

When my Taurus goes down the road, fast, without my foot on the accelerator, it's because of cruise control. When a Toyota goes down the road, fast, without a foot on the accelerator, it's because of a defect.

Just what you need when your accelerator sticks open, brakes that don't work.

Boy, if it weren't for bad luck, Toyota would have no luck at all.

But, they did enjoy a stretch of very good luck. While the federal government was paying American consumers to buy new vehicles by subsidizing the purchase by as much as \$4,500.00, it seems Toyota just had no inkling of the major defects in their hot-selling cars.

Right.

And if you believe that, I have some oceanfront property near Fargo I'd like to

speak with you about.

A review:

Toyota has now owned up to a defect in their most popular vehicles with gasoline engines - the accelerator sticks down and may take you for an unintended joy ride. Initially, they laid the blame on faulty floor mats - they tangled with the accelerator and held the pedal down as your car raced down the road or back into the lamp post. That "story" couldn't hold up forever but it did the trick while the feds were helping people buy Toyotas.

Interestingly, Ralph Nader is nowhere to be found. Must be his criticism is limited

to domestic automakers - American businesses. Maybe he drives a Prius?

The best selling vehicle during the Cash for Clunkers program was the Toyota Corolla. Hmmm. Next best selling were the Honda Civic, Toyota Camry and Ford Focus. Foreign auto manufacturers took 41% of the sales volume during the program period. Ford, GM and Chrysler garnered 39%. Even if the Toyotas and Hondas are assembled in the United States, the profits go back to Japan. Not all bad, not all good.

How many car buyers do you think may have shifted to a Ford, GM or Chrysler product had they known that their new Toyota might "accidentally" accelerate them over a cliff? Or into another vehicle transporting children?

One of the great automotive inventions has been cruise control. When driving the thousand miles back to my homeland of northern Wisconsin, nothing compares. Not temperature-controlled heat, Not intermittent wipers. Not the moon roof. Nothing beats cruise control. Toyota seems to have taken the invention a step further. They have mass-produced cars that accelerate themselves, eliminating the need for cruise control.

Just when they 'fessed up about the defect in acceleration and dampened the claim of floor mats causing the problem, Prius drivers realized that their car may not have had a problem with sticky accelerators but they still couldn't get the thing to stop. Imagine a gutless Prius being a problem to stop. What? Sounds implausible but Toyota is recalling 437,000 hybrids because of complaints that the braking system isn't quick to kick in. Oh, well, it could be worse. Those owners could have one of the other Toyota products that go to beat hell without a foot on the accelerator and good brakes or not, drivers had a hard time getting the runaway vehicle under control.

And was it unique to northern Wisconsin to teach new drivers to put a vehicle into neutral if you have a hard time controlling it - whether on ice or with a sticky accelerator or faulty carburetor? But, to leave the engine running.

The reason you do that is you don't lose your power steering and power brakes if you have the car running albeit in neutral. If you turn off the ignition, you have greater problems than an accelerator stuck to the floor. In the old days, if you turned a car off, you could restart it if you were driving a standard transmission by just depressing the clutch with your car in gear and "pop" it after you turn the key back on. Now, with almost all cars being automatic transmissions, when you turn the ignition off, you'll realize in a hurry that that wasn't a good decision but will have to restart the car with your key - if you can - because the accelerator is stuck.

It just seems to me that if these major issues would have been to a Chrysler product, the national media would have demanded a total recall and cessation of sales of ALL Chrysler products. With no set time to resume sales.

You may have read my words on these pages in the past saying that no foreign company vehicle has ever been parked in my garage. Not even overnight. I have owned nothing but Ford Motor products all my life - not counting the first two cars I bought in my youth. A Nash Rambler (what a piece of dreck) and a Chev Coupe (a beautiful car when redone). Oh, yes, I did own a VW bug while stationed in Puerto Rico in the Navy. After that, all Mercs and Fords.

So, Toyotas that want to go very fast without your involvement, then won't stop if you want it to, do not affect me personally. I have never owned a Toyota. Don't plan to now or in the future. Nor a Honda, Kia, Hyundai, Porsche, Opel or Nissan.

But, frankly, I don't like the idea that they took our government to the cleaners on the Cash for Clunkers subsidy, all the while, in my opinion, knowing that they had major defects in the models being peddled. Do I know that for a certainty? No. But complaints have been lodged about the accelerator problem for a very long time. The "floor mat did it" excuse bought them some time. Enough time to get through the Cash for Clunkers gift that enabled many consumers to expedite purchases or get rid of the mistake they had made in previous purchases.

By the way, not all purchases under the Cash for Clunkers program put high mileage vehicles on the highway and removed poor mileage "beasts." The feds "managed" this program to make it look like the Toyotas and Hondas, better gas efficiency sedans, were most popular. They did that by calling each less-efficient pickup or SUV a different product. Not quite as extreme as differentiating them by colors but five different models of a pickup would not be combined to show the sales of that pickup. So sedans from Toyota and Honda would appear to be the most popular when, actually, certain pickup models sold right up there with them.

It will be interesting to see how the Obama administration's economy looks once all subsidies are removed. As far in the tank as most things are now, where would they be without the \$3,500 or \$4,500 to buy a new vehicle last year or the \$6,500 or \$8,000 to buy a new house? What will happen when all consumers are on a level playing field? When everyone can only make the new purchase they can afford with their own money? Or will that day ever come? Will the future continue to be a redistribution of wealth so more people can live the American dream but do it on your dime? Time will tell, won't it? Be careful with your Toyota, though.

PLEASE CONTACT ME

I need the person with whom I met a couple weeks back at the downtown Village Inn to call or e-mail me. Our discussion was regarding the Jessica Venable case. Your contact information inadvertently was erased from my telephone. My contact information is at the bottom of the page.

Dave Featherly

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