

U.S. Transportation Department safety investigators are looking at whether unintended acceleration complaints are linked to any glitch in electronic throttles in Toyota (TM) and Lexus vehicles. A preliminary finding is not expected until early 2011, government officials said.

A study released on Monday by Kelley Blue Book found that 25 percent of new car buyers considered Toyota (TM) in the third quarter. Toyota (TM) was tops in that study, closely followed by Ford Motor Co (F) and Honda Motor Co Ltd (HMC). KBB said the results showed Toyota (TM) was "slowly recovering from its public-perception crisis."

Separately, Toyota (TM) has told its U.S. dealers it would extend warranty terms on more than 99,000 Lexus sedans to resolve a class-action lawsuit related to airbags on the 2007 model ES350.

The repair campaign is part of a settlement of a 3-year-old lawsuit filed in Florida that had claimed small adults sitting in the passenger seat of the cars might not be detected by the computer used to control airbags. The lawsuit had claimed that people weighing 100 to 120 pounds might not be detected as passengers, depending on how they were sitting.

In a notice to dealers sent on Friday, Toyota (TM) said it stood by the Lexus product and that the vehicles complied with U.S. government-imposed safety standards.

Owners of the 2007 Lexus ES350 received a notice in the mail in September or October telling them they were eligible to have the computer controlling the passenger airbags replaced or fixed at a Lexus dealership under terms of the then-proposed class-action settlement.

In its notice to dealers, which was sent on Friday, Toyota (TM) said it would pay for the inspections and repair under new warranty terms that took effect on Saturday.

A copy of the notice was obtained by Reuters. (Additional reporting by Kevin Krolicki in Detroit and John Crawley in Washington; Editing by Richard Chang)

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