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U. S. Department of Transportation
National Highway Traffic Safety Administration 2005 MAR -7 AM 3:52
Office of Defects investigation
NSA-10.01, 400 7th St, SW,
Washington, DC 20590

Dear Sir/Madam,

I wish to register a complaint on a 2005 Lexus 4DR sedan IS300 that I purchased from Bell Lexus in Phoenix AZ on 10/2/2004. I drove the car home about 15 miles from Bell Rd in Phoenix to my home in Carefree AZ. It was a wet but not rainy day. The temperature was in the 70s F. I had no problem with the breaks until later that day when I drove into a small shopping area in Carefree and slowly drove into a parking spot. On pressing the break pad the car barely slowed down. I pressed much harder and still it would not stop. In this instant the car smacked the bumper in the parked car in front of me. It was a significant bump. I called Bell Lexus the next day and told them about the incident. They provided me with no explanation and suggested that it was a wet day and that it was a slide on the wet pavement. It was not a slide. I have been driving for 55 years and know when the breaks malfunction. This was a malfunction. I did not get a satisfactory answer from the dealer nor any follow up. The incident has not recurred in 2000 miles of driving since then.

I then recently read about a break booster problem in a 2004 Lexus SUV RX 330 (enclosure). This is exactly what happened to me. The booster failed, I am sure. I register this complaint with you. I also expect to receive a call from Bell Lexus to discuss this problem once again.

Sincerely,

Carefree AZ

cc: Bell Lexus
1901 E. Bell Rd
Phoenix AZ 85022
602-866-3300

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3/9/05

U.S. Opens Safety Inquiry on Lexus S.U.V.

Toyota Says It Knew of Brake Problem but Didn't Tell Owners

By DANNY HAKIM

DETROIT, Feb. 15 — Federal regulators have opened a safety investigation into 2004 models of the best-selling vehicle from Toyota Motor's Lexus division, the RX330 sport utility vehicle, after receiving complaints about failures in its power brakes.

Bill Ussery, a Lexus spokesman, said the company was aware of the brake problem and issued a technical service bulletin to its dealers in September. But the company has not notified customers or recalled the vehicle because it says it does not think the problem is widespread and no injuries have been linked to it.

The government's inquiry was prompted by complaints from 10 Lexus owners who told the agency of brake problems, with one saying, "My brakes went completely out while traveling down a highway at 70 miles per hour."

Complaints have also appeared recently on Internet message boards. Several customers said they had been told by Lexus mechanics that the problem was well known but could take weeks to fix because not enough parts were available.

"We saw enough of a pattern in the complaints coming in that we felt it justified a little closer look," said Rae Tyson, a spokesman for the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, which is conducting the inquiry. The investigation is in a preliminary phase. It will become more serious if enough evidence of a potential defect is discovered.

The problem involves the S.U.V.'s brake booster, a critical part that makes power brakes work. Without a brake booster, brakes are still operable but require a driver to push down with considerable force.

"The brakes still stop the vehicle, but it's very unusual and surprising," Mr. Ussery said. He said Lexus needed to review the government's con-



Lexus via Reuters News

Ten owners of the 2004 Lexus RX330 complained about failures in its power brakes, the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration said.

sumer complaints "to determine if further action is warranted."

Last year, the RX330 became Lexus's first vehicle to sell more than 140,000 units in the United States. Mr. Ussery said the company thought the problem was restricted to vehicles that were among the 48,800 of the 2004 model RX330's produced at a plant in Cambridge, Ont., as opposed to models made in Japan. He also said the problem was thought to occur in cold weather.

He said the technical service bulletin sent to dealers recommended replacing the vehicle's brake booster if the problem occurred.

"If you're missing a booster system, it means that for smaller people, for women, it's really hard to stop the vehicle," said Joan Claybrook, the president of Public Citizen, a consumer advocacy group. "Companies are much smarter if they notify people quickly, not only for safety but for public relations."

Nancy Rosta, 63, of Franklin Lakes, N.J., said her RX330 was her

fourth Lexus but would probably be her last. The power brakes on her S.U.V. failed when her son was backing out of a driveway in Vermont in December, she said, and he had to jam down on the brakes to stop.

Ms. Rosta was not among the customers who complained to regulators. She said a Lexus dealer had led her to believe that the problem stemmed from using the parking brake, and only later learned about brake problems in other RX330's.

"This is life and death," she said. "I had my grandchildren, who are 5 and 7, in this car. We felt so safe in it, and then I find out I had them in a really dangerous situation. I thought I was paying a premium for safety."

Lexus replaced her brake booster, but she remains worried that there may be a wider brake problem and wants to be released from her lease.

"They should have sent a letter to every owner to let them know this could be a problem instead of saying they had never heard of this before," Ms. Rosta said.