Physics of Automobile Rollovers

L. David Roper (http://arts.bev.net/roperldavid), roperld@vt.edu

Introduction

The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) of the Department of Transportation of the United States government recently promulgated rollover resistance ratings (http://www.carsdirect.com/encyclopedia/buying-a-safer-car) for automobiles. A parameter called the Static Stability Factor (SSF) is assigned to each vehicle. It is defined as one-half the track width divided by the height of the center of gravity. It is called "static" because SSF is essentially the tangent of the slope angle for an vehicle to just roll over while sitting on the slope. Another, slightly less static, way to look at SSF is "equal to the lateral acceleration in g's at which rollover begins in the most simplified rollover analysis of a vehicle represented by a rigid body without suspension movement or tire deflections" (Taken from http://www.nhtsa.dot.gov/cars/rules/rulings/Rollover/Chapt05.html.) Note the words "at which rollover begins".

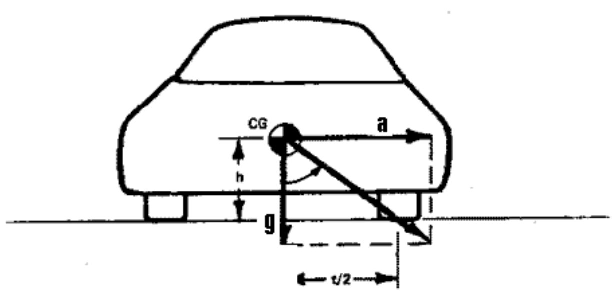


Figure 1: Components of **SSF** shown at Critical Lateral Acceleration

This diagram from that web site shows the lateral acceleration vector a to the right and the gravity acceleration vector g downward. The vehicle will just start rotating about the pivot point at the right tire when $\tan\theta = \frac{a}{g}$. Here $SSF = \tan\theta = \frac{\frac{t}{2}}{h} = \frac{F_l}{F_g} = \frac{a}{g}$, where $F_l =$ lateral force and $F_g =$ downward force. Therefore: $a = g \cdot SSF$.

One needs SSF to be as large as possible to make the lateral acceleration required to cause a rollover to be large.

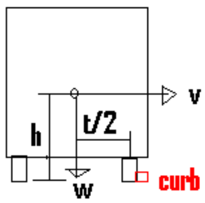
In a real situation a vehicle is usually moving when it rolls over, not standing still on a slope. We consider two types of idealized moving rollover situations:

- A vehicle is moving (sliding) sideways and the wheels strike a solid obstacle that provides a pivot point for a possible rollover. Rollover occurs when the ensuing rotation causes the force of gravity vector to pass through the pivot point.
- A vehicle is moving, without slipping, around a circular curve at a constant speed high enough to just cause rollover. Rollover occurs when the force of gravity vector passes through the pivot point.

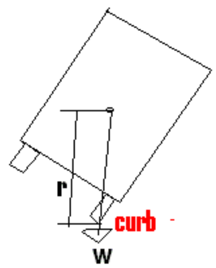
It should be emphasized that the effects of suspension movement, tire movement or electronic/mechanical stability control may be very important in the rollover tendency for a vehicle. Suspension and tire movements would likely increase the tendency for rollovers, while electronic/mechanical stability control is designed to make it less likely that a vehicle would get in a situation where rollovers occur. These analyses do not account for such and, thus, can only compare vehicles as rigid unintelligent bodies.

Rollover Physics for a Vehicle Sliding Sideways

Consider a vehicle sliding sideways until both side wheels strike a solid obstacle, such as a curb. The curb provides a pivot point for the car to rotate. The half track $\frac{t}{2}$ and the height h of the center of gravity are shown in this diagram at the point when the vehicle strikes a curb at sideways speed v :



Here the vehicle is at the critical point for rollover:



If the speed is greater than zero at this point, rollover will occur. If the sideways speed just goes to zero at this point in the rotation, the vehicle is just on the verge of rollover (the critical point).

The height of the center of gravity at the critical point has increased to $r = \sqrt{\left(\frac{t}{2}\right)^2 + h^2}$, by Pythagorus' theorem as the hypotenuse of a right triangle with sides $\frac{t}{2}$ and h .

Energy conservation requires that: energy before hitting the curb = energy at the critical point, where energy = kinetic energy $\left(\frac{1}{2}mv^2\right)$ + gravitational potential energy ($mg \times$ height above surface):

Therefore, at the critical point where $v_p = 0$:

$\frac{1}{2}mv^2 + mgh = mgr = mg\sqrt{\left(\frac{t}{2}\right)^2 + h^2} = mgh\sqrt{s^2+1}$, where $s = SSF = \frac{\frac{t}{2}}{h}$.

Therefore, the initial speed that just produces the critical point is given by:

$$\boxed{v^2 = 2g\left(\sqrt{\left(\frac{t}{2}\right)^2 + h^2} - h\right)}$$

This is the square of the initial speed, when hitting the curb, that yields zero speed at the critical point, the condition to just begin a rollover; call this initial speed the **critical speed**. Thus, we see that the critical initial speed depends not only on the SSF, but also on h or $\frac{t}{2}$. In fact, it is better to not even consider SSF, but both h and $\frac{t}{2}$ instead.

For $s = 0$ (i.e., $t = 0$): $v^2 = 0$.

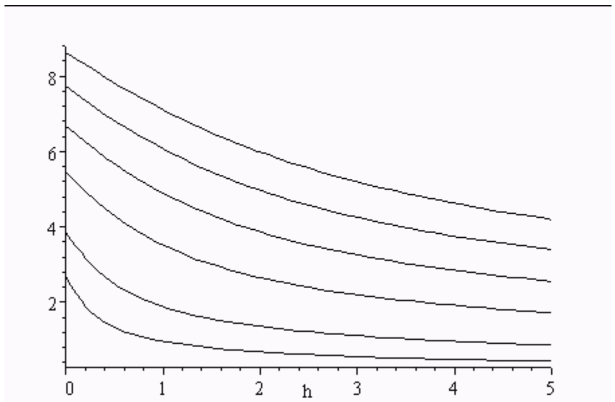
For $s = 1$ (i.e., $h = \frac{t}{2}$): $v^2 = 2gh\left(\sqrt{2} - 1\right) = 0.828gh = 0.414gt$.

For $s = \infty$ (i.e., $h = 0$): $v^2 = gt$.

Most vehicles were rated at $1.0 < s < 1.5$ in the NHTS ratings (http://www.nhtsa.dot.gov/cars/rules/rulings/roll_resistance/appendix1.html). (It is interesting to note that the incidence of rollovers is about five times greater for $s = 1.0$ vehicles as it is for $s = 1.5$ vehicles.)

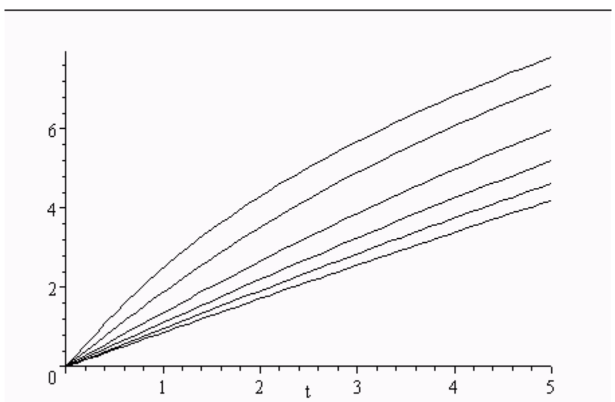
Of course, energy is not strictly conserved, so the actual critical initial rollover speed will be larger than this calculated speed. However, rollovers often occur after the vehicle has left the road bed and is on the downward slope beside the road bed, which would decrease the critical initial rollover speed.

This is a plot of the critical-point initial speed v in miles/hour versus h in feet for different values of t . (Bottom to top: $t = 0.5, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5$ feet).



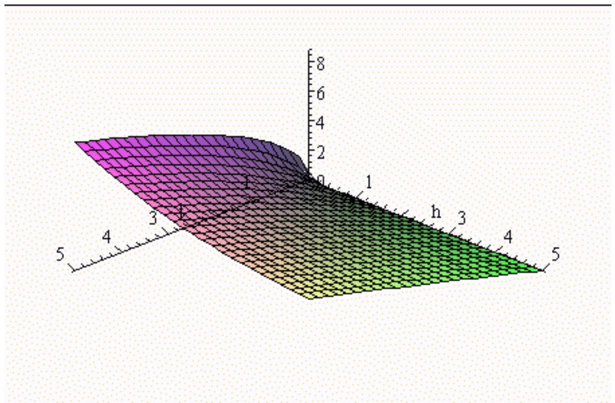
One wants v to be as large as possible. Therefore, one wants h to be as small as possible.

This is a plot of the critical-point initial speed v in miles/hour versus t in feet for different values of h . (Bottom to top: $h = 5, 4, 3, 2, 1, 0.5$ feet).



One wants v to be as large as possible. Therefore, one wants t to be as large as possible.

This is a 3-D plot of the critical-point initial speed v in miles/hour versus h and t in feet.



One wants h to be as small as possible and t to be as large as possible. It is desirable to find out whether it is more effective for producing the desirable high v to decrease h (center of gravity) than to increase t (track) or vice versa. One can do this analytically by taking the partial derivatives (the slopes) of $v^2 = 2g\left(\sqrt{\left(\frac{t}{2}\right)^2 + h^2} - h\right)$:

$\frac{\partial v}{\partial h} = \frac{g}{v}\left(\frac{h}{\sqrt{h^2+\frac{1}{4}t^2}} - 1\right)$ (slope of v when h is varied with fixed t) and $\frac{\partial v}{\partial t} = \frac{1}{4}\frac{g}{v}\frac{t}{\sqrt{h^2+\frac{1}{4}t^2}}$

(slope of v when t is varied with fixed h).

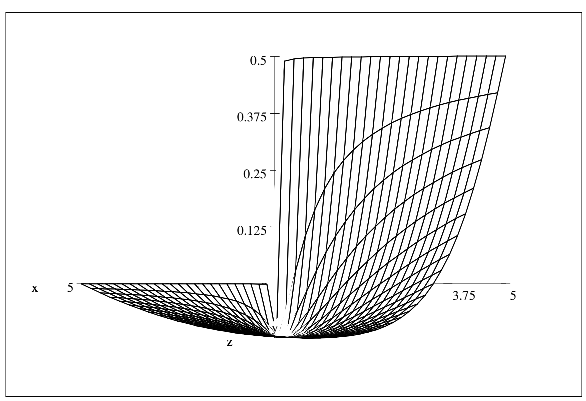
Now subtract the absolute values of the two partial derivatives:

$$\left|\frac{\partial v}{\partial h}\right| - \left|\frac{\partial v}{\partial t}\right| = \left|\frac{g}{v}\left(\frac{h}{\sqrt{h^2 + \frac{1}{4}t^2}} - 1\right)\right| - \left|\frac{1}{4}\frac{g}{v}\frac{t}{\sqrt{h^2 + \frac{1}{4}t^2}}\right|$$

.

Define: $\Delta = \frac{v}{g}\left(\left|\frac{\partial v}{\partial h}\right| - \left|\frac{\partial v}{\partial t}\right|\right) = \left|\left(\frac{h}{\sqrt{h^2+\frac{1}{4}t^2}} - 1\right)\right| - \left|\frac{1}{4}\frac{t}{\sqrt{h^2+\frac{1}{4}t^2}}\right|$.

The following is a plot of this function:



The two absolute values are equal at $t = \frac{8}{3}h$, Δ is negative if $t < \frac{8}{3}h$, Δ is positive if $t > \frac{8}{3}h$.

That is, if $t < \frac{8}{3}h$ it is more effective for producing the desirable high v to increase t (track) than to decrease h (center of gravity).

But, if $t > \frac{8}{3}h$ it is more effective for producing the desirable high v to decrease h (center of gravity) than to increase t (track).

Classifying Automobiles for Rollover Safety

A better way to rate vehicles for sideways-slipping rollovers is by calculating critical-point initial speed

$v = \sqrt{2g\left(\sqrt{\left(\frac{t}{2}\right)^2 + h^2} - h\right)}$ from t and h , instead of by static stability factor $s = SSF = \frac{\frac{t}{2}}{h}$. Critical-point initial speed also has the advantage of being a value with units (miles/hour) to which people can relate. For example

$h = 2$ feet and $t = 4$ feet ($s = 1$): $v = 5$ mph

$h = 2$ feet and $t = 6$ feet ($s = 1.5$): $v = 7$ mph

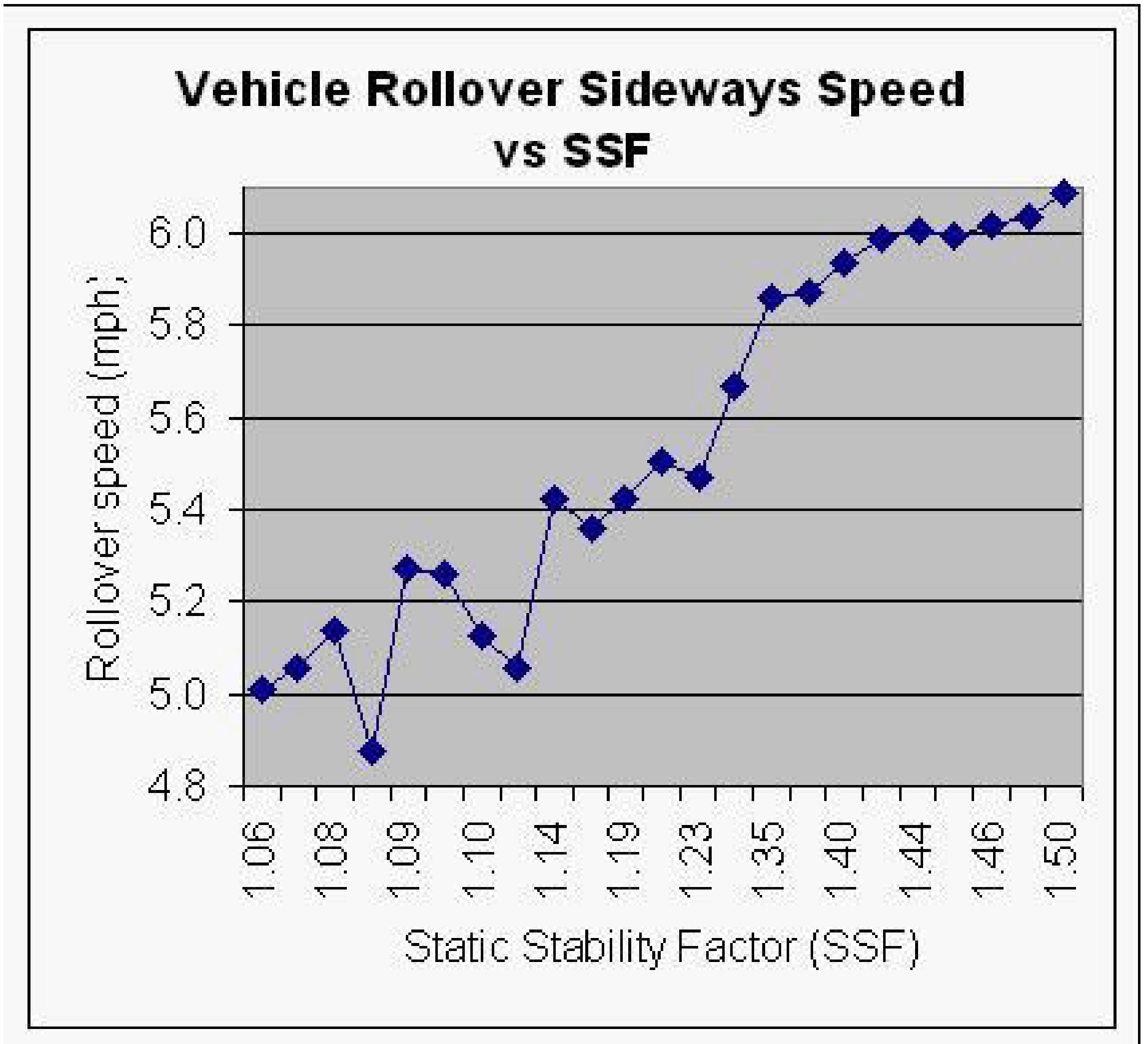
(If these appear to the reader to be small speeds for a vehicle, remember that they are sidways slipping speeds, not forward speeds.)

Values for s for various vehicles are given in http://www.nhtsa.dot.gov/cars/rules/rulings/Rollover/Appendix.html, but the track and center-of-gravity values are not given there. I was able to find track/tread values for some of the listed vehicles on the Internet. (Ford Motor Company did not list the track for its vehicles.) I used them and the SSF to calculate the center-of-gravity height h. (It is not clear on the web pages what is meant by "track width" and "tread width"; It appears that some or all that use the term "track" really mean "tread". In every case I have assumed that they meant the width to the outside edges of the tires; so I have subtracted off 6" for the approximate width of the tire.) Then I calculated the critical-point initial sideways rollover speed, as shown in the following table, sorted by increasing SSF:

Vehicle	SSF	Track(ft)	$\frac{t}{2}$(ft)	Cent. of Grav. h(ft)	Side. Rollover Speed(mph)
Honda Passport	1.06	4.48	2.24	2.35	5.01
Jeep Grand Cherokee	1.07	4.46	2.23	2.32	5.05
Jeep Cherokee	1.08	4.33	2.17	2.24	5.14
Chevrolet Suburban	1.08	4.96	2.48	2.53	4.88
Chevrolet Blazer 2WD	1.09	4.06	2.03	2.09	5.27
Chevrolet Blazer 4WD	1.09	4.08	2.04	2.14	5.26
Nissan Pathfinder	1.10	4.56	2.28	2.30	5.13
Chevrolet Astro van	1.12	4.93	2.46	2.42	5.06
Chevrolet S/10 pickup	1.14	4.04	2.02	1.99	5.42
Mazda MPV van	1.17	4.57	2.28	2.17	5.36
Honda CR-V SUV	1.19	4.53	2.27	2.11	5.43
Jeep Wrangler	1.20	4.33	2.17	2.01	5.51
Dodge Caravan van	1.23	4.79	2.40	2.15	5.47
Toyoto Tacoma pickup	1.26	4.27	2.13	1.89	5.67
Saturn SL sedan	1.35	4.20	2.10	1.74	5.86
Toyoto Corolla sedan	1.36	4.28	2.14	1.76	5.87
Nissan Sentra sedan	1.40	4.33	2.16	1.72	5.94
Honda Civic sedan	1.43	4.33	2.16	1.69	5.99
Dodge/Plymouth Neon	1.44	4.33	2.16	1.68	6.01
Nissan Maxima sedan	1.44	4.48	2.24	1.73	5.99
Toyoto Camry sedan	1.46	4.54	2.27	1.73	6.02
Honda Accord sedan	1.47	4.57	2.28	1.72	6.04
Chevrolet Camaro	1.50	4.55	2.28	1.68	6.09

I should caution that these data were obtained at a specific time (early 2001). They may not apply to later models of the same name.

The following plot shows the critical-point initial rollover sideways speed plotted against the static stability factor (SSF). Note that, at high SSF, the two are essentially equivalent measures of relative rollover tendency, but at low SSF they differ considerably in the rankings. For example, the Chevrolet Suburban is fourth from lowest in SSF rankings, but lowest in critical-speed rankings. Just above the Suburban, four vehicles have their rankings reversed when one uses critical speed instead of SSF. There are three reversals of two vehicles at higher SSF.



I believe that this shows convincingly that critical-point initial speed should be used, rather than SSF, in ranking vehicles for sideways-slipping rollover tendency, since it represents the physics better and does not always agree with SSF rankings.

The following chart uses the theory above to decide whether it is more effective to increase the track t or to decrease the center of gravity g in order to make the critical velocity v larger for each vehicle:

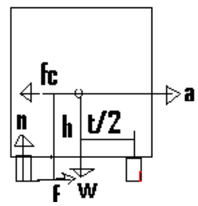
Vehicle	Track t (ft)	Center of Gravity h (ft)	t-(8/3)h	Variable to Change
Honda Passport	4.48	2.11	-1.15	Increase t
Jeep Grand Cherokee	4.46	2.08	-1.10	Increase t
Jeep Cherokee	4.33	2.01	-1.02	Increase t
Chevrolet Suburban	4.96	2.30	-1.16	Increase t
Chevrolet Blazer 2WD	4.06	1.86	-0.91	Increase t
Chevrolet Blazer 4WD	4.08	1.87	-0.91	Increase t
Nissan Pathfinder SUV	4.56	2.07	-0.97	Increase t
Chevrolet Astro van	4.93	2.20	-0.94	Increase t
Chevrolet S-10 pickup	4.04	1.77	-0.69	Increase t
Mazda MPV van	4.57	1.95	-0.64	Increase t
Honda CR-V SUV	4.53	1.90	-0.55	Increase t
Jeep Wrangler	4.33	1.81	-0.48	Increase t
Dodge Caravan van	4.79	1.95	-0.40	Increase t
Toyoto Tacoma pickup	4.27	1.69	-0.25	Increase t
Saturn SL sedan	4.20	1.56	0.05	Decrease h
Toyoto Corolla sedan	4.28	1.57	0.08	Decrease h
Nissan Sentra sedan	4.33	1.54	0.21	Decrease h
Honda Civic sedan	4.33	1.51	0.29	Decrease h
Dodge/Plymouth Neon	4.33	1.50	0.32	Decrease h
Nissan Maxima sedan	4.48	1.56	0.33	Decrease h
Toyota Camry sedan	4.54	1.56	0.39	Decrease h
Honda Accord sedan	4.57	1.55	0.42	Decrease h
Chevrolet Camaro	4.55	1.52	0.51	Decrease h

Of course,doing both will increase v . Note that the best way in increase v for low-ranked vehicles is to increase the track width t .

Of course, in most real sideways rollovers, there will not be a solid curb providing a fixed pivot point. Instead, the pivot point may actually be moving, say in soft earth or pavement friction. Then the critical speed will be higher than the calculated value for a fixed pivot point. Nevertheless, the critical speed calculated for a fixed pivot point is a good comparative measure of the rollover hazard for different vehicles. Most rollovers occur as sideways-slipping rollovers (http://www.nhtsa.dot.gov/hot/rollover: "Most rollover crashes occur when a vehicle runs off the road and is tripped by a ditch, curb, soft soil, or other object causing it to rollover."). There is usually a forward speed, as well as the sideways speed that causes the rollover, which greatly increases the likelihood of damage to the vehicle and its occupants during rollover.

Rollover Physics for an Automobile in a Circular Path

Consider an vehicle moving at initial speed v when the driver suddenly turns the steering wheel such that the vehicle's wheels move in a circle of radius r with no slipping:



The centripetal force acting toward the center of the circle is provided by the friction of the road bed with the tires and causes ($f = ma$) a centripetal acceleration toward the center of the circle with value $a = \frac{v^2}{r}$. This force acts at the places where the tires touch the road bed, but the acceleration a acts through the center of gravity, as does the gravitation force w (weight) downward. There is also a normal force n of the road on the tires. The forces f and n act at all four tires, although they are shown at only one tire in this diagram. The force of gravity is $w = mg$, where the acceleration of gravity is $g = 32.2$ ft/sec^2 .

$\theta = \arctan\left(\frac{h}{\frac{t}{2}}\right)$ is the initial angle between the vehicle floor and the vector to the center of mass from the pivot point.

The fact that the tires-road frictional force, f, causing the centripetal acceleration, a , is offset from a , contributes to a torque about any point other than the tires-road point. The normal force n also contributes to the torque. These torques, if large enough, can cause the vehicle to rotate about a point of contact with the road, in addition to the circular motion.

The frictional force depends on the coefficient of static friction μ between the tires and the road; "static" because the tires are not slipping. The usual assumption is that $f \leq \mu n$; that is, the frictional force can take on any value from 0 to μn , depending on what is needed to provide the centripetal acceleration a .

We treat the two inner tires as one tire and the two outer tires as one tire. Since, relative to the earth, the vehicle will rotate around the point where the outer tire touches the earth, we take that point as the point about which to calculate torques. We call the force doublet (f,n) at the inner tire (f_i,n_i) and the force doublet at the outer tire (f_o,n_o).

Balancing forces:

$$\sum f_x = ma = \frac{mv^2}{r} = \frac{wv^2}{gr} = f_i + f_o \leq \mu(n_i + n_o)$$

$$\sum f_y = n_i + n_o - w$$

The centripetal acceration term, ma , can be considered as a fictitious force, $f_c = ma$, shown in the picture above, acting outward through the center of mass in the reference frame of the moving vehicle. It is called the "centrifugal force". In fact, it must be so used when calculating the torques in the reference frame of the moving vehicle. Balancing torques counter-clockwise about the point of contact of the outer tire with the road bed:

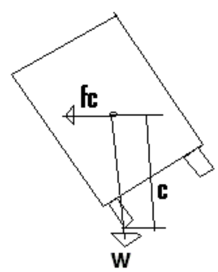
$$\sum \tau = I\alpha = f_c h - w\frac{t}{2} + n_i t$$

where I is the moment of inertia and the angular acceleration, α , is taken counter-clockwise about the point where the outer tire touches the road bed. The inner normal force, n_i , can be any value from 0 to $\frac{w}{2}$; it can never participate in any rotation about the outer tire, because it cannot move. As f_c increases, n_i decreases from $\frac{w}{2}$ to maintain balance until it reaches 0. The angular acceleration will be zero according to $f_c h - w\frac{t}{2} + n_i t = 0$ until $n_i = 0$. Then $f_c h - w\frac{t}{2} = 0$ and the inner wheel no longer has a normal force; i.e., the inner wheel is just lifted off of the road bed. Then: $f_c h = mah = w\frac{t}{2} = mg\frac{t}{2}$, and, therefore:

$$a = \frac{\frac{t}{2}}{h} g = sg = SSF \cdot g$$

This is a reason that SSF was chosen by the NHTSA as the parameter to compare vehicles for rollover tendency. One wants this **critical centripetal acceleration** to be as large as possible. However, this value of acceleration only gives a measure of the tendency to begin a rollover, not to actually rollover. This defines a **critical circular speed**: $v = \sqrt{ra} = \sqrt{rsg}$, the speed required to lift the inner tire from the road bed. This speed depends on the radius of the circle r .

The more relevant situation for rollover tendency is when the center of gravity is over the point of contact of the wheel that is touching the road bed:



(Assume that the vehicle does not slip sideways.) Then the only force causing a torque about the point of contact is f_c . At this point any centripetal acceration value would cause the vehicle to roll over. Call this situation the "**critical point**" for having a rollover. This critical-point rollover angle is given by

$$\tan\theta_p = \frac{\frac{t}{2}}{h} = s = SSF$$

This is another reason that SSF was chosen by the NHTSA as the parameter to compare vehicles for rollover tendency. One wants this angle to be as large as possible; i.e., one wants large t and small h .

In the diagram above the height of the center of gravity above the road surface is

$$c = \sqrt{\left(\frac{t}{2}\right)^2 + h^2}$$

The torque for any angle θ when the inner tires are off the road is

$$\boxed{\tau = \text{ma}\left(h\cos\theta + \tfrac{t}{2}\sin\theta\right) + \text{w}\left(h\sin\theta - \tfrac{t}{2}\cos\theta\right)}$$

At any intermediate angle between $0°$ and θ_p the centripetal acceleration required to balance the torques ($\tau = 0$) lies between sg and 0 :

$$a = g\frac{s - \tan\theta}{1 + s\tan\theta}$$

Once the inner wheels are off of the ground, the vehicle will continue to perform the rollover unless the driver reduces the speed or increases the turning radius, which a driver would instinctively do unless there were insufficient time to react (hundreds of milliseconds) when the beginning of a rollover is perceived.

In the equation above the centripetal acceleration $a = \frac{v^2}{r}$ is not constant. Energy is assumed conserved, so v_p^2 must decrease to

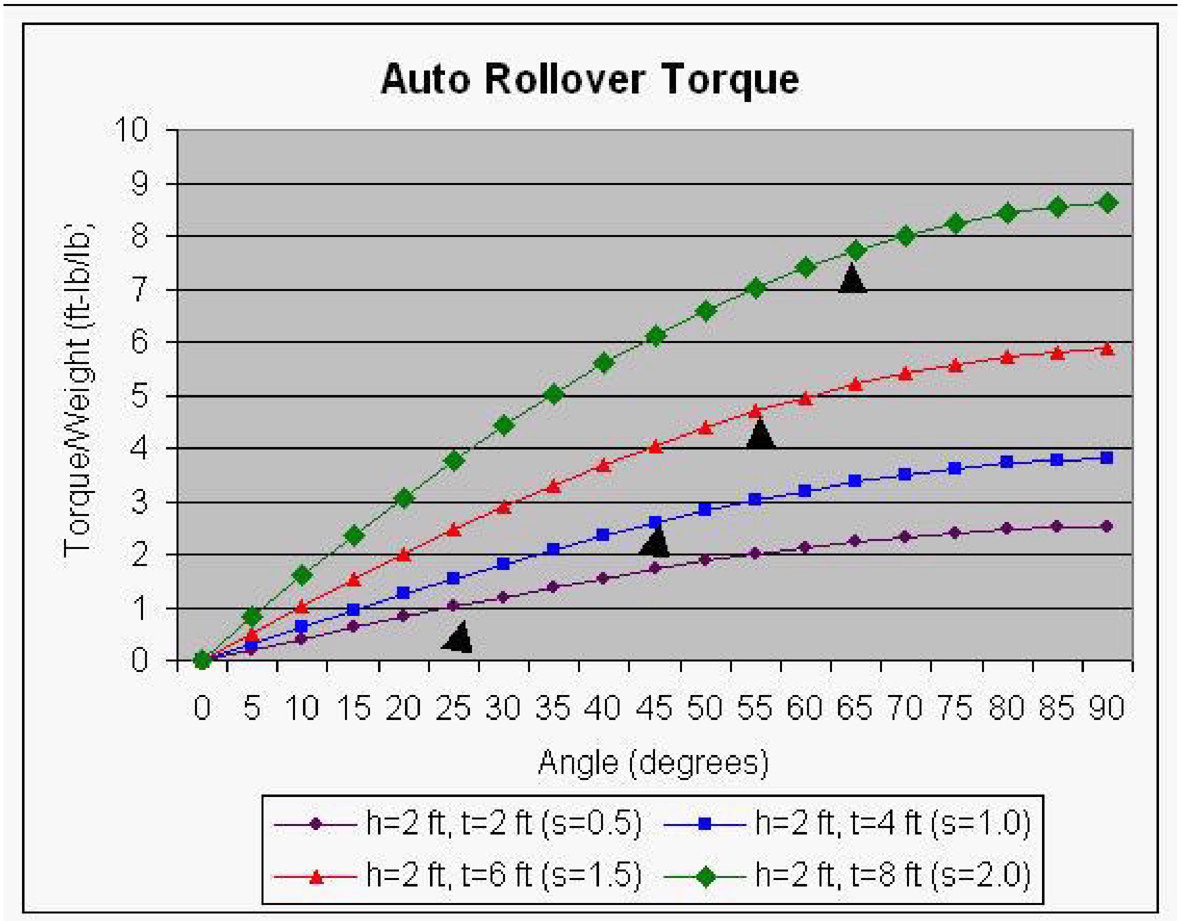
$$v_p^2 = v^2 - 2g\left(\sqrt{\left(\frac{t}{2}\right)^2 + h^2} - h\right)$$

as the center of mass rises from initially h to $\sqrt{\left(\frac{t}{2}\right)^2 + h^2}$ at the critical point of rollover. Also, since the wheels are locked to move in a circle of radius r , the radius of the center of mass changes from initially r to $r + \frac{t}{2}$ at the critical point of rollover. The torque/weight as a function of θ , the angle between the vehicle floor and the road bed, is:

$$\boxed{\frac{\tau(\theta)}{w} = \frac{v^2 - 2g\left[h(\cos\theta - 1) + \frac{t}{2}\sin\theta\right]}{g\left[r + \frac{t}{2}(1 - \cos\theta) + h\sin\theta\right]}\left(h\cos\theta + \frac{t}{2}\sin\theta\right) + h\sin\theta - \frac{t}{2}\cos\theta}$$

(For the derivation of this equation, see http://www.arts.bev.net/roperldavid/torque.pdf.)

The graph below shows the rollover torque as a function of angle for different values of h and t up to complete rollover on the side ($\theta = 90°$) for the critical initial circular speed and $r = 40$ ft.



Any speed slightly above the critical initial circular speed will cause a rollover. The tip-over angle, given by $\tan\theta_p = \frac{\frac{t}{2}}{h} = s = SSF$, is shown for each case by an arrow head. The critical initial circular speeds for these cases are:

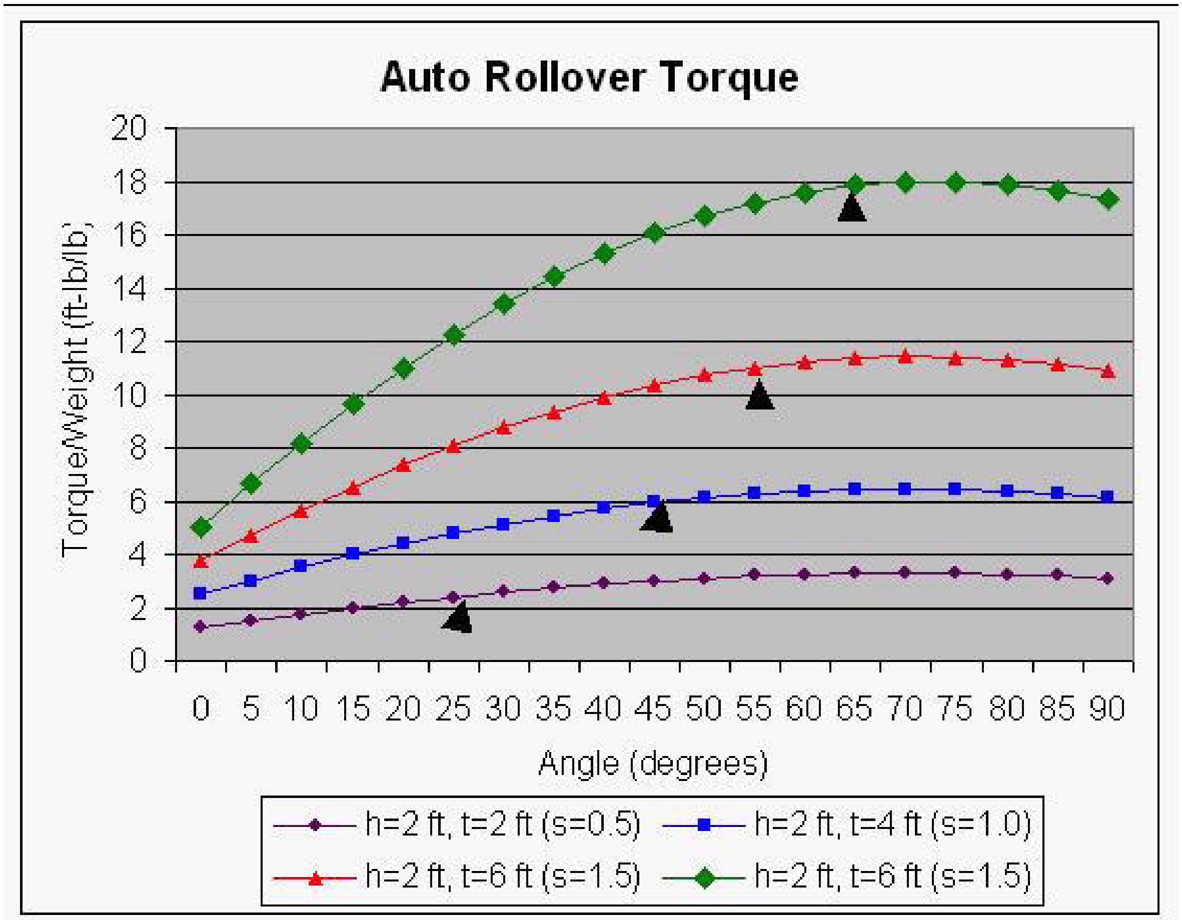
$h = 2$ ft, $t = 2$ ft ($s = 0.5$): 17.3 mph

$h = 2$ ft, $t = 4$ ft ($s = 1.0$): 24.5 mph

$h = 2$ ft, $t = 6$ ft ($s = 1.5$): 30.0 mph

$h = 2$ ft, $t = 8$ ft ($s = 2.0$): 34.6 mph

The graph below shows the rollover torque as a function of angle for circular speed 50% above the critical speed and $r = 40$ ft.



These graphs make it very clear, that once the initial circular speed is above the critical speed and, thus, the torque is greater than zero, the rollover is certain since the non-zero torque causes an angular acceleration which then moves the vehicle to a larger angle where the torque is even larger.

If we assume that the vehicle does not lose any energy to the environment during the course of going from initiating the rollover to the critical point of the rollover, the energy-conservation analysis carries through exactly as above for a sideways-slipping rollover when hitting a curb.

The energy-conservation initial critical speed is, as above:

$$v_{ec} = 2g\left(\sqrt{\left(\frac{t}{2}\right)^2 + h^2} - h\right)$$

For the two examples given above:

$h = 2$ feet, $t = 4$ feet (s= 1): $v_{ec} = 5$ mph

$h = 2$ feet, $t = 6$ feet (s= 1.5): $v_{ec} = 7$ mph

When the torque is zero at an angle θ , then the initial speed required is given by

$$v_{\tau=0}^2 = g\left[r + \frac{t}{2}(1-\cos\theta) + h\sin\theta\right]\frac{\frac{t}{2}\cos\theta - h\sin\theta}{h\cos\theta + \frac{t}{2}\sin\theta} + 2g\left[h(\cos\theta - 1)\frac{t}{2}\sin\theta\right]$$

The critical circular initial speed for barely initiating ($\theta = 0^\circ$, $\tau = 0$) a rollover is

$v_{ir} = \sqrt{\sqrt{rsg}}$.

Equating the two critical initial speeds for energy conservation and barely initiating rollover, we get the following for the critical turning radius required for barely inititating rollover in circular motion of the type described herein:

$$r = \frac{4h}{t}\left(\sqrt{\left(\frac{t}{2}\right)^2 + h^2} - h\right)$$

For the two examples used above:

$h = 2$ feet, $t = 4$ feet ($s = 1$): $r = 1.66$feet

$h = 2$ feet, $t = 6$ feet ($s = 1.5$): $r = 2.44$ feet

These radii are much smaller than any vehicle can steer. Larger, more realistic radii, give a larger critical speed for initiating a rollover, which definitely would cause a complete rollover, once the inner wheels leave the road bed.

For the two examples, a realistic radius of 40 feet yields:

$h = 2$ feet, $t = 4$ feet ($s = 1$): $v_{ir} = 24.5$ mph

$h = 2$ feet, $t = 6$ feet ($s = 1.5$): $v_{ir} = 30$ mph

For this kind of rollover, s is a good measure of the tendency to roll over. However, most rollovers are not of this kind (http://www.nhtsa.dot.gov/hot/rollover). Some rollovers may be a combination of sideways sliding and circular motion.

Conclusion

If a single measure of sideways-slipping rollover-tendency ranking of vehicles is used, it should be critical-point initial speed,

$$v = \sqrt{2g\left(\sqrt{\left(\frac{t}{2}\right)^2 + h^2} - h\right)} \ ,$$

rather than static stability factor, $s = SSF = \frac{\frac{t}{2}}{h}$. This is strictly for sideways rollovers, not for circular-motion rollovers; however, that is the case for most rollovers according to NHTSA.

I suspect that a reasonable fraction of rollovers involve some circular motion, as the driver tries to maneuver out of trouble, as well as sidewise motion. Circular-motion rollover tendency depends monotonically on SSF. So, perhaps one should average the rankings for critical-point initial speed and SSF.

The rankings of the vehicles given above for the three ways to rank are as follows (SRS=Sideways-slipping Rollover Speed:

SSF Rankings	SRS Rankings	Average Rankings
Honda Passport	Chevrolet Suburban	Honda Passport
Jeep Grand Cherokee	Honda Passport	Jeep Grand Cherokee
Jeep Cherokee	Jeep Grand Cherokee	Chevrolet Suburban
Chevrolet Suburban	Chevrolet Astro van	Jeep Cherokee
Chevrolet Blazer 2WD (tie)	Nissan Pathfinder SUV	Nissan Pathfinder SUV (tie)
Chevrolet Blazer 4WD (tie)	Jeep Cherokee	Chevrolet Astro van (tie)
Nissan Pathfinder SUV	Chevrolet Blazer 4WD	Chevrolet Blazer 2WD (tie)
Chevrolet Astro van	Chevrolet Blazer 2WD	Chevrolet Blazer 4WD (tie)
Chevrolet S-10 pickup	Mazda MPV van	Chevrolet S-10 pickup (tie)
Mazda MPV van	Chevrolet S-10 pickup	Mazda MPV van (tie)
Honda CR-V SUV	Honda CR-V SUV	Honda CR-V SUV
Jeep Wrangler	Dodge Caravan van	Jeep Wrangler (tie)
Dodge Caravan van	Jeep Wrangler	Dodge Caravan van (tie)
Toyoto Tacoma pickup	Toyoto Tacoma pickup	Toyoto Tacoma pickup
Saturn SL sedan	Saturn SL sedan	Saturn SL sedan
Toyoto Corolla sedan	Toyoto Corolla sedan	Toyoto Corolla sedan
Nissan Sentra sedan	Nissan Sentra sedan	Nissan Sentra sedan
Honda Civic sedan	Honda Civic sedan (tie)	Honda Civic sedan
Dodge/Plymouth Neon (tie)	Nissan Maxima sedan (tie)	Dodge/Plymouth Neon (tie)
Nissan Maxima sedan (tie)	Dodge/Plymouth Neon	Nissan Maxima sedan (tie)
Toyota Camry sedan	Toyota Camry sedan	Toyota Camry sedan
Honda Accord sedan	Honda Accord sedan	Honda Accord sedan
Chevrolet Camaro	Chevrolet Camaro	Chevrolet Camaro

In all calculations above, the effects of suspension movement, tire movement or electronic/mechanical stability control were neglected. Suspension and tire movements would likely increase the tendency for rollovers, while electronic/mechanical stability control should make it less likely that a vehicle would get in a situation where rollovers occur.

Auto makers need to be required to publish the height of the center of mass and the track for each automobile made, so that one can easily calculate the SSF and the critical speed. Better yet, they should be required to publish the SSF and the critical speed

An industrial economist, Joe Kimmel, has developed a formula for predicting the probability of rollovers in accidents given the track width t , height h and weight w (car weight plus 500 lbs cargo for passenger cars and 750 lbs cargo for vans, SUVs and pickups) of a vehicle. The formula is given at http://www.usatoday.com/money/consumer/autos/mauto698.htm. There is a slight error in the formula as given there. The correct formula for the % probability of rollover is:

$P = 0.091(550000\frac{h}{tw} - 90).$

The values for 189 model year 2001 autos are given at: http://cgi1.usatoday.com/money/consumer/autos/mauto695.htm.

Rollover risks for some 2001 luxury AWD automobiles are:

Model	Acura MDX	Acura MDXTour	Audi A6Avant	Audi Allroad	VolvoV70XC
height (in)	68.7	71.3	58.2	60.1	61.5
track (in)	664.	66.4	61.3	62.2	61.6
weight (lbs)	4323	4383	3787	4167	3699
risk (%)	3.8	4.1	4.4	3.4	5.3
			height	62.7	
			risk (%)	3.9	
head air bags	no	no	yes	yes	yes
Model	BMW X56c	BMW X5V8	Lexus RX300	Merc.ML320	Merc.ML430
height (in)	67.5	67.5	67.7	69.9	69.9
track (in)	60	61.4	61.3	60.4	60.4
weight (lbs)	4519	4828	3924	4586	4696
risk (%)	4.3	3.2	5.9	4.4	4.1
head air bags	yes*	yes*	no	yes	yes

*All except the BMW have curtain air bags; the BMW has a cylindrical head air bag apparently only for the front seats, which I judge to be not as good as curtain air bags.

I did not add any cargo weight, as Kimmel did. So the risk numbers cannot be compared to the numbers he calculated. Instead, the comparisons should be made only to cars in this table.

Two values are listed for the Audi Allroad because it has a variable height/ground-clearance capability between the two values shown. The last line indicates whether the vehicle has head air bags that extend from the front to the back of it; this is very important for protecting the occupants during a rollover.

I should caution that these data were obtained at a specific time (early 2001). They may not apply to later models of the same name.

(I own an Audi A6 Avant and a Volvo V70 XC.)

L. David Roper, roperld@vt.edu, Mar 2001, revised, except for vehicle data, August 2003.