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Off the Hook: NHTSA closes probe on Toyota Tacoma's sudden acceleration issue

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Posted Today 12:10 PM by Andrew Strieber
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Bringing back memories of *60 Minutes* and the 1986 Audi 5000, recently a wave of owner complaints drove the NHTSA to investigate 2004 - 2008 Toyota Tacoma pickups over a possible problem with sudden, unintended acceleration. All along the automaker has insisted that despite hearing of over 431 separate incidents nothing is mechanically wrong with their truck, and now federal regulators are backing them up -- closing the inquiry, the NHTSA says it cannot find a cause for the issue, and concludes the acceleration must be from driver error.

Previously one Tacoma owner had petitioned the NHTSA to look into the Tacoma problems, citing 33 total complaints from fellow drivers. Toyota also admitted it had gotten many more reports of the same issue, including 51 crashes and 12 injuries, while over the past couple of years only a few other incidents of sudden acceleration were reported on all other pickup models sold in the U.S. combined. The agency launched an investigation into 775,000 Tacomas built since 2004, but is now concluding that no specific defect was behind the problem. Toyota's own examination of the problem found that most of the complaints dealt with minor engine speed changes, which have no impact on the trucks' safety, and that many owners became nervous because of widespread

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publicity over the issue. That said, the *Detroit Free Press* previously noted that the majority of sudden acceleration reports came *before* it gained any coverage in the media.

At issue is the Tacoma's drive-by-wire system, which uses a computer to replace the physical connection between the gas pedal and engine throttle. While some owners believe this system is unreliable, Toyota insists it includes a feature that will report an error if the accelerator and throttle ever become mismatched, and so far no Tacoma inspected by technicians or dealers has recorded a problem. The Audi 5000's acceleration issue was also eventually determined to be caused by driver error, but not before the automaker's position in the U.S. market was significantly damaged. Now that the NHTSA has ruled the Tacoma to be safe, however, Toyota can turn to more pressing issues like its reduced 2009 sales outlook instead.

Source: The Detroit Free Press

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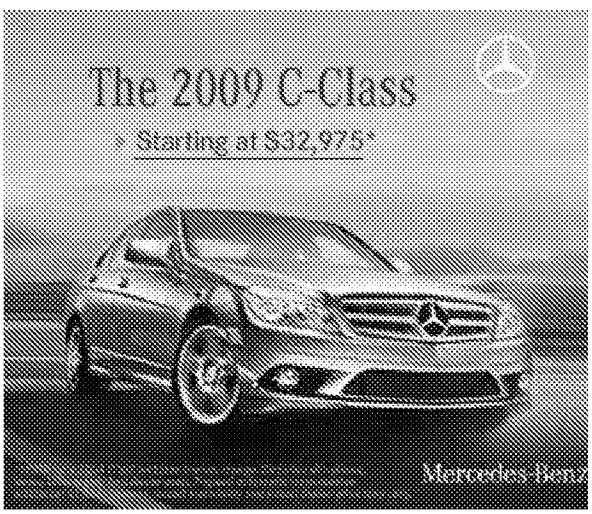

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