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Santa Clara, CA [redacted]

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Nat Beuse, Associate Administrator for Vehicle Safety Research
National Highway Traffic Safety Administration
1200 New Jersey Avenue, SE
Washington, DC 20590

Dear Mr. Beuse,

I am writing to you about a serious safety issue on my 2015 BMW i3 with Range Extender that BMW has acknowledged since 2014, but refuses to fix. In 2014 they stated to consumer reports that a fix for the issue was coming in Spring 2015 that would also be retrofitted on all existing i3's with the Range Extender. Attached to this letter is a copy of that acknowledgement.

This is in addition to the multiple recalls my car has had; airbags that don't deploy, engine mount bolts that can snap and a fuel line that can leak and cause a fire. Additionally, due to the thin, lightweight tires that BMW had made for the i3, they rupture easily; I've had 2 flat tires since leasing the vehicle in November 2015.

As you know, BMW petitioned the California Air Resources Board (CARB) to create a new category of plug-in electric vehicle called BEV (Battery Extended Vehicle). While BMW has continued to gain millions in California EV rebates for the BMW i3 REx, owners continue to be placed in unsafe driving conditions when using the REx under certain conditions.

This condition occurred for me in December 2015 when I was driving from Fremont, California to Santa Cruz, California with 2 other friends. When we left Fremont, I knew that we would run out of electric range along the route, but I wasn't worried because the dealer had informed me that the REx would kick on and the i3 would drive like any other car. As we drove along 17, the battery hit 6% and the REx kicked on. As we climbed the Santa Cruz mountains, the battery dropped to 0.5% and suddenly the car slowed to a complete stop. We had just come around a sharp turn on 17 and there were no pull offs anywhere near us. Luckily, we did not get rear ended and we waited for the REx to bring the battery back to 6% so that we could drive to the nearest pull off.

The next day, I immediately informed BMW of North America of the incident as well a BMW of Stevens Creek. They were concerned there might be something wrong with the engine or other components, so they advised me to bring in the vehicle for service. After I did that, they responded that the vehicle had nothing wrong with it and that it "works as designed". They advised me to chat with a BMW iGenius who would go over the "limitations" of the vehicle.

Consumer Reports

BMW i3 range extender has the little engine that could, testing shows

Energy can be depleted at rather inopportune times, but BMW is working on a fix

Published: October 09, 2014 03:00 PM

The electric BMW i3 we're testing is the version that comes with a range extender—a small two-cylinder gasoline engine that fires up when the drive battery is near depletion, acting as a generator to keep the electric drive system running. Relying on that gas engine when the main battery is depleted works well in most cases, including high-speed steady cruising, but not, we've discovered, if you demand more of it.

Recently, one of our drivers tromped on the pedal to pass a truck on a hilly two-lane highway. The i3 began to lose power without warning, subjecting the driver to more exposure in the oncoming lane. It then recovered rather quickly upon coasting, which converts energy and uses it to fill the battery. But losing power just when you need it most is disconcerting to say the least.

Energy depleated during hill climb.

Read our BMW i3 first drive. And learn about another observation we made in "Beware tailgating a BMW i3."

Further tests revealed that after a prolonged use of the throttle with little or no speed varying and no gentle braking to regenerate energy to the battery, acceleration ability falls off dramatically. In that state, we measured a 0-60 mph acceleration time that ranged from 27 to 40 seconds—as opposed to 9 seconds in normal range extending mode. For the record, when the car is running purely on electric power it sprints to 60 mph in 7.5 seconds.

BMW bills the i3 as a car suited for a mega metropolis and as such, with frequent speed variation, it is unlikely to wind up in a situation like this. But it would be nice to get a warning light regarding the reduced power, as one gets in the Tesla Model S and Toyota Prius.

Asked for a response, a BMW spokesman, Matthew Russell, said that an enhancement is coming in spring 2015 that will address our concern. It will include a battery state-of-charge indicator, an early alert prior to potentially experiencing a temporary loss of power, and a proactive boosting of the battery level based on the car's navigation prior to encountering hilly terrain. This enhancement will also be available as a retrofit for existing i3 owners.

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