

Current Weather: 73°F, 66% humidity, Few Clouds

SUBSCRIBE TODAY! | Weather | Tr

SignOnSanDiego.com
BY THE UNION-TRIBUNE

News/Sports Entertainment Web

Search...

BING & DECIDE.

bing measles


[Home](#) [News](#) [Today's Paper](#) [Business](#) [Sports](#) [Entertainment](#) [Multimedia](#) [Forums](#) [Smart Living](#) [Jobs](#) [Autos](#) [H](#)

Save This

Email This

Print This

Most Popular

Share This

RELATED TERMS: CHULA VISTA, EL CAJON, MISSION GORGE, SANTEE

Floor mat may have trapped accelerator in CHP officer's crash, death

By Debbi Baker

UNION-TRIBUNE STAFF WRITER

4:34 p.m. September 9, 2009

SAN DIEGO – A preliminary investigation into the fiery crash that killed a California Highway Patrol officer and three family members indicates it may have been caused by an accelerator trapped by a floor mat, said Sheriff's Department officials.

Witnesses saw flames coming from the front and rear tires of the speeding 2009 Lexus ES 350 before it crashed Aug. 28 in Santee, suggesting "long, constant heavy braking," said Sgt. Scott Hill, the lead sheriff's investigator.

Killed were CHP Officer [REDACTED] and his wife, [REDACTED] both 45; their 13-year-old daughter, [REDACTED] and 38-year-old [REDACTED] all of Chula Vista. Lastrella was [REDACTED] brother.

In addition to the Sheriff's Department, the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration and the California Highway Patrol are part of the investigative team. NHTSA contacted the department after hearing about the crash and asked to assist in the investigation, Hill said Wednesday.

Investigators examined the wreckage of the luxury sedan and were able to recover the brakes, the accelerator and the floor mats from the badly burned vehicle, he said.

The car, a loaner from Bob Baker Lexus El Cajon, was equipped with "all-weather" floor mats, designed for Lexus vehicles made between 2004 and 2009, he said. Hill would not further elaborate on the mats or how they were installed.

All-weather mats installed in 2007 and 2008 models of the Lexus ES 350 were recalled by manufacturer Toyota in November 2007 due to complaints that, if not properly installed, the mats could slide forward and trap the gas pedal in the open position.

Hill explained that when the mat is not in the right position and the accelerator is pushed down, it becomes caught between ribs of the rubber mat and will not release.

Brian Lyons, vehicle safety and quality communication manager for Toyota USA, said Wednesday that the all-weather mats, which are made of rubber, were redesigned at the time of the recall. He said the new mats from the manufacturer have a different shape and retaining system and are designed not to interfere with the gas pedal even if not properly clipped to the floor.

Lyons said the recalled rubber mats were made to use in place of the carpet mats, but some consumers incorrectly put them on top of the carpet mats.

According to the NHTSA recall report, there were incidents in which double mats led to sudden acceleration.

Hill, the Sheriff's Department investigator, said the Lexus in the accident did not have double mats.

Toyota sent letters to the registered owners of the 30,500 Lexus cars involved in the recall, asking them to return and replace the driver's side mats and said it would change the packaging of the mats to warn owners about improper installation.

Dave Ezratty, vice president of Bob Baker Lexus El Cajon, said Wednesday that the dealer was refraining from

commenting until the entire investigation is done.

Hill said investigators are studying the burned Lexus, witness accounts, evidence from the crash scene and the 911 call made by back seat passenger Lastrella. A full report should be complete in a few weeks, he said.

The car was northbound at about 120 mph on state Route 125 about 6:30 p.m., Hill said, when it entered a T-intersection with Mission Gorge Road, clipped the rear corner of a Ford Explorer and then plowed over a curb and through a fence before hitting an embankment and going airborne. It rolled several times and then burst into flames.

Hill thinks [REDACTED] who was driving, started to experience problems with the accelerator sometime before he reached the Route 125 and Interstate 8 intersection, which is about five miles from Mission Gorge Road. Several people called to report that the car was seen speeding and weaving in and out of lanes with its emergency flashers on.

Hill said the evidence shows that there was prolonged "heavy, heavy, hard braking."

"He did everything he could to stop that car," he said.

It was a matter of minutes between when the problem started and when the car ran off the road, Hill said, and [REDACTED] had to make a "split-second decision" to head straight into the intersection rather than to take the state Route 52 curve.

"He was still trying to figure out what was wrong with the car," Hill said. [REDACTED] a 19-year CHP veteran, must have worked extremely hard to maneuver the Lexus to avoid other cars on the heavily traveled roadway, only hitting the one vehicle, Hill said.

"We were very lucky that there were not more deaths," Hill said.

Investigators do not know if [REDACTED] tried to shift the car into neutral or if he tried to shut off the engine.

The NHTSA recall report from 2007 found that some Lexus drivers with stuck accelerators tried to turn off the car with the engine control button but didn't know the button must be held for three seconds. In addition, the report said that hitting the brakes multiple times depleted the car's vacuum-based power assist, making it more difficult to stop the car and possibly resulting in overheated brakes.

Lyons, of Toyota USA, said Wednesday that the company hasn't seen preliminary reports from the investigation and can't comment on the accident at this point.

Debbi Baker: (619) 293-1710;

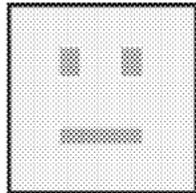
RELATED TERMS: CHULA VISTA, EL CAJON, MISSION GORGE, SANTEE

[Click here to hide comments](#)

Commenting Terms of Use



Add New Comment



- Logged in as
- Logout from DISQUS
- Logged in as
- using Facebook Connect (Logout)

Required: Please log into Disqus or connect with Facebook or sign in with Twitter or sign in using OpenID to comment on [SignOnSanDiego](#).

Type your comment here. [Text input area with scrollbars]

WARNING: Smoki Kills!

However, These New Cigarettes Don't Kill. Future Of Smoking Is News9Today.com

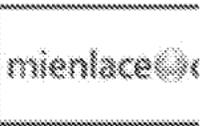
Cheap Airline Tick

Compare cheap airline tickets from 40+ major carriers! JustClickLocal.com

Free Credit Report

Official Site FreeCreditReport.com America's #1 Free Re Score. FreeCreditReport.com

Buy a link



Weblogs

- News**
- Breaking News: NewsBlog
 - Legal Affairs: Mi Orders
 - Science: Eureka
 - Weather: Weath Watch
- Sports**
- SportsBlog
 - PadresBlog
 - Minor League Bl
 - BoltsBlog
 - Going Outside
 - Teeling Off
 - Links
- Opinion**
- America's Finest Arts
 - Entertainment: S
 - Television: TV T
 - Theater: House
 - Books: Volumes Visions
- Also**
- Autos: Maynard' Garage
 - Health: Paul Gre Running Weblog
 - Boomers: Baby Adviser
 - Military: Homefr Focus
 - Development: U the Hood
- More Weblogs**

Showing 19 of 19 Comments

Sort by **Newest first** Community Page Subscribe by email

You must log into your Disqus Profile in order to post comments.

Opinion Online



- Today's editorial
- Write a letter
- Contact your representatives

 2 seconds ago
 THIS DOESN'T MAKE SENSE.
 STEP 1, BRAKE HARD
 STEP 2, TURN OFF ENGINE
 THERE IS NO STEP 3...

- Like
- Report
- Reply
- More ▼

 8 minutes ago
 RIP Saylor family.

Don't buy Lexus.

- Like
- Report
- Reply
- More ▼

 8 minutes ago

Had an incident with a Toyota Cambry, Hybrid. The owner asked for help, the engine was surging fwd in gear. Neglecting to look at the floor and accelerator, I helped the driver and called AAA for a tow truck, and called the dealer, they said tow it in. When the towtruck driver arrived, he noticed the floor mat setting on the accelerator, and a paper mat from a previous oil change also. Pulled both off, all was OK. Still towed vehicle to dealer. Saw the driver and family a week or so later, they gave me the evil eye. I saved that driver from leaving the parking lot.

- Like
- Report
- Reply
- More ▼

 21 minutes ago

1) If the mats were recalled, what was it doing in this *dealership* loaner car?

2) Why wouldn't the dealership *at least* ensure all driver-side mats are clipped to the floor?

- Like
- Report
- Reply
- More ▼

 22 minutes ago

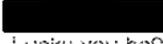
omg! i can't even imagine. honestly, i wanted to vomit after i read this... he tried so hard to save his family...RIP

- Like
- Report
- Reply
- More ▼

 12 minutes ago

OMG!! Like I totally and totally agree. Very sad.

- Like
- Report
- Reply
- More ▼


*  53 minutes ago
Lucky you hc92126!

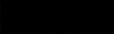
It is really important to avoid having loose items in the car. A sharp turn or break can cause those items go near break/accelerator and interfere with their proper functioning. Especially folks with kids in the backseat - kids always drops things and those can slip under the driver's seat to reach the brake.

And if things fail (celiphone, wallet, pen, glasses, water bottle/cap etc.) - consider it an emergency and pull over asap.

1 person liked this comment.

- Like
- Report
- Reply
- More ▼


*  Today 05:33 PM

Looks like  better call a lawyer. This is a tailor made wrongful death case if I've ever seen one.

1 person liked this comment.

- Like
- Report
- Reply
- More ▼


*  Today 05:22 PM

There is no way to shift the car in neutral, or turn it off? (yes you lose power steering and brakes, but you would eventually stop)

- Like
- Report
- Reply
- More ▼


*  *it* All 48 minutes ago

It's right there in the story: The way to shut off the engine is to hold the "engine control button" in for three seconds. But who would know that? Maybe an experienced owner, but not somebody driving a dealer's lendor vehicle. I have also encountered some cars that won't let you shift when the engine RPMs are high enough to damage the transmission in a lower gear, so that is not too surprising.

I think this is a terribly negligent design on the part of Lexus: I suppose they could argue that you should be able to drive 120 MPH, but why would they ignore the brake pedal position? If you are standing on the brakes, obviously you want to stop! If the brakes are engaged to the point of failure, then the engine controller should ignore the gas pedal position (assume it is stuck) and cut off the injection of fuel into the engine.

- Like
- Report
- Reply
- More ▼


*  15 minutes ago

Further, if the ignition button is being repeatedly pressed (possibly from a panicked driver), it's obviously not an accident and they are trying to turn the engine off.

The engine should turn off either by holding it down for a few seconds, OR by pressing the button repeatedly. POOR design!!

- Like
- Report
- Reply
- More ▼


*  Today 05:10 PM

What a bummer. RIP Officer Saylor and family.

I just purchased rubber mats for my wifes new Acura RL.

I'm taking them back. We'll replace the much more expensived floor rugs when needed instead.

Floor mat may have trapped accelerator in CHP officer's crash, death

I too thought there had to be more to the story than I was reading. Looks like I was wrong.

- Like
- Report
- Reply
- More ▾



Today 05:06 PM

I've had something like this happen and it was terrifying. I was out off exiting onto Mira Mesa Blvd from the 15 North and when I hit my brakes a vegi can rolled under the brake pedal. Luckily I realized with enough time to grab the can out from under the pedal and the light stayed yellow long enough for me to speed through, but this could have easily been me if I'd panicked.

What a tragedy! My prayers go out to this whole family.

- Like
- Report
- Reply
- More ▾



Today 05:03 PM

Though this is a terrible tragedy and I give my condolences to everyone affected, but I have to wonder why the driver didn't put the car in neutral.

- Like
- Report
- Reply
- More ▾



Guest Today 05:03 PM

Wow, Toyota will never hear the end of this....

And if the mats were incorrectly installed by the Dealer--look out. The attorneys are lining up.

- Like
- Report
- Reply
- More ▾



Today 04:58 PM

It's probably the "Made in China" tag.

- Like
- Report
- Reply
- More ▾



Today 04:56 PM

waiting for all the posters to respond who said this was maybe a suicide by the officer. Don't you just love how everyone is so quick to draw conclusions without all the evidence?

1 person liked this comment.

- Like
- Report
- Reply
- More ▾



Today 05:24 PM

You're a cop, you have a gun, there are faster ways to kill yourself

- Like
- Report
- Reply
- More ▾



sdchrgrboy Today 05:30 PM

I agree but this story first broke, there were posters who were saying this story seemed fishy and they should she if the cop owed a lot of money etc and it sounded like suicide.

- Like
- Report
- Reply
- More ▼



[Contact SignOnSanDiego.com](#) | [Online Media Kit](#) | [Print Media Kit](#) | [Frequently Asked Questions](#) | [Make us your Home](#)
[Contact the Union-Tribune](#) | [About the Union-Tribune](#) | [Site Index](#) | [Privacy Policy](#) | [Your California Privacy Rights](#)
© Copyright 2009 The San Diego Union-Tribune, LLC