

Software fix didn't work on some Fiat Chrysler gearshifts

November 16 2016, by Tom Krisher



In this Tuesday, May 6, 2014, file photo, a vehicle moves past a sign outside Fiat Chrysler Automobiles world headquarters in Auburn Hills, Mich. Software designed to fix confusing gear shifters on 1.1 million Fiat Chrysler vehicles didn't work on 29,000 of them. Now the owners are being asked to take the vehicles back to dealers for another try. The new software was supposed to make the cars and SUVs automatically shift into park when the driver's door is opened while the engine is running. But Fiat Chrysler says the change didn't properly fix 13,000 vehicles in the U.S. and 16,000 in other countries. (AP Photo/Carlos Osorio, File)

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Jeep Grand Cherokees from the 2014 and 2015 model years and the 2012 through 2014 Dodge Charger and Chrysler 300 were recalled in April due to complaints from drivers who had trouble telling if the transmission was in "park" after stopping.

A U.S. government investigation that led to the recall found 266 crashes that injured 68 people. Many owners reported that the vehicles rolled off after the driver exited. "Star Trek" actor Anton Yelchin was killed in June when his recalled Jeep rolled down his driveway and pinned him against a mailbox pillar and fence. His parents have sued Fiat Chrysler claiming that it made unsafe shifters. Los Angeles police are still investigating his death.

FCA says it's calling and sending letters and emails to the 29,000 owners. The software fix worked properly on the rest of the 406,000 vehicles that have been fixed worldwide, the company said.

The problem, reported in a document released this week by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, was discovered in a Fiat Chrysler audit. Company spokesman Eric Mayne says the vehicles may not shift into park automatically, or they may shift into park without the gear selector showing it.

Fiat Chrysler has no reports of crashes or injuries among the 29,000

vehicles. Many were at dealerships for other reasons and were given the new software, Mayne said.

The software didn't work in a small number of vehicles with certain engine, transmission and two- or four-wheel-drive combinations, Mayne said. "In most cases we initiated the installation of that software without the customer having to show up with the recall notice in hand. It just wasn't the right software for their particular vehicles," he said.

A second software update will take care of the problem, Mayne said. A spokesman for the government safety agency said he was checking into the matter.

The recalled vehicles have an electronic shift lever that toggles forward or backward to let the driver select the gear instead of moving along a track with notches for each gear like a conventional shifter. A light shows which gear is selected, but to get from drive to park, drivers must push the lever forward three times. If a [vehicle](#) is in drive and the lever is pressed just once, it goes into neutral and could roll if on a slope.

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