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News

Toyota Recalls Floor Mats, NHTSA Warns Prius Owners

Not all Priuis owners buy the floor mat theory

By Joe Benton
ConsumerAffairs.Com

September 27, 2007

The Toyota Motor Corp. and the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) have agreed that faulty floor mats are the cause of runaway acceleration in the Toyota Prius hybrid as well as several other Toyota vehicles.

Toyota announced it will conduct a recall of 55,000 floor mats which are used in the 2007/2008 Lexus ES 350 as well as the 2007/2008 Camry.

At the same time, NHTSA is strongly urging owners "make sure the driver-side, all weather floor mat is properly secured before driving the vehicles."

NHTSA and Toyota noted that, if unsecured, the mats being recalled can slip forward and trap the accelerator pedal, causing the vehicle to accelerate uncontrollably.

The floor mats in the Prius are not part of the recall but NHTSA urged drivers of Toyota Avalons and Prius hybrids to check the driver-side floor mats to make sure they are properly installed.

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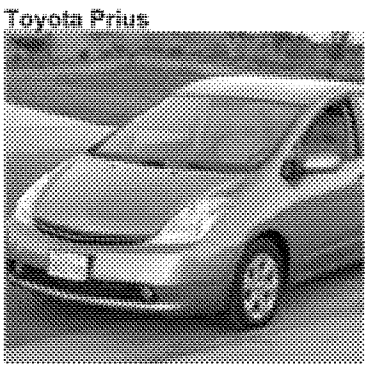

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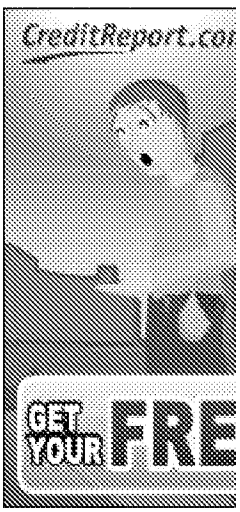

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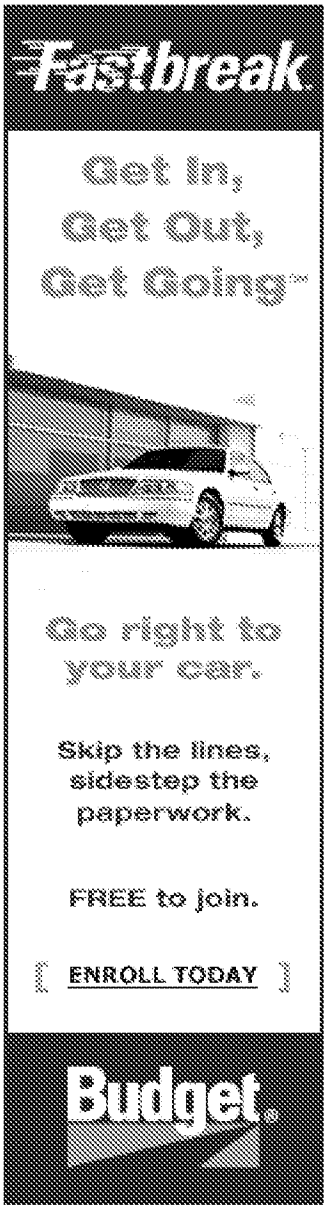

"Of course, depending on vehicle design, it is possible for unsecured floor mats to interfere with accelerator or brake pedals in a wide range of vehicles," NHTSA said in a press release.

"Therefore, NHTSA reminds all drivers of all makes and models to check the driver-side floor mats for secure installation and to follow manufacturer instructions for installing the mats."

For more information on the floor mat recall, consumers can contact the NHTSA Hotline at 888-327-4236 or their Toyota or Lexus dealer.

NHTSA has also reported complaints of unintended acceleration in the RAV 4 and Tacoma pickup.

Earlier this month, NHTSA spokesman Rae Tyson told ConsumerAffairs.Com that regulators at NHTSA were "aware of" complaints of runaway acceleration in the popular Toyota Prius hybrid and were in a "monitoring mode."

Prius owners skeptical

Prius owners who have reported the unintended acceleration problem with their Prius hybrid to ConsumerAffairs.Com remain wary that the problem can simply be traced to floor mats.

"Here is the rub," one California reader told us. "If it truly were the mat catching the accelerator, why did turning the car off solve the problem? There is nothing with the power button that would do this. And yet each time when I restarted the Prius it was fine. If the accelerator were caught under the mat once the car was turned off the problem did not persist," she wrote.

The California consumer said her test of the Prius will continue.

"I've decided to remove the mat and drive the car for a month to see if the problem occurs without the mat. If this does turn out to be the problem then one has to ask why Toyota would sell a Toyota Prius specific mat that would have any potential of causing this problem. If this does not turn out to the problem then that is bad and others should know."

On August 22,[redacted] California reported an unintended acceleration problem with his Prius.

"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

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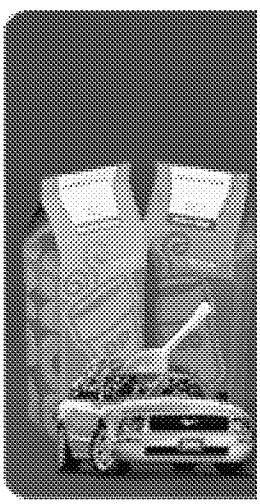

brakes. I quickly checked for anything under the accelerator including the floor mat, foot on the gas, or any other cause. All were negative."

[redacted] 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," [redacted] told us.

When [redacted] 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." [redacted] told us.

Other incidents

[redacted] 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," [redacted] wrote us.

[redacted] 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.

[redacted] 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," [redacted] wrote.

[redacted] took the runaway Prius to her Toyota dealer and listened as the service manager blamed everything that occurred on "nothing more than a carpet jamming the 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.

About the same time that [redacted] was crashing into a garage wall with her Prius, [redacted] 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 bee at the Toyota dealership 5 days. they cannot find any problems," [redacted] said.

In Tustin, California, [redacted] reported this problem with her 2006 Prius. "Three weeks ago I went to pick up my daughter from school, I decided to back up my car and wait for her to come out. Suddenly my car accelerated while I had my foot pressing the brakes, it was going too fast I had no time to do anything, I crashed onto a wall about 10 fees in front of me."

[redacted] said the wall was not damaged and she was not hurt but the Prius suffered $14,000 in damages.

An engineer's theory

In Los Lunas, New Mexico, [redacted] had a similar experience.

"In each case, the vehicle was accelerating at a rate below maximum and went to and stayed at maximum without driver command." [redacted] told ConsumerAffairs.Com.

"A simple touching of the lever that disengages the cruise control caused the system to immediately go back to a normal condition with the cruise control off," [redacted] told us.

[redacted] said he is "a qualified professional engineer and systems analyst." His work "has involved automobiles as well as aircraft and industrial systems."

"I can assure you," [redacted] 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 [redacted] opinion, "the problem may be in the cruise control system itself, either a mechanical, electronic or electrical problem in the cruise control system."

"The problem could easily cause a serious accident if the driver, caught unaware, did not take immediate remedial action,"

according to our reader in New Mexico.

Toyota's advice

Toyota spokesman Sam Butto said owners who encounter a an unintended acceleration problem "can contact our Customer Experience Center Monday thru Friday from 6:00 AM -6:00 PM Pacific time at 1-800-331-4331 to have their concern documented so the Center can look into it."

Butto also advised that customers can consult any Toyota dealer for an inspection or diagnostic test. "If an abnormal condition is found repairs will be covered by the Prius warranty of 8 years/100,000 miles or in California and states adopting California standards 10 years/150,000 miles," he said.

If no problem is found Toyota may charge a fee for the inspection or diagnostic test.

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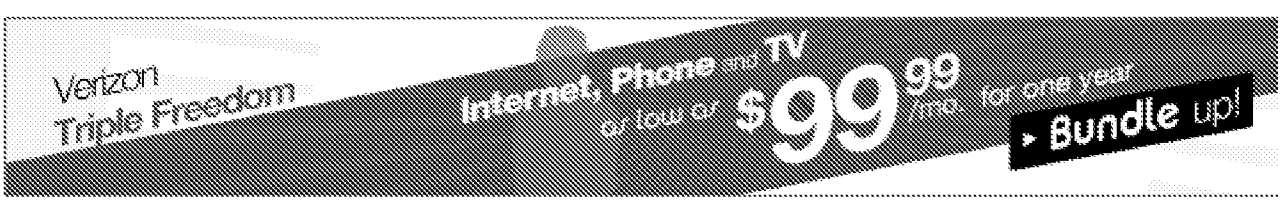

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