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## Sevierville woman's Lexus suddenly accelerates on I-40

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6 On Your Side Reporter

SEVIERVILLE (WATE) -- A federal safety group is investigating why some new Lexus models suddenly accelerate. It happened to a Sevierville woman last fall as she merged onto I-40. And the reason behind the problem is simple and surprising.

The reports of sudden acceleration come from owners of the **2007 Lexus ES350** and from federal records.

Lexus vehicles are made by Toyota Motor North America. Consumer publications such as *Consumer Reports* list Lexus as one of the most reliable and safest vehicles on the roads. Those are some of the reasons why ██████ of Sevierville, bought her car.

On October 12, 2006, ██████ drove her Lexus onto I-40 Westbound from the Sevierville on ramp and started to merge. "I had sped up to about 65 miles an hour."

Then ██████ says something strange happened. The car began accelerating on its own. "I looked down at my speedometer. It had gotten up to about 70 and I didn't have my foot on the accelerator."

"At about 75, the cruise light came on by itself. So I thought, maybe that's why it started to speed up. So, I took my hand and disengaged the cruise," ██████ says.

But she says the car kept on going faster. "And then I geared down into neutral and it did nothing. So I kept doing that. Then I just put it in reverse."

██████ says she also applied the brakes. "Then, of course, I pushed the emergency brake on. I guess I said out loud, I can't believe this is happening."

Using the remote phone in her car, ██████ called her husband, ██████ "I've been married to her for 35 years. I've never heard the terror in her voice like I did that day," he says.

"I told him I was going 100 miles an hour down the interstate. I asked him if he knew anything else I could do to try to stop the car," ██████ says.

██████ says he told his wife to put the car in park. ██████ says she couldn't do that.

"The good Lord just helped me out here cause I wasn't doing anything different and the speedometer started backing down just a little bit," ██████ says.

She had gone about six miles when the car began slowing down and she finally stopped it. "It's just times like this that it all comes back to me." Bringing up those terrifying moments still makes ██████ feel shaky.



"I looked down at my speedometer. It had gotten up to about 70 and I didn't have my foot on the accelerator," ██████ says.



██████ only recently got back in her Lexus. It has a total of 2,700 miles on it.

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## Floor mat is reason for sudden acceleration of local Lexus

Days after the event, the Smiths wrote to Toyota Motor Company. The couple showed 6 On Your Side a report from a Toyota field technical specialist who inspected the car.

Toyota says, "Our FTS was unable to duplicate the unintended acceleration that you reported. For the sequence to have occurred as reported to us, two totally different systems would have to fail at exactly the same time. And if properly maintained, the brakes will always override the acceleration."

Toyota replaced the transmission on the couple's Lexus but the [REDACTED] wanted a new car. So they appealed to the National Center for Dispute Settlement.

In its March 6 report, the NCDS writes, "The evidence is insufficient to conclude there is a warrantable defect. The customers' request that the vehicle be repurchased is denied."

[REDACTED] and [REDACTED] also wrote to the Department of Transportation.

6 On Your Side searched the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration's (NHTSA) Web site and found 14 incidents reported on sudden acceleration for the 2007 Lexus ES350. (To duplicate this search, [click here](#) and put in the vehicle's year, make and model. Then you can select "vehicle speed control" to see the complaints.)

- One owner writes, "My car began to accelerate uncontrollably."
- Another says, "Car did not slow down."
- A third owner says, "It's a miracle I'm alive."

An investigator from the NHTSA came to Sevierville to examine [REDACTED] car. He found something out of the ordinary, a rubber mat on top of the regular floor mat.

Who would have suspected the floor mat? A preliminary report from NHTSA says there are six cases of improperly placed floor mats on cars like [REDACTED]

The regular floor mat is hooked with clips. When the winter mat is put on top of the regular one, there's no way to hook it. Consequently, the rubber mat can slip forward and come over the accelerator pedal.

The [REDACTED] ordered the extra floor mat from their dealer in Kingsport. "When we went to pick up the car, they had installed the winter mat on top of this other mat. So when I saw that done, I thought that must be fine. It's okay because the dealership had done it."

There is a warning label on the winter mat but it's difficult to see. "Do not place on top of existing floor mat," [REDACTED] reads. "It is what, about an eighth of an inch?"

[REDACTED] only recently got back in her Lexus. It has a total of 2,700 miles on it.

Toyota tells 6 On Your Side it is cooperating fully with the **NHTSA in its efforts** to investigate the allegations made in the government's preliminary evaluation of the floor mats.

That **floor mat evaluation report** shows three crashes so far and seven injuries regarding this issue.



When the winter floor mat is put on top of the regular one, there's no way to hook it.



[REDACTED] is pointing to the warning on the winter floor mat. It's extremely hard to see.

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