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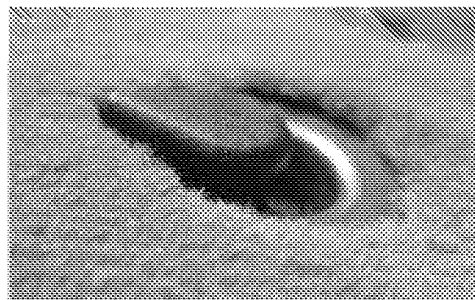
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October 13, 2009

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Floor mat survey reveals problem with all-weather mats

Last week, we reported on a massive Toyota and Lexus recall that followed a fatal crash blamed on an errant all-weather floor mat that reportedly jammed the accelerator in the Lexus ES 350 the family was driving. This made us wonder how many other cars might have misaligned or unsecured floor mats that could prove dangerous. We turned to our test fleet for insight.



Of the roughly 25 current test cars we checked, we found three that had loose mats that could slide forward under continual pressure—potentially leading to the mats pressing on the accelerator. All three of the cars had all-weather rubber floor mats, not the carpeted kind commonly included as original equipment with new cars.

All the cars that we checked with standard mats were equipped with hooks affixed to the floor that fit through a hole in the mat to hold them in place. But two of our cars with all-weather mats didn't have the hooks. In addition, we have recently purchased cars with the all-weather mats stacked atop the regular mats, and only the carpeted mats on the bottom were secured. We have found that luxury-brand dealers often include all-weather mats as a courtesy, but they should throw them in the trunk, not atop the carpeted mats.

Our small, unscientific survey could indicate that the problem is not as widespread as some thought, at least for brand-new vehicles. Many older cars on the road may still not be equipped with floor hooks to secure the floor mats. Going forward, we think that all-weather mats should be designed to use the vehicle's mat retention system. After all, the mats in our test cars were factory accessories. If hooks were ubiquitous, then aftermarket suppliers could more readily design their products to use the floor anchors.

Some German automakers, as well as Lexus, are implementing technology that may do away with this type of unintended acceleration altogether. Using drive-by-wire throttle controls, they can allow the brakes to override the throttle electronically. If the brake is depressed at the same time as the gas pedal, the brake will take precedence and throttle will not open on the engine. (See the NY Times piece "Smart Gas Pedals May Solve Floor-Mat Problem.") This seems like a good solution, and we'd like to see it in as many new cars as possible.

Clearly more can be done by some automakers to avoid this potential hazard, but it is important that drivers actively

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check how their floor mats are fitted and choose wisely when purchasing replacements.

—Eric Evarts

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Posted by: [Redacted] Oct 13, 2009 3:16:34 PM

"Using drive-by-wire throttle controls, they can allow the brakes to override the throttle electronically. If the brake is depressed at the same time as the gas pedal, the brake will take precedence and throttle will not open on the engine."

What new potential problems do CR foresee with this solution? Will it slow down the 0-60mph on automatic cars? On manual cars, how will the users do rev matching using heel and toe?

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