

'Tin Whiskers' and Other Discredited Unintended Acceleration Theories

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Over the past two years, major government investigations of Toyota vehicles and technologies undertaken by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) and engineers at the National Aeronautics and Safety Administration (NASA) have been clear and unequivocal in their conclusions: there are no real-world scenarios in which Toyota electronics can cause unintended acceleration. Last week, a report by the National Academies of Sciences put another nail in the coffin of this discredited theory, concluding that all the data available indicated that there was no electronic or software problem in Toyota vehicles and that NHTSA was justified in closing its investigation.

Respected independent experts including Edmunds.com have reached the same conclusion. After his \$1 million prize for demonstrating a novel cause of UA went unclaimed, [Edmunds CEO Jeremy Anwyl called claims of a possible electronic problem in Toyota vehicles “the auto equivalent of the grassy knoll.”](#) In an editorial on January 23, [Automotive News compared this allegation to 9/11 conspiracy theories:](#)

“It is long past time to take the notion that some electronic gremlin caused sudden acceleration in Toyotas and bury it alongside the theories that President Barack Obama wasn’t born in the United States, the 9/11 attacks on the World Trade Center were an inside job and Elvis is alive and well somewhere.”

[In the words of U.S. Transportation Secretary Ray LaHood](#), “The verdict is in. There is no electronic-based cause for unintended high-speed acceleration in Toyotas. Period.”

Why, then, is Toyota continuing to be subjected to unwarranted speculation in the news media about an issue that has long since been put to bed? Here’s what is happening: trial lawyers with a financial interest in pursuing the discredited gremlins in the engine theory – the same lawyers who funded and hawked the “expert studies” that contributed to the news media frenzy in the first place – continue to seed the news media with repackaged and repurposed “non-news.”

For two years, these individuals and their paid “experts” have made repeated, baseless claims about potential causes of unintended acceleration. In so doing, they have ignored the overwhelming scientific evidence in a calculated attempt to sow unwarranted fear among the motoring public. Indeed, as each of their allegations has been debunked, they have simply invented a new one and hoped that no one would notice.

It is disappointing that news organizations such as the Huffington Post would continue to publish baseless claims from these so-called “experts” without disclosing their clear financial self-interest in generating controversy where none exists.

To be clear, so-called “tin whiskers” are not a new phenomenon and do not represent a mysterious or undetectable problem in a vehicle’s electronics. Indeed, no data indicates that tin whiskers are more prone to occur in Toyota vehicles than any other vehicle in the marketplace. To the contrary, Toyota’s systems are designed to reduce the risk that tin whiskers will form in the first place. In addition, multiple robust failsafe systems are in place to counter any effects on the operation of our vehicles in the highly unlikely event that they do form and connect to adjacent circuitry. In the unlikely event that tin whiskers cause a short-circuit in the pedal position sensor, our systems detect the fault, illuminate the malfunction indicator light and put the vehicle

into “limp home” mode.

No one, including paid consultants to plaintiffs’ attorneys quoted by the Huffington Post, has ever found a single real-world example of tin whiskers causing an unintended acceleration event. Nor have they put forth any evidence of unintended acceleration occurring in a Toyota vehicle because of tin whiskers forming inside an accelerator pedal position sensor.

There is no problem with the electronic throttle control systems in Toyota vehicles – and all the scientific evidence confirms it.