

“KEEPING PACE” - #44



SHIFT-LOCK:

For many years, we have told our clients that unintended acceleration accidents are almost never caused by a vehicle defect or malfunction, but rather because the driver placed his or her foot on the accelerator pedal rather than on the brake pedal.

In 1986, the Audi 5000 received much negative publicity for acceleration accidents, in which people claimed that the Audi would “surge” forward or rearward of its own accord. It wasn’t true, and five years later the Federal government agreed that these accidents occurred because of pedal misapplication. To counter this pedal misapplication, the Volkswagen Corporation, maker of the Audi, invented a “shift-lock” device. It is a very simple device and consists of an electrical solenoid connected to the brake lamp switch on the brake pedal. The solenoid does not let a driver take the car out of “PARK” until the driver’s foot is fully depressing the brake pedal. This makes sure the driver’s foot is not on the wrong pedal. Volkswagen had noticed (and so had I) that these acceleration accidents almost always occurred as the driver shifted out of “PARK” into “DRIVE” or out of “PARK” into “REVERSE.” As soon as this change was made by Audi in a recall, they told me that their number of acceleration accidents “virtually went to zero.” The cost is minimal.

Today, there is a shift-lock in almost all vehicles used in America. However, there are still a small number of pedal misapplication accidents which begin while the vehicle is at speed.

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REAR WINDOW BRAKE LAMP

Another great, simple, inexpensive fix like the shift-lock was the additional rear window brake lamp which was required in automobiles starting about 1986. I read a report in 1991 that this resulted in a 27% decline in rear-end collisions, although that exact number was disputed some years later.



Sincerely,

Frederick F. Franklin, P.E.
Forensic Engineer