

'Runaway' NY Prius Driver Never Used Brakes

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HARRISON, N.Y. (AP) — Computer data from a Toyota Prius that crashed in suburban New York City show that at the time of the accident the throttle was open and the driver was not applying the brakes, U.S. safety officials said Thursday.

The disclosure prompted an angry response from the police captain investigating the cause of the accident. He said his probe was not over and driver error had not been established.

"For any agency to release data and to draw conclusions without consulting with the law enforcement agency that brought this to light could be self-serving," said Capt. Anthony Marraccini of the Harrison, N.Y., force.

A housekeeper driving the car on March 9 told police that it sped up on its own down a driveway, despite her braking, and crashed into a stone wall across the street. She was not seriously hurt.

The accident set off an intense investigation because Toyota has recalled more than 8 million cars since last fall over gas pedals that could become stuck or be held down by floor mats.

The Prius hasn't been recalled for sticky accelerators. However, the car involved in the accident under investigation had been repaired for the floor mat problem. An Associated Press analysis of government data found more than 100 reports of repaired cars continuing to accelerate on their own.

Technicians from Toyota and the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration and the police department's own consultants examined the wrecked 2005 Prius outside police headquarters in Harrison on Wednesday. Marraccini said NHTSA also interviewed the driver.

On Thursday, NHTSA said information from the car's computer systems indicated there was no application of the brakes and the throttle was fully open. It did not elaborate.

The Prius is equipped with an event data recorder, or "black box" designed to record the state of the car at the moment of the impact.

Marraccini cautioned that even if NHTSA's disclosure is accurate, "This is a snapshot. This is not the total investigation."

He said the Harrison police have not closed their investigation or examined all data that was retrieved.

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Earlier, the captain also criticized Toyota for announcing the evidence was "conclusive" and for providing him with data from the recorder but not the software he needed to read it.

"You can't open it, you can't read it, you can't do anything with it," Marraccini said.

Toyota spokesman Wade Hoyt said later that the company was arranging for the police to get temporary access to the needed software "at a reduced cost." He said it typically costs about \$7,000 but is also available on a temporary basis for \$50.

In a report earlier this month, The Associated Press found that for years, Toyota has blocked access to data stored in the "black boxes" that could explain crashes blamed on sudden unintended acceleration.

Marraccini said police would be meeting again Friday with Toyota and he believed the company would cooperate fully.

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Thomas reported from Washington. AP Auto Writer Dan Strumpf in New York contributed to this report.

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