

American Roads are Singing for Safety

More tuned in rumble strips are expected to line American roads in 2024

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Everyone has done it, driving along the road and drifted slightly too far right, a loud noise and jarring vibrations designed to get the driver back on track – the car has stumbled upon the rumble strip.



Grooves on a Singing Road

Invented in New Jersey in 1952, vibrating strips on the side of the road remind drivers where the edge is. But one pair of TV producers thought that the mid-20th century technology might be taken one step further – Singing Roads.

“

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Pete Thompson

If a vehicle traveling over equally placed strips made a very specific note, what would happen if those strips had varied spacing? Could the driver play a tune where the vehicle is the instrument? The answer is yes, very effectively.

In 2014, producers Chris Hill and Pete Thompson designed a singing road for the New Mexico DOT, as part of a National Geographic television show, Crowd Control, about altering bad habits.

Mr. Thompson explained, “If we can get people to drive at a certain speed to hear a tune, then maybe we can alter speeding habits.”

The theory of the road is simple "To make a specific musical note you only have to vibrate something a particular number of times a second. It doesn't matter if it's a guitar string, an oboe reed, an insects back leg, or the wheel of a car. For instance, vibrate anything 432 times in one second and you will hear an "A" note," said Mr. Hill.

Turning that basic theory into an actual tune is a bit less simple. Choosing a suitable song is the first step. Hard core dance might be a bit of a challenge, but simple tunes like jingles and anthems and rousing choruses work really well.□

After choosing the tune the hard work begins. Breaking down that piece of music into individual, recognizable notes and translating that into rumble strips.

Hill adds, "It turns out installing the tune into the road is easy. It's also very easy to get the mathematics wrong, which leads to disaster later on 'down the road'. An unfortunate example of that is the failed singing road installation for a car commercial in Lancaster, CA which was less William Tell Overture and more wailing cat."

Thompson and Hill have now completed more singing roads than anyone else in the US.

Hill made his first singing road in the UK for another television science show, Bang Goes the Theory, to celebrate the royal wedding in 2011.□□

"At that time we had no idea if what we had constructed stood any chance of working. But we drove a hilarious three- wheeled car over the strips and the Wedding March played through the car like it was coming from the speakers," said Hill.

The pair are fielding calls to install singing roads like this around the world.

"All you need is a fairly straight piece of asphalt. The length depends how long a song you want to hear," said Thompson.

Singing Roads can be installed any where there is a long stretch of asphalt and the driver can maintain the steady speed such as highways, parking lots, campuses, driveways, even airport runways.

For more information about singing roads look at www.singingroads.com. To inquire about installing a Singing Road, email contact@singingroads.com

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