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Subject: Feds Probe Prius Runaway Acceleration by Consumer Affairs 9/10/07.

September 10, 2007 Consumer Affairs Reports

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- Hybrids Don't Always Deliver the Expected Fuel Economy

Federal safety regulators at the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration have quietly opened an investigation into complaints of "runaway acceleration" in the popular Toyota Prius hybrid, according to a senior official at the agency.

When asked if the agency probe was underway, the senior official responded tersely "yes." Pressed for details, the official said that there is "nothing more to say at this time."

The Toyota Product Communications office is not talking either, not responding to several requests from ConsumerAffairs.Com to discuss the issue of unintended acceleration in the Prius.

Prius owners in the meantime continue to encounter incidents of unintended acceleration with the hybrid and the Japanese automaker seems unable to remedy the problem.

In a new wrinkle, one Prius owner whose hybrid was damaged in an unintended acceleration accident reports that her Toyota dealer is unwilling to accept the Prius in trade for another vehicle, even though the hybrid is almost new.

In Burnet, Texas, [REDACTED] slammed into a garage wall with her 2007 Prius.

"I was pulling into my garage. Suddenly my Toyota Prius accelerated out of control and drove into the wall of the

garage damaging my nerves, the car and the wall," she told ConsumerAffairs.com.

█████ husband thought his wife was the cause of the accident.

"My husband, thinking it was user error put the car in reverse and it accelerated again out of control," she said. "We bought the Prius as our retirement car. My husband and I are 70 plus and have found ourselves without a car until someone can find what is happening."

"They say it can't even be traded in," █████ told us.

█████ has reported the unintended acceleration problem to Toyota with no response.

"I am very frightened of the car what if I had been approaching a group of pedestrians," █████ asked?

Similar reports

About the same time that █████ was crashing into a garage wall with her Prius, █████ in Las Vegas was wrestling with her 2005 Toyota hybrid's tendency to accelerate suddenly.

"It has hesitated several times on me. This last time I almost got in an accident. It chugged along several times in a row. No lights went on. It has 99,000 miles and has a warranty to 100,000 miles. It has been at the Toyota dealership 5 days. they cannot find any problems" █████ said.

On August 22, █████ in San Dimas, California reported a similar Prius problem.

"I was almost stopped for a red light, my foot was on the brake (NOT on gas), the car was surging forward being held back by brakes. I quickly checked for anything under the accelerator including the floor mat, foot on the gas, or any other cause. All were negative."

█████ pulled into a gas station on the corner with the engine still revving at maximum rpms. He turned the Prius off, double checked for external causes and found none. He then turned the hybrid back on and it "behaved normally," █████ told us.

When █████ reported the unintended acceleration problem to his Toyota dealer, "he said there was a service bulletin on the 2004-2005 models but not on the 2006. He offered to re-flash the computer." █████ told us.

█████ in Los Gatos, California has a 2007 Prius she has driven since December of 2006.

"After driving the car approximately 1,000 miles, Toyota Prius hybrid had an uninitiated full-throttle acceleration while driving on an expressway," she told ConsumerAffairs.Com.

"Startled, I slammed on the brakes. The accelerator fought my braking as I pulled over and turned off the car, shocked and taking a deep breath," █████ wrote us.

█████ did not think about the problem with unintended acceleration again until it happened with about 13,000 miles on the odometer.

"I had been stopped at a traffic light. It changed to green and I started to move forward. The Prius took off charging toward the car in front of me. Standing on the brakes, I pulled over and turned off the car. Very frightened, I sat wondering what I should do next. What happens if I turn the car on and it takes off again?" she asked herself.

█████ said that all was normal when she re-fired the hybrid engine.

"I called Toyota and talked to a sales person and explained this dangerous experience. He confirmed that he was familiar with the problem and also experienced this himself when driving one of the earlier models of the Prius," █████ wrote.

No floor mats

She took the runaway Prius to her Toyota dealer and listened as the service manager blamed everything that has occurred on "nothing more than a floor carpet jamming accelerator pedal."

"As I explained to him, I didn't have floor mats when this happened the first time," [REDACTED] wrote.

A concerned friend sent [REDACTED] a link to earlier stories published by ConsumerAffairs.Com.

"I forwarded the link to the owner of the Toyota dealership. He too expressed concern and asked me to keep the loaner for a few more days while they get someone for Toyota to look further into this," [REDACTED] said.

"At the moment, I'm still in the dealership loaner car. They still have my Prius," [REDACTED] told us.

Feds Probe Prius Runaway Acceleration 9/10/07

A related article published last month:

Toyota is unable to recreate the unintended acceleration. The service technician was either uninformed of intentionally misleading his customer, since ConsumerAffairs.Com has received -- and published -- numerous such complaints. "I can assure you," another customer told ConsumerAffairs.Com, "that the incidences that I had did not involve mechanical sticking or jamming of the accelerator pedal because of a piece of carpet. It was not driver error." In his opinion, "the problem may be in the cruise control system itself, either a mechanical, electronic or electrical problem in the cruise control system."

Prius Owners Report More Unintended Acceleration Incidents 8/12/07

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