



U.S. Department
of Transportation
National Highway
Traffic Safety
Administration

Memorandum

Subject: Complaint Update

Date: March 23, 2004

From: Scott Yon 

To: File for PE04-021, Toyota Throttle Control

This memo serves to update ODI's analysis of consumer complaints for relevance to the specific throttle control issues that are being investigated in PE04-021. Since opening the investigation March 3rd, 2004, the Office of Defects Investigation (ODI) has conducted detailed interviews of complainants identified in the opening resume to gather specific information concerning the failure incident(s) that are alleged in each instance. Information collected in ODI's interviews indicated that some of the complaints that were counted in the opening resume were not related to the throttle control issue that is under investigation. This memo identifies the complaints that are considered relevant to PE04-021. ODI also used the interviews to make arrangements for inspections of vehicles of interest where possible. ODI will be continuing in this effort over the coming weeks.

This investigation concerns the electronic throttle control system in model year 2002 and 2003 Toyota Camry, Camry Solara, and Lexus ES300 passenger cars (subject vehicles). Unlike most passenger cars, where the accelerator pedal uses mechanical linkages to control engine speed and power, the subject vehicles use an electronic throttle control system. Sensors at the accelerator pedal indicate pedal position (throttle demand) and an electronic control unit (ECU) interprets the pedal sensor signal to open or close the engine's throttle valve.

ODI has opened this investigation based on owner reports alleging that: A) an engine speed increase occurred without pressing on the accelerator pedal or, B) the engine speed failed to decrease when the accelerator pedal was no longer being depressed. In either event, ODI's position is that if such a failure were to occur the driver would be able to control or stop vehicle movement by pressing on the brake pedal. However, in certain close-quarters driving situations (such as parking), should the subject vehicle throttle control system open the throttle valve without driver intent, the resultant vehicle surge could result in a momentary loss of vehicle control. In some instances, a crash may then result when the driver is unable to react in time to apply the brakes effectively. Longer duration incidents involving uncontrollable acceleration where brake pedal application allegedly had no effect are not within the scope of this

investigation. Accordingly, based on the information gathered from complainant interviews, ODI is revising the number of pertinent VOQs to 11, of which 5 reports involve a vehicle crash. No injuries have been identified. A list of the pertinent VOQ numbers is included as an attachment to this memo.

One of the VOQs that have been removed (ODI 10056117) involved a serious injury that occurred after the vehicle went through a car wash. In this incident, the vehicle's transmission was placed in neutral so that a conveyor/roller could pull the vehicle through the car wash while the operator remained in the vehicle (ODI notes that the functionality of the shift interlock system would not require application of the brake pedal to move the shifter from neutral to drive). During ODI's interview, the vehicle operator mentioned that their foot was not squarely on the brake pedal when the transmission was engaged and that it subsequently slipped off and may have inadvertently struck the throttle. ODI also removed two sets of duplicate VOQs (10002266 duplicate of 10003640, 10019875 duplicate of 10025068) and one VOQ that was included by error (10056537). The other VOQs were removed because ODI does not currently consider them to be the result of a throttle control failure; they may be reconsidered should new information warrant.

ODI is regularly monitoring incoming VOQs for relevance to this investigation and where appropriate will be interviewing these complainants. Any VOQ deemed to be pertinent to the investigation will be added on an ongoing basis.

PE04 – 021; Toyota Throttle Control, March 22, 2004

11 VOQs – ODI Numbers

6900639, 8004502, 8013543, 8013908, 8015215, 10008367,
10026392, 10026512, 10045944, 10053774, 10055375