

Really?



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The photo you see at right shows a broken frame on an LLV used by a city letter carrier in the Western Area. The story could end there, but there are too many questions that come to mind to discount what happened before the photo and then what happened after the discovery.

Before the photo

How the (insert your favorite Manny word here) could any mechanic not notice the rusting out of the cross frame during a preventative maintenance inspection (PMI)? In my July 2016 column, I addressed the Handbook PO-701 at Section 311, which states that the purpose

of a maintenance program is to maintain vehicles in a *mechanically reliable, safe*, clean and neat condition. Doesn't this commitment and instruction require USPS to thoroughly service the vehicle, before a failure, so that we are not exposed to a hazard that could seriously injure or kill one of us or one of our postal customers?

The area where this vehicle is assigned frequently experiences snowfall and, as I write this article in late April, it was covered in snow today. I point this out because the magnitude of rusting to the frame is only experienced in snow country where the roads are salted. This, in turn, should result in extra attention being paid to the undercarriage of the vehicle during twice yearly preventative vehicle inspections, as per Section 341.3 of the PO-701. If your vehicle is used less than 500 miles per accounting period (AP), it is supposed to get "maintained" (serviced) on a 26-week cycle. If your vehicle is used more than 500 miles in an AP, it is supposed to be serviced on a 17-week cycle (three times per year).

The Preventative Maintenance Bulletin "V-07-98" (which you can download from the Safety page on nalc.org) identifies all the required steps for a thorough inspection of your LLV and CRV, which are considered light delivery vehicles. Pages 22-36 identify each of the steps required in the thorough inspection. If someone takes a shortcut, that person is gambling at your expense.

Inspection items 34 and 36 take the mechanic's attention to the underside of the vehicle, where they should thoroughly inspect for fluid leaks and steering components. Item 39 takes them to the suspension, springs, shocks and the condition of the stabilizer bar. If all this is being done, one would have to cover their eyes to miss the magnitude of rusting that led to the collapse in the photo. It



An LLV with a broken frame used to deliver mail in the Western Area

is incomprehensible that a mechanic would miss the obvious rust buildup.

After the photo

Obviously, this catastrophic failure of the frame to the vehicle in the picture was an unknown, but when it was discovered, what happened?

One of the vehicles in the same installation had previously required a frame replacement that took place about eight months earlier. We would expect that at the moment the frame failure was discovered, the vehicle would be immediately taken out of service before someone got hurt. I am advised that the reaction from postal management was to the effect of "They thought it would be all right for a while."

Are you kidding? How could any intelligent and credible person say that? It's not possible. My father, who was an aerospace engineer, used to explain that when an engineered object breaks, the failure is labeled as a catastrophic failure because it was unable to perform its function and often would lead to other failures. If the frame was designed to keep the vehicle "up" on the wheels, no one could properly claim it would be OK for a while. In the past, we have had our supervisors and managers act as if they had a medical degree; now out West, they must have handed out bogus engineering degrees.

We have to make management live up to its responsibilities on safety. As the winter comes to a close, it would be a great time in snow country to insist on a proper inspection of the undercarriage to discover unsafe rusting before we get hurt.

Keep an eye on each other.