

The Wisecracker: Toyota finally gets a "brake"

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Back in the mid-'90s I was on the front lines of a "sudden acceleration" crisis with Jeep vehicles. Jeep Grand Cherokees were supposedly possessed with a demon that made them careen out of control despite the driver firmly jamming on the brakes.

Almost every case was identical. "The harder I pressed on the brake the faster I went!" testified the alleged victims. Later, it was proved beyond any doubt that the vehicles sped up no matter how hard the brake was applied because . . . the driver's foot was actually on the gas pedal. Duh.

Fast-forward more than a dozen years and Toyota - until recently God's gift to Green Thomas Friedman and the planet - was in the thick of yet another "sudden acceleration" scandal and handling it very, very badly. Toyota created an initial information vacuum with the media and allowed that vacuum to be filled with giddy plaintiff attorneys - "safety advocates" that are nothing more than shills for trial attorneys and supposed victims like the porn website owner/wacko in San Diego whose Prius was allegedly out-of-control for miles and had to be told by a trooper how to stop.

That was followed by our top vehicle regulatory agency claiming Toyotas were unsafe at any speed -- especially a fast one -- and night after night of Late Night comic bashing.

Toyota handled the growing crisis with the subtlety of Otis "Masturgate" Mathis in the super's office. They urged their supporters to claim that the whole investigation was a conspiracy manufactured by the Obama Administration to unfairly humiliate Toyota for the benefit of General Motors and Chrysler (aka, Obama Motors). Note to conspiracy dweebs: Ford was the company that gained the most from Toyota's fall, and if you think Toyota execs were pummeled in their congressional testimony, think back to November 2008 when Big Three execs had their you-know-what's handed to them in Planegate.

Now, The Wall Street Journal reports, the government has finally determined it was driver error in a majority of the Toyota cases. Sure there were those pesky floor mats and sticky throttles. And Toyota didn't help itself by initially burying its head in the sand hoping it would all go away. But in the end, what we learned at Jeep - and Audi before that - is: When your foot is on the brake, your car will stop.

If you don't believe me, ask reporter Rod Meloni of Detroit's WDIV. On a live broadcast he stood in front of a Jeep while I, with my foot firmly on the brake, jammed my other foot on the gas. The vehicle violently rocked and screamed like Monica Conyers at sentencing, but DID NOT move forward an inch.

The news for Toyota isn't all good. While the government may have bailed them out, that won't stop the "safety advocates" and ambulance chasers that never let the facts get in the way of a jury trial.