Memorandum

U.S. Department
of Transportation

**National Highway
Traffic Safety
Administration**

Subject: Consumer Interview and Vehicle Inspection Date: 8/30/2007
Vehicle Owner Questionnaire (VOQ) ODI 10189655

From: D. Scott Yon
Investigator and Interviewer, NHTSA ODI

To: Files ODI 10189655 and EA07-010

Present for Inspection: Thomas Scherschel, attorney representing subject vehicle insurer;
Mark Boyle, attorney (outside) representing Toyota;
Bill Collins, NHTSA, VRTC;
Scott Yon; NHTSA, ODI

ODI conducted a telephone interview with the owners (wife and husband) of the subject vehicle on May 7th and 8th, 2007. The primary driver was a 70 year old female, 5' 5" tall, and considering herself in good physical condition. According to her statements, on April 4th, 2007 she was driving northbound on Edens Expressway[1] in the Mundelein, IL area at about 60 MPH and noted that the vehicle speed was increasing for an unknown reason. She applied the brakes repeatedly but was unable to get the vehicle to go any slower than about 60 MPH. In a panicked state, she stated she did not attempt to turn off the engine[2] or to shift the vehicle into another gear. Unable to slow or stop the vehicle for some distance, she recalled having to steer around slower moving traffic on the expressway to avoid a collision.

She decided to exit the expressway at Dundee Road heading west. Noting her excessive vehicle speed, she was surprised she negotiated the clover-loop style exit ramp successfully[3]. Shortly after entering Dundee Road she came to the intersection with Skokie Boulevard which is controlled by a traffic light. A pick-up truck was stopped at the traffic light behind another vehicle. She was unable to maneuver past the truck and crashed into the back of it pushing it into the vehicle in front of it. She estimates her speed at impact was 60 MPH and noted that the airbags did deploy; a vehicle fire ensued shortly after the collision.

She was able to self-extricate and was not transported for medical treatment however she did see a doctor shortly afterwards. She suffered bruising and soreness but no bone fractures; she reported no ongoing treatment. She estimates the distance from where she first noted a loss of control to the point of collision at about 2.5 to 3 miles. She was aware the vehicle was equipped with an all weather rubber floor mat on the driver side floor but had no knowledge of its state of installation, advising that she would have her husband contact ODI to discuss this.

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[1] According to her statements, she entered the expressway at the Old Orchard Road interchange.
[2] She stated she was fearful of the affect pressing the engine button would have on the vehicle while it was moving.
[3] The subject vehicle is equipped with a vehicle stability control system that may have intervened.

On May 8th 2007 the husband of the driver contacted ODI to discuss the incident. In an understandably agitated state he forcefully explained his full awareness that the driver all weather floor mat could not be installed on top of the carpet mat stating that he knew the retaining hooks were not long enough to engage both mats. He advised that the dealership had also explained this to him when he purchased the vehicle and that he was very attentive to matters like this on all his vehicles. He was confident that the all weather mat in his wife's vehicle was properly secured at the time of the incident, and that even if it wasn't, he did not believe there was any possible way the mat could be the cause of what his wife experienced. He advised he was aware of several similar VOQ reports on the NHTSA database and that he was concerned there was another problem with the vehicle which caused the incident, noting that his wife was currently driving another MY 2007 ES and that he did not want this to happen again.

Photographs showing how an unsecured floor mat can trap the accelerator pedal were emailed to the husband with a request for him to review them and call back; he called back shortly (in a calmer state) acknowledging that he now understood the concern and potential consequence. He advised he was unaware the floor mat could trap the accelerator in this manner and that he was concerned his dealer had not warned him of this. ODI advised that an insurance investigator had reported that the driver side all weather mat was found unsecured in a post crash inspection of his wife's car. The husband could not explain this and asked if perhaps the retaining hooks had failed during the collision. He advised that the vehicle had been cleaned and washed recently but that he did not think either location that performed the service would have disturbed the floor mat. We agreed that a vehicle inspection was required to collect more information and he granted ODI's request to inspect the vehicle.

The vehicle inspection was conducted on 7/25/2007 at a Copart facility located in Elgin, IL and was attended by the persons listed above. The attorney for the insurance company coordinated the manufacturer's involvement and attendance; he also filed court documents to advise interested parties of the inspection[4]. The inspection consisted of a physical examination of the vehicle interior, exterior, engine compartment, LHF/LHR brake components, and the underside of the vehicle. No electronic interrogation of any vehicle system was performed. With the exception of the components removed for brake inspection, the driver side floor mat, and materials adrift from collision damaged, no other components were removed or disturbed. Disturbed components were placed back in their original position, or as close as possible. NHTSA did not take possession of any vehicle components or other materials. Copies of pertinent photographs taken during the vehicle inspection are included with this report.

The VIN was recorded as JTHBJ46G072[redacted], the date of manufacture as 05/06, and the point of manufacture as Japan (photo 1). The vehicle has been located at the current facility for an unknown length of time; it is fully disabled, has significant collision damage to the front end, and has suffered an engine compartment fire; the fire breached the windshield. The insurance agent who filed the VOQ report advised that the vehicle is a total loss.

With the exception of the damage related to the collision, fire, and the subsequent storage and protection, the vehicle's condition is consistent with the estimated vehicle mileage indicated on the VOQ. The fire origination appears to be in the engine compartment; causation was not evident however portions of the fuel system were damaged. The fire consumed most of the

[4] ODI provided an inspection protocol for this purpose.

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engine compartment combustibles and damaged the windshield, driver glass, and other interior and exterior components. See photos 2 to 5.

Discoloration, rust and surface damage to the brake rotors is visible through all four wheel apertures. The LHF and LHR brake calipers were removed and the brake components inspected. The components displayed significant damage due to overheating. The damage is consistent with the driver's statement that she was attempting to stop the vehicle while it was moving at high speed for a significant distance. See photos 6 to 10.

The vehicle interior condition is consistent with the estimated vehicle mileage. All weather mats are installed at all four seating positions. The driver side all weather mat was found to be installed by itself; it was not on top of another floor mat. The installed mat was found to be unsecured by the retention hooks; the mat did not interfere with the accelerator pedal in the position it was originally inspected. The mat was removed from the vehicle. The two retention hooks were found engaged in the flooring material after the mat was removed[5]. The hooks were intact and did not appear to be damaged from the collision. See photos 11 to 16.

[5] ODI notes that the RHF all weather floor mat was also found unsecured and that one of the retention hooks was engaged in the rubber mat but was not engaged in the flooring material.

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Photographic Log:

Photo 1: Certification label, driver side door jam (redacted)

Photo 2: Front oblique view of vehicle showing collision and fire damage

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Photo 3: Rear oblique view of vehicle.

Photo 4: Front view, hood open, fire damage in engine compartment (redacted)

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Photo 5: Fire damage to front windshield and dash panel

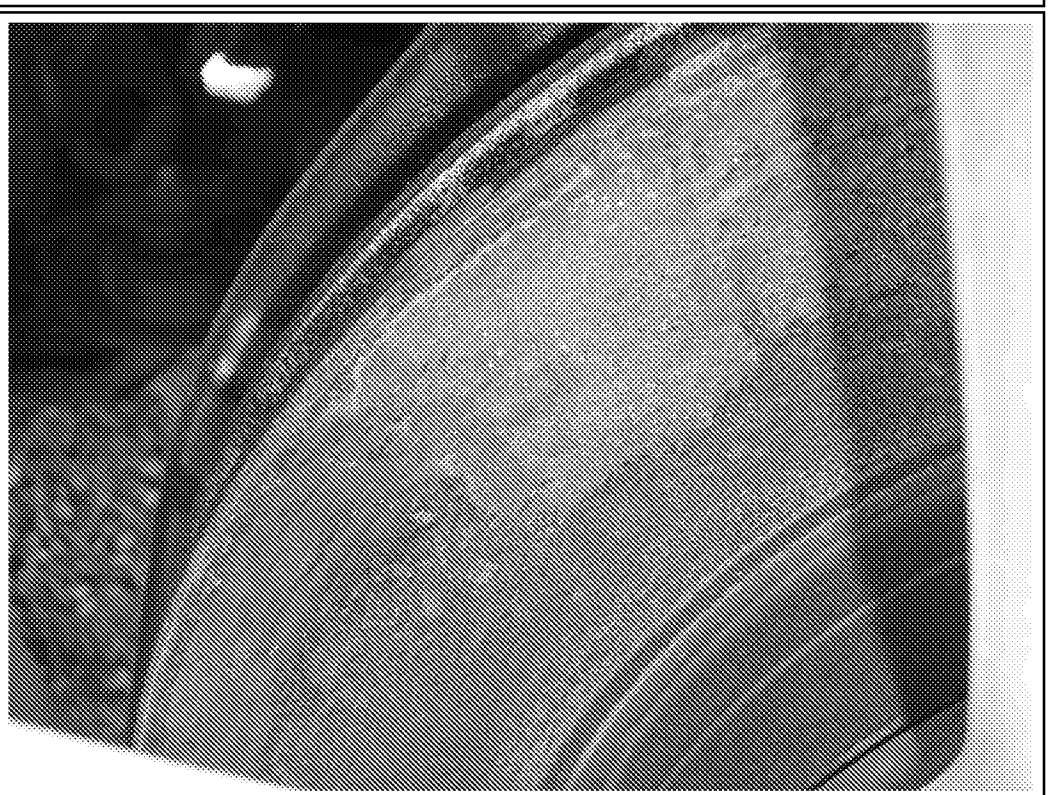

Photo 6: RHF rotor surface as viewed through the wheel aperture

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Photo 7: LHF brake assembly, wheel removed

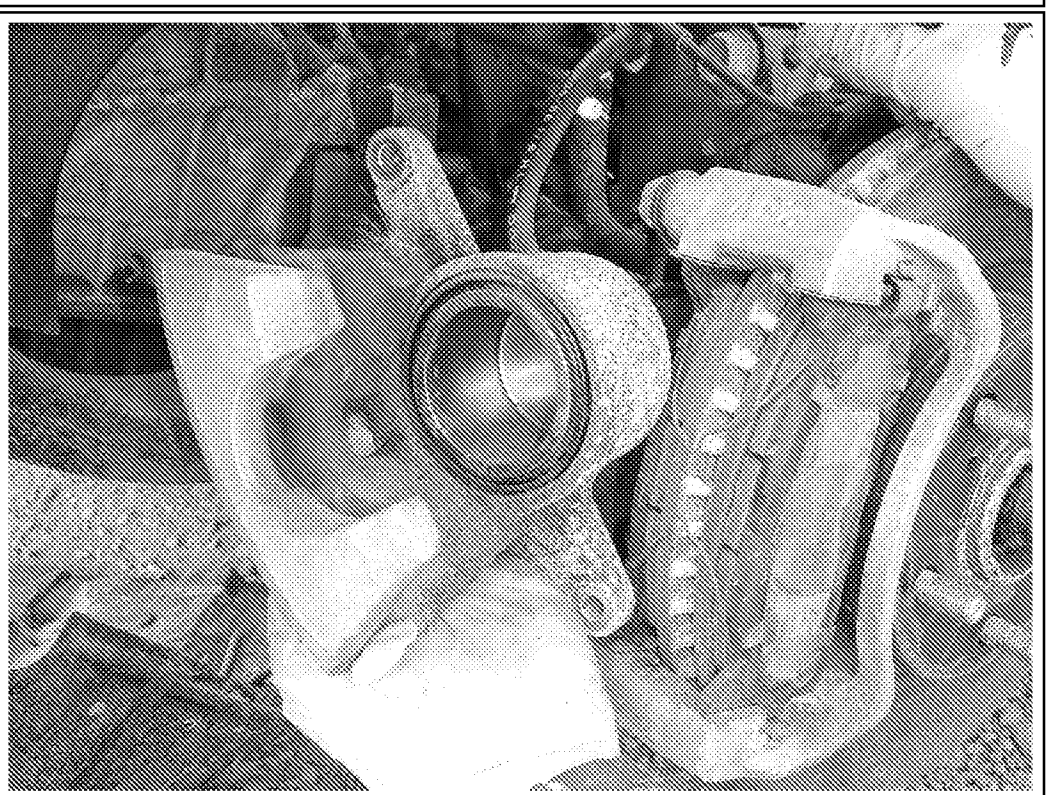

Photo 8: LHF brake hardware, caliper removed

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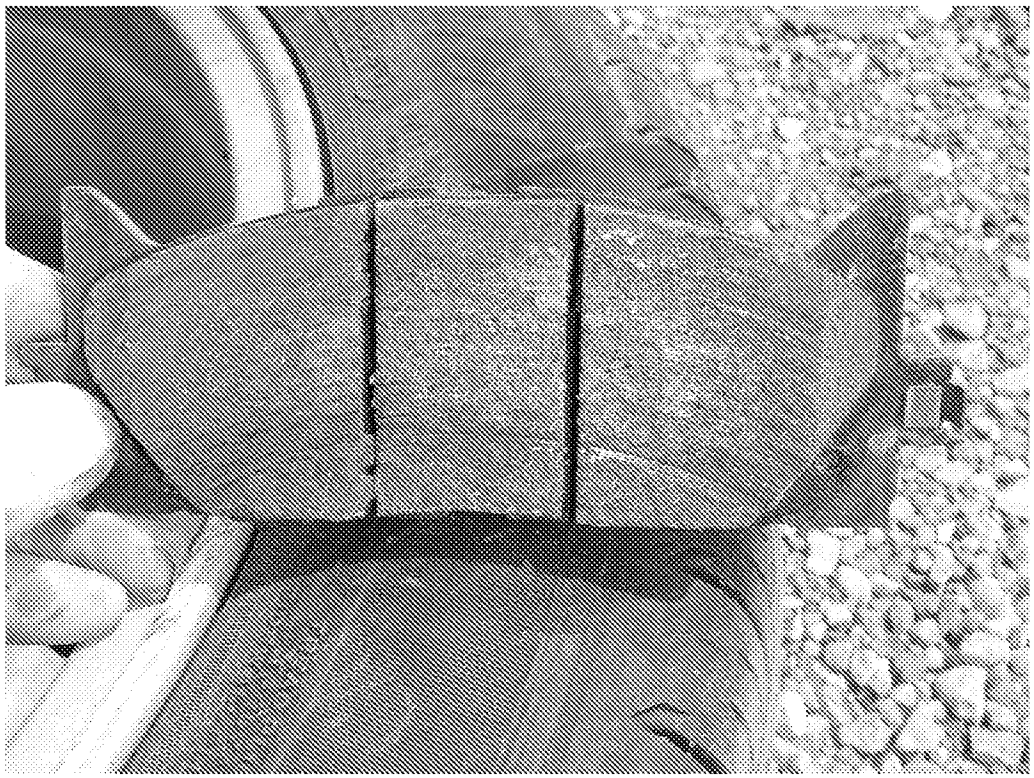

Photo 9: LHF disc brake pad, friction surface/rotor side

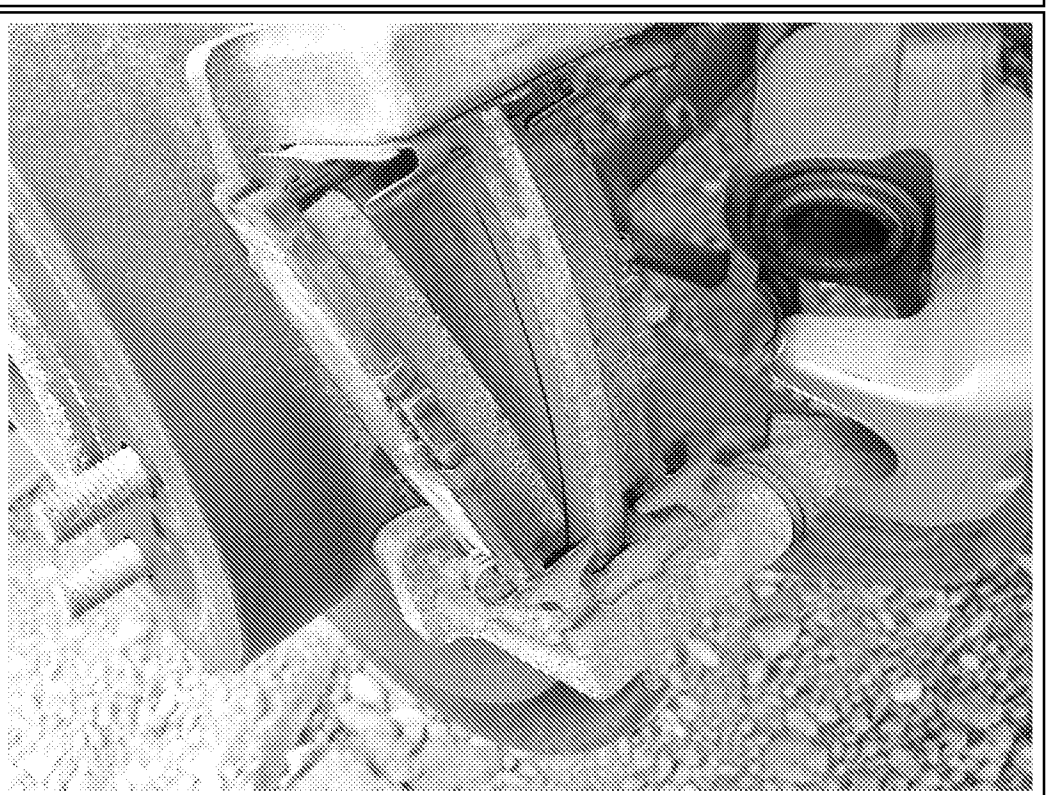

Photo 10: LHR disc brake hardware, caliper removed

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Photo 11: Driver side floor board as inspected, all weather mat installed

Photo 12: Drivers outboard mat retention hole without retaining hook engaged

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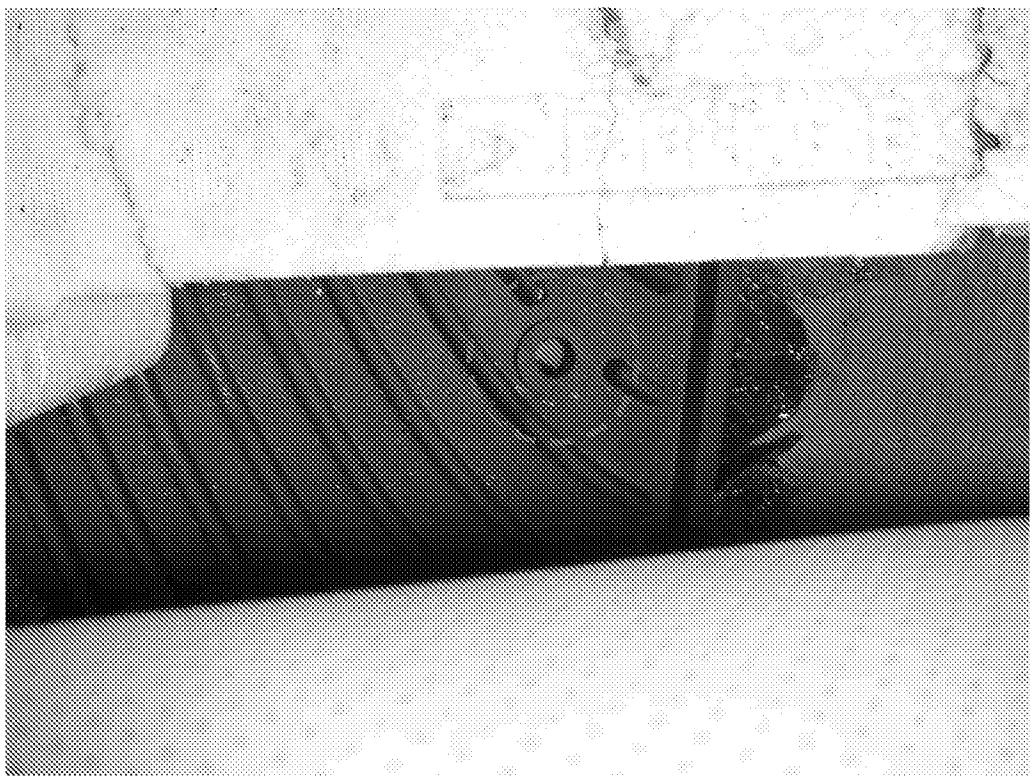

Photo 13: Driver inboard mat retention hole without retaining hook engaged

Photo 14: Driver outboard hook engaged in flooring, carpet mat not installed

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Photo 15: Driver all weather mat removed from vehicle

Photo 16: Driver inboard mat retention hook engaged in floor material

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