



Weekly Car Dealers Newsletter

June 14, 2010

This information that follows is taken from sources including *The Carconnection*, *Autoweek*, and other industry sources.

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VEHICLE SAFETY BILLS REFLECT COMPROMISE AUTOS NEED FEATURE TO CUT PEDAL RISK, TEST CHIEF SAYS MORE MUSTANG

VEHICLE SAFETY BILLS REFLECT COMPROMISE

Automakers have reached a series of compromises with lawmakers over both the House and Senate versions of auto safety legislation aimed at forcing the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration to set and enforce stricter standards, according to records and interviews. The bills were drafted after congressional hearings in February that pointed to agency weaknesses in handling probes of runaway acceleration problems in Toyota vehicles that led to dozens of deaths and hundreds of serious injuries. The proposed legislation, known as the Motor Safety Vehicle Act of 2010, would require the agency to set standards for the first time on electronic components in vehicles, increase penalties for automakers who lie or mislead the agency about safety defects and bar agency officials hired by automakers from working with the agency for three years.

Since the bills were introduced, lawmakers have made changes that eliminate or extend deadlines for setting some of the new safety standards; give the transportation secretary the discretion to set rules that had been mandated in earlier versions; and require safety standards to "mitigate" runaway acceleration rather than "prevent" the problem, records show.

A spokeswoman for the Alliance of Automobile Manufacturers said that some of the deadlines in earlier versions of the legislation were unrealistic because research needed to set standards is not complete. Also, she said, legislative language needs to recognize

that automakers cannot control all factors that could lead to unintended acceleration. "We can't prevent a shoe from going under a pedal. We can't prevent people from putting in more than one floor mat," said Gloria Bergquist, spokeswoman for the alliance, which represents automakers. "Prevention becomes a very steep hill to climb." Officials from Toyota Motor Corp. declined to comment and referred questions to the alliance.

[Rep. Henry A. Waxman](#) (D-Calif.), who chairs the Energy and Commerce Committee, defended the House bill, saying it would "dramatically improve the safety of motor vehicles." He pointed to requirements that vehicles contain a brake override system and "black boxes" to record crash information, to larger fines should automakers fail to report defects and to a tripling of funds for the agency over the next four years.

The House bill could go to the floor for a vote this week. The Senate bill is scheduled for markup Wednesday in the Commerce, Science and Transportation Committee. Waxman and other congressional leaders said they hope to reconcile House and Senate versions and pass final legislation before the July 4 holiday.

Clarence Ditlow, executive director of the Center for Auto Safety, said that the compromises have weakened oversight on some of the same problems Toyota and government officials pointed to as contributing to runaway acceleration. For example, in earlier versions of the bill, the agency would have been required to set uniform standards for pedal construction and placement in two years and automakers would have been required to incorporate those standards in vehicles by 2014. The current versions of the legislation do not spell out those deadlines, and the standards would be set only if the transportation secretary deems it "necessary." *Source: The Washington Post*

AUTOS NEED FEATURE TO CUT PEDAL RISK, TEST CHIEF SAYS

U.S. autos should be required to have technology to stop sudden acceleration, reducing the risks that floor mats trap pedals and send a car careening, Consumer Reports' auto testing chief said. Legislation requiring an override feature, or "smart" throttle, when the accelerator and brakes are applied together would cut dangers from misplaced mats, said [David Champion](#), Consumer Reports' director of automotive testing. Probes by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration help, he said. "Once you've got smart throttle, it's a non-issue because if the throttle does stick open, you put your foot on the brake, the computer takes away all the engine power, you bring the car to a halt," Champion said in an interview at the magazine's test track in East Haddam, Connecticut. "And then you realize what's going on."

U.S. lawmakers are considering auto-safety legislation that would require override software in all vehicles, a measure prompted by [Toyota Motor Corp.](#)'s record recalls. The Senate Commerce Committee approved its version today. Toyota has said a brake-override feature will be in all models by 2011. NHTSA is investigating [Ford Motor Co.](#)'s Fusion and Mercury Milan sedans after three reports of floor mats jamming pedals. The agency examined a similar flaw in cars from Toyota, which recalled 5.4 million vehicles in the past year for mats that may entrap pedals and lead to unintended acceleration.

Champion and staff at the Consumer Reports track in rural [East Haddam](#), about 100 miles northeast of New York City, have studied floor mats that can catch onto pedals. The facility, owned by Consumers Union of Yonkers, New York, has a Ford Fusion hybrid model among cars for testing. Consumer Reports engineers studied the floor mat and pedal configuration of the Fusion and couldn't find any conflict, Champion said in the interview on June 2.

Automakers and regulators have faulted drivers for double- stacking floor mats. All-weather mats, thicker than carpet mats that may come standard with cars, aren't to blame, Champion said. "They're really useful," he said. "But you need to understand that if you're going to put those in, you take out the carpet ones. You store them for the winter months."

Toyota, based in Toyota City, Japan, began recalls related to floor mats after an Aug. 28 Lexus sedan crash in California killed an off-duty California Highway Patrol officer and three family members when a mat jammed down the accelerator pedal. The company told consumers to remove some floor mats and shortened pedals so they wouldn't get stuck.

Engineers at the Consumer Reports track this year found an electronic-stability flaw in Toyota's Lexus GX 460 sport-utility vehicle and concluded the SUV was a "safety risk," leading the world's largest automaker to halt its sales. The magazine, which began rating vehicles in 1936, operates the 327-acre auto-evaluation facility and tests about 80 cars and trucks a year. Consumer Reports, which doesn't do crash tests, buys new cars and sells them after completing its battery of more than 50 tests.

A NASA investigation into whether there is an electronics-related cause of Toyota unintended acceleration should resolve the issue, Champion said. The Transportation Department hired the National Aeronautics and Space Administration for its engineering and electronics expertise. Source: Bloomberg.com

MORE MUSTANG

Looking for just a little something extra to jazz up the 2011 Ford Mustang GT? Ford has an answer--a dealer-installed package named RTR that upgrades the suspension, adds bigger wheels and sorta subtle exterior stripes.



Ford says the RTR had the input of drifting race star Vaughn Gittin Jr. The package is launching now for the new Mustang GT. A version for the V6-power Mustang is due to arrive late this year.

The RTR package carries a suggested retail price of \$7,895.

For that, you get:

- Ford Racing shocks and springs that lower the car 1.5 inches.
- Bigger rear sway bar.
- Cross-drilled and slotted brake rotors.
- Falken FK452 performance tires.
- RTR 19-inch wheels
- K&N air filter and Ford Racing engine tuning, good for a 9-hp increase over the base 5.0-liter V8's 412 hp.
- Front chin spoiler with splitter.
- Aluminum rear spoiler.
- RTR badges and floor mats.
- Ford Racing mufflers that aren't so quiet but are 50-state legal.

Source: Autoweek.com