

AUTOMOBILE •

# A 'Fake' Way to Die

Auto spare parts discovered in a container: Fake or original?

cars.

Perhaps, the bus disaster might have been averted if the vehicle had an effective brake mechanism. The brake shoe linings, made of compressed gas, had slackened and burst into flames at the sudden impact with the driver's feet. But, contrary to speculations that it may have impaired over time, "It was just two and a half weeks old," said Ras Akinkunmi, an automotive mechanic and owner of the bus. Akinkunmi had overhauled the vehicle's brake mechanism two weeks before the crash. Therefore, he was astonished by the news of the accident.

Actually, what Akinkunmi did was that he had unknowingly fitted the bus with counterfeit brake shoe linings, which led to the death of six innocent passengers, his driver, and subjecting seven others to different kinds of physical and emotional torture.

**Worldwide, counterfeit products have become, not only big business, but, as Nigerians have found out, fake automobile parts have heightened the occurrence of road accidents**

By OLATUNJI OLOLADE

It was sunset and the Toyota Hiace bus was coasting around 120 kilometres per hour on the Lagos-Ibadan highway. Apart from the incessant plea by a middle-aged female passenger that Dele Osunde, the bus driver, should reduce his speed, there was really nothing dramatic about the journey.

But, just a few metres beyond the Redemption Camp of the Redeemed Christian Church of God, Osunde suddenly saw a broken-down Honda Prelude car in the middle of the road. He hit on the brakes in frenzied precision. Immediately, the vehicle somersaulted twice. Osunde and six passengers lost their lives in the accident apart from many others who were injured. Another example is the disaster that occurred on the motorway connecting Ibadan and Ile-Ife to the East, about 250 kilometres north of Lagos, recently. A petrol tanker, travelling at high speed, had run into a traffic jam. Attempting to come to a halt, the poorly maintained vehicle suffered total brake failure and ploughed into the queue of cars right ahead. The resultant explosion killed over 150 people and gutted about 115

This graphically illustrates the danger of using counterfeit auto parts which abound in Nigeria.

According to Felix Nyado, head of enforcement, Standard Organisation of Nigeria, SON, there are about 1500 pirated automobile components while 80 per cent of vehicle parts being sold in the country are believed to be either fake or of questionable quality. Corroborating Nyado, John Akanya, the director-general of SON, explained that such substandard auto parts constitute great danger to road users and are responsible for most automobile accidents in the country. There are no available statistics on how many accidents have been caused by counterfeit automobile parts, but Ayobami Omiyale, the Lagos State sector commander of the Federal Road Safety Corps, FRSC, disclosed that about 10 per cent of vehicle accidents within the country are caused by the use of counterfeit and substandard auto parts.

Even though Emmanuel Uzundu, director of Chima Enterprises, a Lagos-based auto spare parts dealership,

## Automobile

**This trailer caught fire after skidding off the road: Many lives were lost**

Indeed, the local automotive parts market is a thriving outlet of branded counterfeits that are sold at interesting prices. For instance, a Bolus or Dorian oil filter sells at N550 while Super Filter, a Chinese imitation, sells at N200. Also, original spark plugs produced by the Japanese NGK, Toyota and American Motorcraft vehicle parts manufacturing outfits sell at N220 each while their Chinese imitations can be obtained at N55 per one. A set of Mercedes Benz- 190 front brake pads by Meyle, a German auto parts manufacturer, sells at N600 while Jurid, its Chinese imitation goes for N350.

But Rasheed Amoo, chief executive officer of Hardalt Technical Ventures, an Ota, Ogun State-based engineering firm, prefers to buy original automobile parts made by the real equipment manufacturers. According to him, it is safer to possess a very sound knowledge of the original equipment manufacturer's brand. "If not, the various automobile mechanics would find it easy to dupe unsuspecting car owners. They could hand you an imitation at the price of the original and you would never know," he said.

There is no question that auto parts counterfeiting is already big business in the automobile sector. Although there are no reliable statistics on the economic implications locally, industry estimates show that counterfeiting accounts for over \$12 billion a year in lost auto parts sales globally. This is about 10 per cent of the \$120 billion world trade deficit due to the production and marketing of fake products, including pharmaceuticals and cosmetics. As a result, international trade and law enforcement organisations such as the German Interpol, the Counterfeit Investigation Bureau, CIB, London, the International Anti-Counterfeiting Coalition, IACC, and the Federal Bureau of Investigation, FBI, United States, US, now place automotive parts counterfeiting activities at the top of the international crimes list alongside computers and fashion apparel counterfeiting.

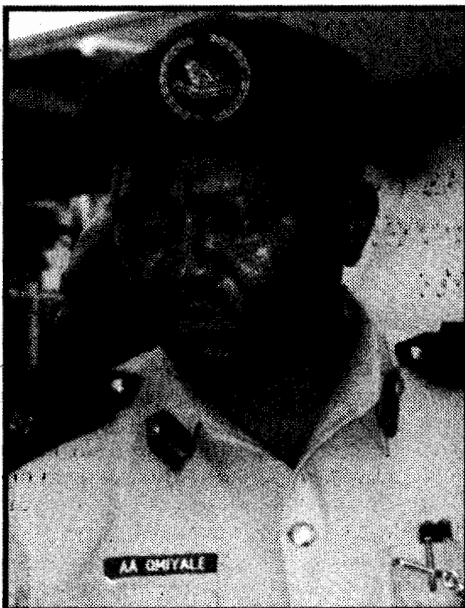
Initially, counterfeiters focused on cosmetic items like car accessories and body parts, but, in recent years, they have moved on to safety-related components like brake pads and suspension components. "It is now possible to assemble a complete car from illegally copied and produced parts," said Ahmed Tella, a Mercedes Benz auto-specialist and game centre proprietor. The picture gets

situation," he said.

But the counterfeit parts are not durable and, for this reason, some vehicle owners prefer buying fairly used original replacement parts to replace worn-out parts in their vehicles, explained Michael Akinsulire, a used auto parts dealer. The 33-year-old who plies his trade at the popular Jankara Market, Ijaiye, Lagos, said that the market as well as others at Ladipo, Mushin and Owode-Onirin, Ikorodu have become a haven of sorts for vehicle users who are afraid of the danger associated with the use of substandard imitations.

**Uzundu: Claims many motorists prefer cheap counterfeit parts**

admitted that Akanya was spot-on, he does not share his point of view. According to him, many motorists would rather purchase counterfeit vehicle parts at relatively low prices instead of the originals which are usually more expensive. "This is as a result of the harsh economic



**Akanya and Omiyale: Link automobile accidents to fake auto spare parts**