

Post-Bulletin

Local doctor has close call with Prius

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By [Edie Grossfield](#)

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Alan Hoffman just donated his 2007 Toyota Prius, with 34,000 miles on it, to Northwestern University in Evanston, Ill.

He said he's hoping the engineering department can use the car for a project, maybe to figure out why on Dec. 4 the car's accelerator malfunctioned and its brakes failed, causing him to sideswipe another car and nearly end up in the middle of a busy four-lane highway.

Nobody was injured in the accident, which Hoffman, a recently retired Mayo Clinic physician, said happened a split second after he gently pressed the accelerator on his Prius to back the car up about 50 feet into a hotel parking space in Palatine, Ill., a suburb of Chicago.



Doesn't blame dealer

He wants nothing more to do with the Prius, especially since he said Toyota will not acknowledge his claim that the car has dangerous accelerator and brake malfunctions.

Hoffman bought the Prius at Rochester Toyota, but since it's not on Toyota's recall list, it's not eligible for the fix many other Toyota cars are now getting for accelerator problems. Hoffman and his wife, Judy, say they don't have any ill will toward Rochester Toyota and don't believe the dealership is to blame for their troubles.

Post-Bulletin attempts to speak with someone at Rochester Toyota about Hoffman's experience were unsuccessful.

After calling three times and writing two letters to Toyota's national headquarters in Torrance, Calif., he said the best Toyota has done for him is to assign him a case worker.

Accelerator, brake problem

After the car took off backward "like somebody had gunned it," Hoffman said he slammed both feet on the brakes. But the car kept going, taking him over a curb and down into a culvert alongside the highway, where it finally stopped. He doesn't know

Toyota help

To find out if your vehicle is involved in the recent recalls, you can enter your [VIN](#) (Vehicle Identification Number) on the Toyota Owners Web site at www.toyotaownersonline.com to find out if your specific vehicle is involved.

Toyota's customer service number is 1-800-331-4331

why it took off the way it did, or what made it finally stop.

"I could have been killed, I could have killed other people. So, I was extremely lucky," he said.

The experience was harrowing, and since then, Hoffman says trying to get customer service from Toyota has become more and more frustrating. The Hoffmans rented a car to drive back to Rochester, leaving the Prius at a dealership in Palatine. Toyota officials in Aurora, Ill., inspected the car and sent Hoffman a letter stating that they found nothing wrong with it.

Even with his problems, Alan Hoffman said he would like to see Toyota, as a whole, do well. In fact, he loved his Prius before he had the problem in December.

"I enjoyed it a lot. It got 50 miles to the gallon quite frequently," he said. "This car was great for 34,000 miles, but then in the last 120 feet it was like a potential killer of me and other people... I'm concerned about the safety of this car."

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