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BUSINESS | AUTOS & TRANSPORTATION | AUTOS

Fiat Chrysler Recalls 5.3 Million Vehicles for Cruise Control Software Glitch

Defect could prevent drivers from being able to slow down by canceling cruise function



The recall impacts certain 2014-2019 model year vehicles with automatic transmissions and gasoline-powered engines, including the 2014-2019 Ram 1500 pickup the company said. PHOTO: JOHN BAZEMORE/ASSOCIATED PRESS

By *Chester Dawson*

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DETROIT— Fiat Chrysler Automobiles [FCAU -1.98% ▼](#) NV said Friday it is recalling more than five million vehicles in the U.S. and Canada to fix a programming flaw that could prevent drivers from canceling the cruise control to slow their cars, in an example of glitch-prone software taking over a critical safety function.

The auto maker said drivers could lose control of vehicle speed “in an unlikely series of events” involving a short circuit in an electrical network. In such a case, the vehicle would maintain a set speed even if the brakes are tapped or a driver attempts to turn off the cruise control function.

The recall is the largest by Fiat Chrysler since an air bag-related announcement two years ago affecting 4.3 million of its vehicles and is the latest in the series of retroactive product fixes by the auto maker, some prompted by deficient software.

The move comes as the auto industry is increasingly relying on software for critical vehicle functions, which is putting more drivers and passengers at risk from distractions—or worse—as bugs crop up while vehicles are in operation.

Fiat Chrysler said the errant cruise control can be overpowered by continuous application of the brakes or by shifting into neutral and bringing the vehicle to a halt. The company said it is not aware of any accidents or injuries from the flaw, but did find one driver of a 2017 Dodge Journey crossover who experienced it.

“Notwithstanding the extraordinary circumstances that must exist before a customer would

AFFECTED VEHICLES »

- 2015-17 Chrysler 200 sedan
- 2014-18 Chrysler 300 sedan
- 2017-18 Chrysler Pacifica minivan
- 2015-18 Dodge Challenger coupe
- 2014-18 Dodge Charger sedan
- 2014-18 Dodge Journey CUV
- 2014-18 Dodge Durango SUV
- 2014-18 Jeep Cherokee SUV
- 2014-18 Jeep Grand Cherokee SUV
- 2018 Jeep Wrangler
- 2014-19 Ram 1500 pickup
- 2014-18 Ram 2500 pickup
- 2014-18 Ram 3500 pickup
- 2014-18 Ram 3500 cab chassis
- 2014-18 Ram 4500/5500 cab chassis

experience a problem, we are taking this action because we are fully committed to vehicle safety,” said Mark Chernoby, Fiat Chrysler’s U.S. head of vehicle safety and regulatory compliance.

The company asked owners of the vehicles to avoid using cruise control until their vehicles’ software has been upgraded with a patch.

Cruise control to maintain vehicle speed has been around for decades and is standard in most new cars sold in the U.S. today. But it is also the linchpin for the development of more advanced forms of driver-assistance technology and the self-driving cars of the future.

The Fiat Chrysler recall didn’t involve vehicles with advanced autonomous-car capabilities, but it follows high-profile incidents involving cars that did, including a fatal collision between a pedestrian and a robotic car in Arizona earlier this

year that prompted Uber Technologies Inc. to cancel its test program in the state.

Those incidents may be contributing to what one recent survey found is growing unease among U.S. consumers about autonomous-vehicle technology. Nearly three-quarters of American drivers would be afraid to ride in a self-driving car, up from 63% last year, according to a survey published this week by AAA.

Advocates of self-driving technology say robotic cars will save more lives than they put at risk, noting traffic-related accidents killed 40,000 people in the U.S. in each of the past two years.

Fiat Chrysler has figured prominently into an unprecedented government crackdown on automotive-safety transgressions in recent years.

The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration in July 2015 hit the auto maker with a then-record \$105 million penalty for lapses with nearly two dozen recalls covering more than 11 million vehicles, including older Jeeps with rear gasoline tanks linked to numerous fatal fires. The auto maker suffered an additional \$70 million penalty later that year for failing to report deaths, injuries, warranty claims, consumer complaints and other safety-related information as required under U.S. law.

Regulators use the so-called early-warning reporting data to help spot possible safety problems that could require recalls. The company signed consent orders agreeing to sanctions and reforms.

The Fiat Chrysler recall issued Friday, which the company said its own engineers uncovered, targets 4.8 million vehicles for the U.S. market and an additional 490,000 sold in Canada. It impacts certain 2014-2019 year vehicles, including versions of 16 models sold under the Chrysler, Dodge, Jeep and Ram brands, among those the 2018 Jeep Wrangler SUV and 2014-2019 Ram 1500 pickup.

In the case of the Dodge Journey driver, the cruise control wouldn’t disengage after being set at 70 miles per hour, according to a complaint filed in March with the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration. The driver, who said the vehicle was a rental car from Avis, was forced to pull off to the side of the road using the brake pedal to overpower the engine, which was “fighting the brakes,” the complaint said.

Representatives for Avis Budget Group Inc. had no immediate comment.

In March, Fiat Chrysler lost its appeal of a wrongful-death case stemming from a fiery Jeep crash in Georgia. The Georgia Supreme Court upheld the results of an earlier trial that hit Fiat Chrysler with nearly \$40 million in legal damages on account of the Jeep fire, which killed a 4-

year-old boy.

A Fiat Chrysler spokesman said the company has decided not to further litigate the Jeep-fire case. “This decision in no way reflects the company’s agreement with the result of the litigation,” the spokesman said, reiterating the auto maker’s view that the accident was caused by a reckless pickup-truck driver slamming into the back of the Jeep at highway speed.

Also in March, the family of “Star Trek” actor Anton Yelchin settled a lawsuit brought against the auto maker after his Jeep rolled away and killed him in his driveway nearly two years ago. A Fiat Chrysler spokesman said the company was pleased to reach an “amicable resolution” in the matter.

—Mike Spector contributed to this article

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