

11.3.11

Measure x along the tracks in the direction of travel, y crossways, and z vertically up, all three relative to the car. The ball's velocity relative to the ground is $(V + \dot{x}, \dot{y}, \dot{z})$, so the Lagrangian is $\mathcal{L} = E_K - U$

$\mathcal{L} = \frac{1}{2}m[(V + \dot{x})^2 + \dot{y}^2 + \dot{z}^2] - mgz$. The generalized momentum has components

$$p_x = \frac{\partial \mathcal{L}}{\partial \dot{x}} = m(V + \dot{x}), \quad p_y = m\dot{y}, \quad p_z = m\dot{z}$$

Notice that the generalized momentum is the momentum relative to the ground, not to the moving car! We can solve for

$$\dot{x} = (p_x - mV)/m, \text{ so that}$$

$$\mathcal{H} = p_x \dot{x} + p_y \dot{y} + p_z \dot{z} - \mathcal{L} = \frac{p^2}{2m} - p_x V + mgz$$

From here, we can derive the expected equation of motion, but the point is here is to note that

\mathcal{H} is not equal to the energy $E_K + U$ (neither relative to the car nor relative to the ground), because

$$\begin{aligned} (E_K + U)_{\text{rel. to car}} &= \frac{1}{2}m(\dot{x}^2 + \dot{y}^2 + \dot{z}^2) + mgz \\ &= \frac{p^2}{2m} - p_x V + \frac{1}{2}mV^2 + mgz \neq \mathcal{H} \end{aligned}$$

$$\text{And } (E_K + U)_{\text{rel. to ground}} = \frac{p^2}{2m} + mgz \neq \mathcal{H}$$