Bumpy Commute? Try Driving on the World’s Worst Road – a Hellish Mix of Potholes, Cobblestones and Speed Bumps

- Potholes are a problem for drivers who are forced to pay for costly repairs. Damage is so bad that vehicle recovery services report a huge rise in pothole-related calls.
- Ford test center in Belgium replicates effects of world’s worst potholes and other extreme surfaces. Lommel Proving Ground incorporates test tracks covering 50 miles, more than 100 extreme surfaces replicated from 25 countries, including 1.2 miles of potholes.
- Hazards including potholes, granite blocks from Belgium, and French cobbles help Ford to test and develop innovations that make cars stronger. In the U.S., the Fusion V6 Sport is the first Ford car equipped with a computer-controlled shock absorber system – or continuously controlled damping – as a standard feature – to make potholes less jarring.

Related: All-New Ford Fusion V6 Sport Helps Protect Against Potholes, Enhancing Comfort and Handling

LOMMELE, Belgium, Feb. 18, 2016 – Potholes and other rough road surfaces have become a pricey problem for motorists around the world.

In the U.S., pothole damage has cost drivers $15 billion in vehicle repairs over the last five years – approximately $3 billion annually – according to a new study from AAA.

Recognizing the issue, Ford Motor Company has created a diabolical 1.2-mile road that consists of precise replicas of some of the worst potholes and road hazards from around the world. What’s the point of this boulevard of broken suspensions? To help engineers create more robust chassis systems and develop new innovations to ensure Ford vehicles can better withstand the world’s increasingly choppy roads.

The road is part of 50 miles of test tracks at Ford’s test facility in Lommel, Belgium. It incorporates potholes from Europe and the U.S., and simulates more than 100 hazards from 25 countries worldwide. In the past three years alone, Ford engineers’ search for scary road hazards has taken them to Austria, France, Germany, Italy, Russia, Spain, Switzerland, and the U.K., as well as Asia, Australia, North America and South America.

“From a rutted traffic junction in China to a bumpy German side-street, this road is a rogues’ gallery of the most bruising surfaces that our customers might encounter,” said Eric-Jan Scharlee, durability technical specialist, at Ford’s Lommel Proving Ground, in Belgium. “By incorporating these real-world challenges into our test facilities we can develop future vehicles to better cope with challenging conditions.”

Engineers are always investigating potential new additions for inclusion at the facility. Employing similar equipment to that used by seismologists studying earthquakes, the engineers drive through the potholes at speeds of up to 46 mph, using sensors to record the loads and strains to the
suspension and components. This includes surfaces as diverse as granite blocks from Belgium, cobbles from Paris and speed bumps from Brazil.

Ford's obsession with making sure its cars can withstand the world’s worst roads has led to innovation. For example, Ford is debuting Continuous Control Damping with Pothole Mitigation technology in Europe on Mondeo, Galaxy and S-MAX. In the U.S., the Fusion V6 Sport is the first Ford car equipped with the technology, which adjusts the suspension if it detects that a wheel has dropped into a pothole, and can help protect the suspension from damage. Ford’s Tire Pressure Monitoring System alerts drivers to punctures, and Electronic Stability Control can help drivers maintain control of their vehicle when avoiding obstacles.

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