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Toyota orders floor mat inspections after fatal crash

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By Robert Jablon, Associated Press Writer

LOS ANGELES — Toyota said Tuesday it will order all dealers to inspect their cars for mismatched floor mats after a mat was suspected of snagging a gas pedal on a runaway Lexus, ending with a fiery crash that killed four family members in San Diego County.

Toyota Motor Sales USA planned to issue an order Wednesday to about 1,400 Toyota and Lexus dealers nationwide to make sure each of their new, used and loaner vehicles had the proper floor mats and that the mats were properly secured, said Brian Lyons, a spokesman for the Torrance-based company.

Customers who are concerned should also make sure they have the proper mats.

"If there's any doubt in their mind about the security and shape of their mat, go ahead and visit the dealer" to have them checked, Lyons said.

California Highway Patrol [redacted] 45, and three others were killed Aug. 28 on State Route 125 in Santee, a town near San Diego. The runaway car was doing more than 120 mph when it hit a sport-utility vehicle, launched off an embankment, rolled several times and burst into flames.

The SUV driver was treated for moderate injuries.

In addition to [redacted] who was a 19-year CHP veteran, the crash killed his wife, [redacted], 45; their daughter, [redacted] 13; and Saylor's brother-in-law, [redacted] 38.

[redacted] called police about a minute before the crash to say the vehicle had no brakes and the accelerator was stuck.

The call ends with someone telling people in the car to hold on and pray, followed by a woman's scream.

The family was in a 2009 Lexus ES 350 that was loaned by a dealer, Bob Baker Lexus El Cajon, while their own vehicle was being serviced.

Investigators with the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration have determined that a rubber all-weather floor mat found in the wreckage was slightly longer than the mat that belonged in the vehicle.

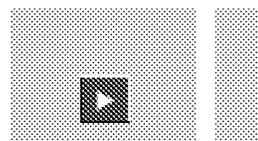
That could have snared or covered the accelerator pedal.

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"We don't know if the all-weather floor mat was properly secured or not," he said. "We do know that it was a floor mat from a different Lexus."

A call left for Dave Ezratty, a vice president at the dealership, was not immediately returned Tuesday.

Lyons said most Toyotas come with carpeted floor mats, but all-weather mats are sold as accessories.

After the accident, Toyota officials contacted the dealer and told him to check the mats in cars, Lyons said.

"It's really nothing different than what we're going to instruct all the dealers" to do, he added.

The driver could have put the car in neutral to disengage the engine from the automatic transmission, Lyons said.

The driver also could have turned off the electronically keyed car by holding down the start switch for three seconds, but that could have locked the steering wheel, turned off the headlights and cut power-assist to the brakes, Lyons said.

Lyons said the company had not had any complaints about mismatched floor mats.

In 2007, the company did recall all-weather mats from some of its Lexus ES 350s and Toyota Camrys after complaints that they could slip and trap the accelerator.

However, this crash was unrelated to the mats that were pulled from the market during the recall, Lyons said.

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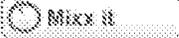
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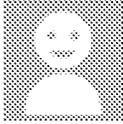
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 (0 friends, [send message](#)) wrote: 1d 5h ago

No, actually Toyota hasn't had problems with uncontrolled acceleration, it was due to elderly drivers and hitting the wrong pedal. Funny how it was Camry, Avalon, and Buick that had the problems. Audi almost went out of business because of old people and forgetting which pedal they were pushing.

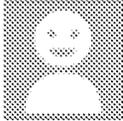
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[REDACTED] (6 friends, [send message](#)) wrote: 1d 12h ago

I'm surprised that the overated vacum could go that fast. TOYholla SUCKS.

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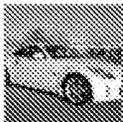


[REDACTED] (0 friends, [send message](#)) wrote: 1d 16h ago

Are you kidding me? This person had the time and the presence of mind (HA!) to make a phone call, yet in all that time, it never occured to her to TURN OFF THE IGNITION! If the car won't stop, TURN IT OFF!

She called about a minute before the crash. Did somebody on the other end of the line have time to tell her to TURN IT OFF! How could somebody else in the vehicle not suggest she TURN IT OFF! So, unless something is missing from this story, Toyota is gonna pay 10's of millions for a simple mistake that anybody could have made (somebody put the wrong floor mat in a car at a dealership) when most of the fault lies with the extreme stupidity on the driver.

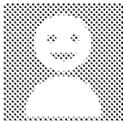
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[REDACTED] (0 friends, [send message](#)) wrote: 2d 5h ago

Do they charge extra for floor mats?

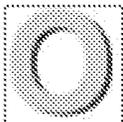
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[REDACTED] (0 friends, [send message](#)) wrote: 2d 6h ago

Same thing happened near me. A couple of old ladies in a car with a stuck accelerator, and they didn't think to put it neutral or shut off the car. Unfortunately the drawbridge was open, so we never knew exactly why the car kept going. I would imagine a lot of us in a panic situation might not think of such a simple solution.

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[REDACTED] (0 friends, [send message](#)) wrote: 2d 8h ago

The driver probably said the car had no brakes because the driver had been using them initially to control his speed. They overheated and "faded". Faded brakes, if you have ever experienced them, feels like no brakes at all.

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[REDACTED] (28 friends, [send message](#)) wrote: 2d 8h ago

Talk about multiple failures. The accelerator gets stuck AND the brakes go out at the same time? Sounds kind of suspicious to me. I would have shift it into neutral way before I hit 120 MPH. The emergency brakes should have still worked though. Put it in neutral then apply the ER brake. Seems logical to me.

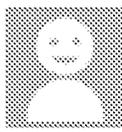
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 (18 friends, [send message](#)) wrote: 2d 8h ago

 (0 friends, [send message](#)) wrote: 30m ago
The caller from the car thought it had no brakes because they couldn't stop the car. The floor mats were too big and that's what snared the accelerator.

That's a theory that the mats were too big and they snared the accelerator. They don't know for certain that is the case yet, but it might be likely. Toyota has had problems with uncontrolled acceleration in the past unrelated to floor mats (but that is why they put the hook in the carpet to restrain the mat)

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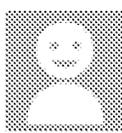
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Personally, I would have tried the "shift to neutral" option. Who cares if the engine red lines? The car was a loaner. As mentioned, shutting off the engine locks the steering - you don't want that at 120 mph.

And that is exactly the right thing to do. If you turn off the ignition, you can lock up the steering. If you turn off the engine, you can lose power steering and power boost on your brakes (loss of engine vacuum). If you shift to neutral, you might end up trashing the engine and/or transmission, but most likely you would be fine. In either case, replacing an entire powertrain is cheaper than calling an ambulance and a trip to the ER, even if you don't spend any time in the hospital.

So shift to neutral, and then when you get close to a stop, feel free to try to turn the engine off to minimize powertrain damage, if you want....

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 (0 friends, [send message](#)) wrote: 2d 9h ago
The caller from the car thought it had no brakes because they couldn't stop the car. The floor mats were too big and that's what snared the accelerator.

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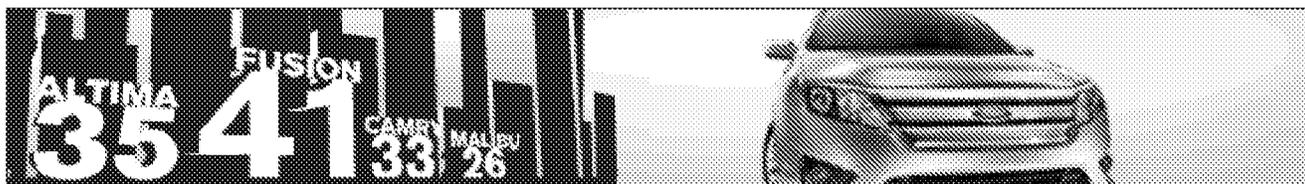
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