



By Syre Perkins

R egarding technology in our industry, many of us have been towing for decades and think we know how to roll with the changes, keeping the mindset of business as usual. However, do you know what advancements are taking place in automotive technology? What operational adjustments will you need to make to lower your risk of danger and exposure to litigation? Are tow companies correctly factoring in technology expenses so they can remain profitable? In this article, I point out a few issues related to automotive technology that tow operators will eventually deal with in everyday operations and the physical and legal risks that they are exposed to.

When the words "automotive technology" is spoken, many tow operators think about vehicles that have allwheel drive, antilock brakes, traction control, adjustable air-ride suspensions, and other mechanical features. However, automotive technology is changing faster than the industry can handle. For instance, vehicles are now being manufactured with newly developed materials. These materials are stronger and lighter, but also have their limitations. Most tow operators are not aware of the changes in vehicle manufacturing and are lost with trying to tow vehicles with the new technology. They have no clue about the procedures and equipment available to the tow operators to properly complete a job. With that said, what is automotive technology?

The flagship change in automotive technology is the industry's move toward electric vehicles (EVs). Five years ago, BMW and Tesla were the main companies with EV technology. Now, Audi, Ford, GM, Karma, Mercedes-Benz, and Porsche all have EVs and have standing commitments to discontinue internal combustion engines. General Motors and Ford are the most aggressive, aiming to produce nothing by EVs by 2030. At first glance, a tow operator may think that an EV is just another vehicle on wheels, so they can tow it with a wheel lift and dolly or skate it up



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onto a flatbed. Sounds easy enough. However, have you truly looked at this situation? EVs cannot go into neutral. If you cannot wake up an EV's computer system, you have a big paperweight to move. These vehicles are much easier to damage. The costs of EV repairs are very high averaging a 38% higher repair cost over a combustion engine vehicle, and then EV repairs are also more time consuming. In State of Georgia, Audi, BMW, GM, and Mercedes all have a wait-time of ten to twelve weeks for a service appointment. If you need body parts, that wait is even worse. If a car rental is involved, insurance carriers stop rental coverage at thirty days, so that can be costly.





Issues with EV technology will lead to a plethora of questions, whose answers vary by manufacturer and vehicle type. Advances in manufacturing have led Audi, Mercedes, and Volvo to use delicate aluminum-alloy frames. Flexing these frames can crack or break rear and side windows when the vehicle is lifted by a wheel lift. BMW uses a unique magnesium-alloy frame that is unique and fragile. The BMW i3 is so advanced that a tow operator can physically fold the vehicle in half with a wheel-lift when picking it up by the tires. Therefore, these vehicles cannot be towed with a wheel-lift.

EV manufactures like Ford, GM, and Nissan are experiencing issues with electronics caused by static electricity accumulated around the wheels & Brakes when vehicles are towed on dollies. Static electricity builds up and can arc from various places, shorting out electronics.

Tow operators must deal with the heaviness of EVs and their batteries. Most EVs weigh more than 6,000 pounds and are unable to go into neutral when they are dead. If you need to tow

an EV, be careful, because you have no tow connections. If you use skates, you will need to use control-arm straps to prevent the vehicle from shifting. However, the control arms on EVs are too fragile to pull the heavy weight of an EV onto the incline of a flatbed. You risk damage to the drive train if the wheels turn while loading because EVs have no



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transmissions. After a failed attempt, you may turn and use a wheel lift and dolly; however, EVs weigh around 6,000 pounds and dollies are rated for only 2,500 lbs., so are you ready to cover the damage claim expense for equipment failure?

Anyone with experience towing Tesla's knows about their self-driving technology. Models S and X will soon lose their easy Tow Mode with a software update, making them experience the same issues as other EVs. If you are using a jump pack, you will need to invest in a lithium Pack with a minimum of 3000 amps but monitor the pack. If you jump a car with a bad alternator, it will cause your pack to have a melt-down. BMW, Mercedes-Benz, Porsche, and Volvo want tow operators to carry 2 different packs.

Now let's discuss the major issues with the batteries used in EVs. EV manufacturers are having dangerous issues with batteries melting down and causing fires. This is causing great expense and headaches for the EV manufacturers, tow providers and insurance carriers. Our issues relate with safety risks: we are the first responders



who are responsible for getting the EVs off the roadway and towed into dealerships. Safety is number one, but at the same time we must remain profitable.

EV battery issues affect all manufacturers in the industry. General Motors has reached a \$1.9 billion settlement with LG, who manufactured their EV' batteries. GM recently signed a new deal with LG Chem Battery to produce a new



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battery for there EVs. GM has officially announced that if they run into any more battery problems, they will abandon the EV technology market and stop production. (Information obtained from General Motors Press Releases).

Vehicle manufacturers worldwide are experiencing EV battery issues, with major problems occurring in Europe. These issues have become so bad that GM shut down production for five months and the issues they experienced has caused the European governments to get more involved therefore totally changing how the towing industry operates in Europe. With Battery meltdowns causing vehicle fires, which burn at a slow rate over several hours, have exposed new unique dangers too tow operators. Moving melting EVs out of danger zones has totally changed how Public Safety and towing providers respond and operate in Europe.

When EV start to melt down, the vehicle stops running.



To help combat these issues, some European authorities are placing mandates for fire and tow operators to have access to the Italian-made EasTractTowTract® towing robot. This machine is the only the only equipment available to resolve all the problems that EVs are presenting to the towing Industry. This mandate will require towing companies that provide towing service to the governments to have an EasTractTowTract® robot available to support



<image>





public safety personnel as needed. The EasTract TowTract® robot can carry vehicles out of tight, dangerous areas while keeping the operator at a safe distance, away from danger without having to touch the towed vehicle. The robot picks up a vehicle and moves it like a bomb disposal robot moving an explosive out of the way. According to Interpol, EVs were becoming increasingly popular in Europe now they are required. Some countries have signed mandates requiring law enforcement and fire departments to have access/availability to use the EasTractTowTract® machine when an EVs battery issue arise. According to Agent Grogan with the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, "Public safety policies and procedures used in Europe are usually incorporated into the U.S. procedures within 12-18 months behind Europe. However, with the EV issues in Europe with the melt-down, he believes these requirements could arrive much sooner to the bigger cities in the U.S. Government



agencies will require their tow contractors to have a machine available when needed. The ability to move a vehicle without keys and not touch the vehicle is a valuable tool for all areas of public safety."

With current automotive technology causing these new problems, we cannot forget about the dreaded insurance issues that we have to deal with. Insurance carriers know what the dangers are. They are already a nightmare for the insurance companies because they pay out the claims. Then, factor in the towing industry issues, which has the responsibility to pick up these vehicles and get them to repair facilities. With operators responding to EV service calls, most companies have not looked at the complex issues involved with servicing EVs. Do you currently provide services or tow EVs? If you do, look at your towing insurance policy, it probably contains coverage exemptions for certain activities and vehicles. Most tow







insurance policies have coverage exemptions for EVs and specialty vehicles. You might be surprised to know that most insurance carriers classify EVs as specialty vehicles, and place language into a policy that provides insurance restrictions/exemptions for towing EVs. According to the American Insurance Association, very few towing insurance carriers allow EV's to be insured with a regular policy. Most insurance carriers require a special EV insurance addendum to the policy, and this can cost up to an additional 47% of the cost of a regular towing policy. Location, risk, population, and culture all factor into insurance costs. With this information, can a tow provider financially survive without adjusting for these added expenses? Will the consumer motorist pay for the added expense?

According to Philip Carroll of EasTract North America®, he states "The EasTractTowTract® machine is a tow industry game-changer. It is the future of towing. What is unique, the EasTractTowTract® Robot is currently classified as towing equipment by the insurance carriers. This machine lowers the risk of physical harm and damage to vehicles; therefore, the insurance costs are only with a tow truck. Insurance carriers have not figured out how to classify the robot, thereby lowing risk and cost" There is a growing interest with this technology. This machine has wowed several major metropolitan law enforcement agencies throughout the North America and the towing industry. The big issue is people are not familiar with this technology and easily get intimidated because they have never seen anything like this before. However, once a tow operator sees the machine in action, they are always impressed."

The cost of this EasTractTowTract Robot® technology is not cheap. It provides "The most advanced solutions for vehicle recovering handling and towing." This robot technology complicated tasks easier while reducing the risks. Thereby, providing a good profit margin with the job/risk factor. EasTractTowTract® machines are custom made to order in Italy to American specifications. If you are interested in getting information about this technology, contact Philip Carroll at Philip@EasTractNA.com.

About the Author

Syre Perkins, J.D.

Possess a Juris Doctorate from UGA, has 18 years' Towing Management experience in the Industry and a TRAA Certified Tow Master.

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