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Feds To Inspect Pickup Trucks After I-Team Investigation

Drivers Say Vehicle Has Unexplained Acceleration Problems

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POSTED: 4:14 pm CDT October 8, 2007
UPDATED: 6:15 pm CDT October 8, 2007

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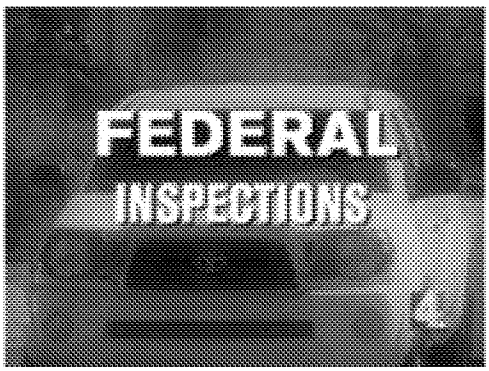

NASHVILLE, Tenn. -- A nationwide investigation by the Channel 4 I-team found complaints about the 2007 Toyota Tacoma that included mysterious acceleration even when drivers said they hit the brakes.

Channel 4 found a growing number of drivers who have had problems with the vehicle, which has prompted the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration to start conducting tests on the model.

The former director of NHTSA told Channel 4 that the I-team has uncovered what may be "a safety defect of significant proportions."

It's not easy for [redacted] to see what's left of his 2007 Toyota Tacoma.

On June 8, [redacted] hit the brakes on his truck while traveling on Interstate 24 near Briley Parkway, but the vehicle never slowed down.

"It just took off even faster," said [redacted]

The next thing he knew, he was rolling and crashing into the embankment.

"What was going through my mind, was, 'I'm dying today. I'm going to die,'" said [redacted]

That's what he was thinking at the time, but something was going through his head months earlier when he first got the vehicle.

"I told my insurance guy, 'I just want you to know, if I end up in a rear-end accident or something like that in the near future, there's a problem with my vehicle,'" said [redacted]

[redacted] insurance agent documented the conversation in a note that said there were problems with unexplained accelerations in the vehicle. That is when the Channel 4 I-team found complaints about the 2007 Toyota Tacomas from all over the U.S.

[redacted] wasn't aware that in the Boston area there was another driver who also said her 2007 Toyota Tacoma took her for the ride of her life.

"Did you feel like your life was in danger?" asked reporter Jeremy Finley.

"Absolutely, it's the scariest thing that's ever happened to me," said Tacoma driver [redacted]

[redacted] said earlier this year that while driving on the interstate, without the cruise control on, her brand new Tacoma suddenly took off as if it had a mind of its own.

"It was just trying to go 120 mph. I was pressing on the brakes as hard as I could, and it was just going forward out of control," said [redacted]

There is also a similar case of this happening to a 2007 Tacoma driver in San Diego.

"The engine just revved up and took off, and I thought I was going to die. I was going to crash," said Tacoma driver [redacted]

There is also a driver in Sacramento, Calif., with a similar story.

"I don't think they should turn out vehicles like this, and let the public buy them," said Tacoma driver [redacted]

Twenty complaints have been filed so far this year to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration.

Joan Claybrook used to head the agency and reviewed the complaints uncovered by the I-team.

"I think what you've encountered here is a safety defect of significant proportions," said Claybrook.

Clarence Ditlow heads the center for Auto Safety in Washington.

"I suspect it's the tip of the iceberg," said Ditlow.

After months of questions from the Channel 4 I-team, NHTSA confirmed it will begin testing the Toyota Tacoma's acceleration system.

A Toyota spokesman said he wasn't aware of any of the complaints, and they are currently not looking into these problems that customers said they are having with the vehicle.

However, they said they would investigate if the NHTSA asked them to.

"Once NHTSA notifies us of a preliminary investigation, we will submit all in house data. It's an open book," said Toyota spokesman, Bill Kwong.

Toyota points out that in various acceleration complaints over the years, and involving several different cars, NHTSA has blamed driver error.

But even Toyota found a problem unrelated to driver error in other models. During the course of this Channel 4 investigation, Toyota announced an equipment recall for "all weather floor mats" in the 2007 and 2008 Camry and Lexus 350 automobiles. Toyota said that those floor mats could come loose and slip onto the gas pedal.

But what about the Tacomas like the ones owned by [redacted] and [redacted]?

A NHTSA investigator sent [redacted] an e-mail that suggested the floor mats in her Tacoma caused her frightening drive home.

"Is it possible that the gas pedal got stuck on the floor mat?" asked Finley.

"Absolutely not. I don't understand how that theory makes any sense," said [redacted]

Drivers point out that the 2007 Tacomas don't even have the recalled all-weather floor mats.

"There's a problem with this vehicle," said [redacted]

[redacted] wanted the company to pay him back the $31,000 he spent on the truck, but Toyota declined.

"Thirty-thousand dollars to Toyota is like a gnat on the elephant's rear end. I said, 'You can't afford to leave this car on the street. Someone's going to get hurt,'" said [redacted]

The 2007 Toyota Tacoma earned top quality ratings from J.D. Power in 2007 and sold 178,000 models last year.

There are currently only 20 filed complaints, but NHTSA said they know that many drivers won't file complaints and will just get rid of the truck.

There are many theories as to what is causing the unintended acceleration. Some critics blame cruise control problems but every driver in Channel 4's story insisted that they were not using cruise control at the time of the incident.

Related Link:

- Complaints Regarding Toyota Tacomas (pdf)

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