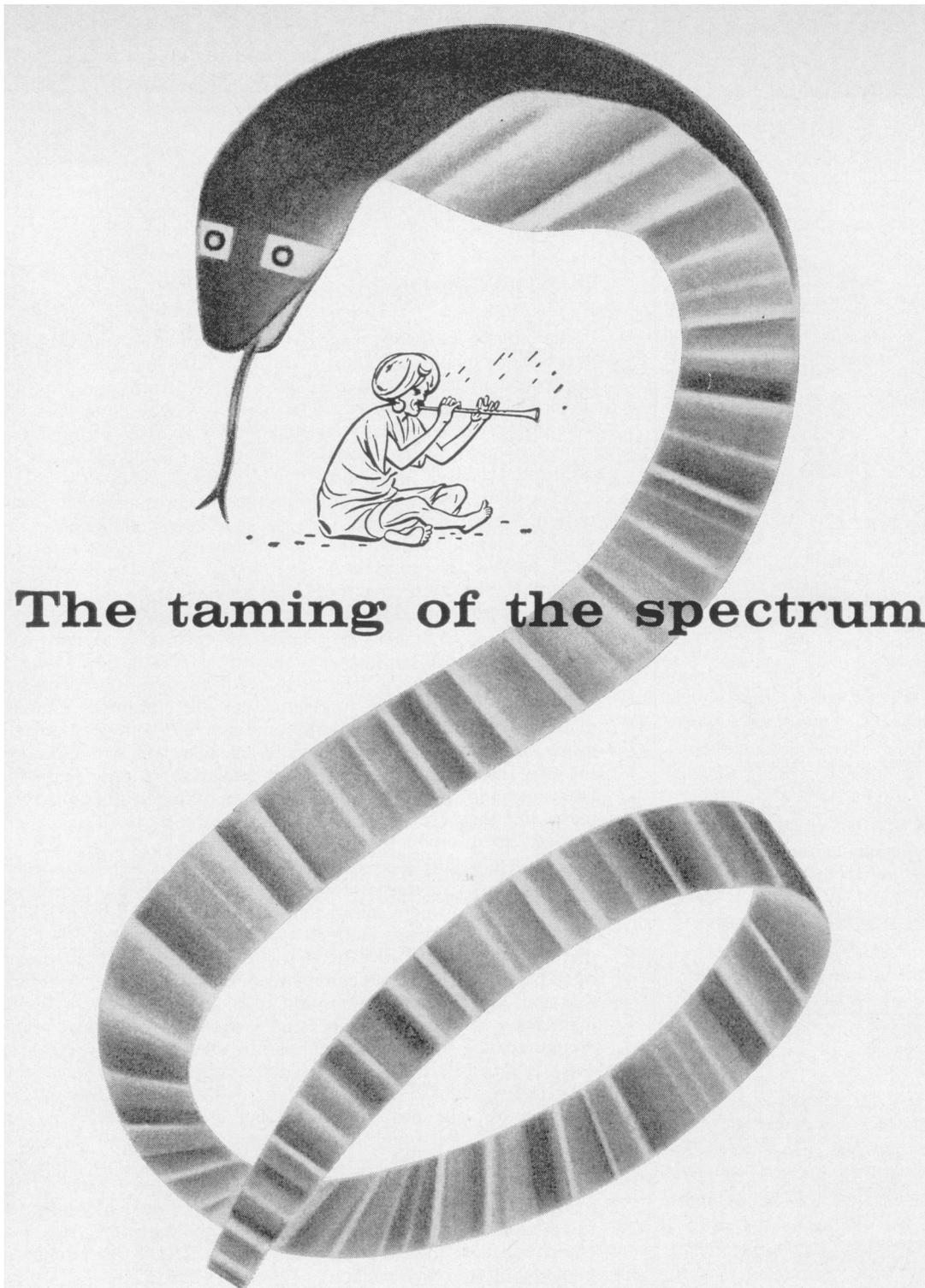
Traffic dynamics research such as this is adding to our understanding of intricate traffic problems — what causes them, how they can best be resolved. The study is an example of the ways GM Research works to make transportation of the future more efficient and safe.

General Motors Research Laboratories

Warren, Michigan



Relative positions of 10 hypothetical cars after lead car goes through maneuver. Amplitude of instability increases, resulting in a collision between 7th and 8th cars.



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