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I-Team: Drivers Report Additional Problems With Toyota Tacoma

Drivers Say Truck Will 'Lurch' Forward While Stopped

Reported by Jeremy Finley

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NASHVILLE, Tenn. -- Reporter Jeremy Finley has uncovered a new concern regarding a Channel 4 I-Team investigation that prompted federal inspections of pickup trucks.

 **Video: I-Team: Drivers Report Additional Problems With Toyota Tacoma**

Channel 4 News this week already showed how people from all over the country described their scary experiences while driving their 2007 Toyota Tacomas.

The I-team discovered drivers across the country claimed that this model of truck accelerates on its own, without warning, on the interstate, which sometimes led to smashed trucks and disturbed drivers.

Channel 4 is now looking into what drivers called a "lurching" problem that is blamed for accidents across the country.

After months of questions from the Channel 4 I-team, the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration recently announced it would start inspecting the Tacoma.

The I-team has now found something else that might interest the NHTSA.

"(It) scared the heck out of me because I thought it would hit something," said Toyota Tacoma driver from Phoenix, [REDACTED]

The I-team found Tacoma drivers like [REDACTED] who said when they brake, like at a stop sign, the truck will "lurch" forward a few feet.

"The first time it happened to me, I felt like someone rear ended me. That's how hard it pulled forward," said [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] of Dover, Tenn., experienced the sudden "lurching" when he stepped on his brake outside of a gas station.

"I was pushing so hard on the brake that I had to stretch out to get it to stop. I had to turn out to the street," said [REDACTED]

About 20 complaints were sent to the NHTSA this year about the 2007 Tacomas.

One Tacoma driver said that when she was in a school parking lot, with the brake firmly pressed, the engine began racing and she hit the car in front of her.

Another driver said that while at a full stop, his Tacoma accelerated by itself and pushed him into oncoming traffic.

Drivers tell the I-team they worry what could have happened if someone walked in front of their Tacomas when the surge occurred.

"What Toyota needs to do is launch a full scale investigation," said Clarence Ditlow of the Center for Auto Safety.

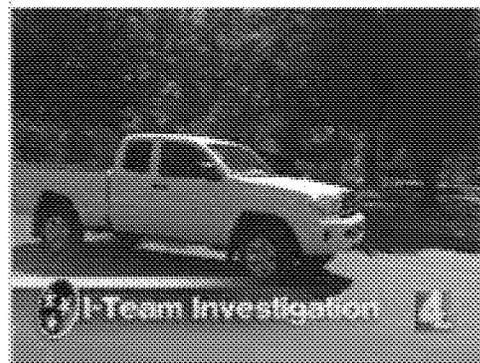
Safety advocates believe the I-team has found a symptom of a bigger problem.

"As the former director of NHTSA, how much of a concern is this for you to see this happening with the Tacoma?" asked Finley.

"This is a serious problem. These are heavy vehicles, and they can cause great damage," said former NHTSA director, Joan Claybrook.

Claybrook and some auto industry critics believe electronic glitches in cruise and engine control spark cars to take off unintentionally. They call it sudden acceleration.

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Ditlow co-authored a 2003 book on the subject and believes the auto industry hasn't done enough to head off the problem.

"Unfortunately, they're not doing enough fault detection as they develop these new systems," said Ditlow.

But is sudden acceleration causing the complaints with the Tacomas?

Toyota points that NHTSA investigators have often blamed drivers for acceleration problems in the past, saying they either hit the wrong pedal or didn't understand how their new vehicle worked.

Even those who teach automotive technology, like Nashville's Claude Whitaker, describe sudden acceleration as an unproven theory.

"Removing your foot from the brake at expressway speed and the vehicle takes off on its own? I'd have to see it to believe it. I would have to reproduce it. Not saying its not there, but as a service technician, to properly fix it, and fix it right the first time, I would have to experience it," said Whitaker.

Those who have experienced it said it's such a problem that lives are at stake. Some people are already calling for a recall.

"This is a company that to retain its reputation, which is good, is to have a recall (and) immediately to correct the problem," said Claybrook.

A spokesman for Toyota said they are not aware of the complaints, but will turn over all their in-house data if NHTSA asks them to.

As part of the NHTA inspections, they have actually purchased a 2007 Tacoma and are specifically checking its acceleration system to see if it works. They said they will run it through dozens of tests and see what they find out.

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