

Cadillac Brake Failures Reported

By Jack Anderson

General Motors hasn't bothered to warn the owners of one million 1968-72 Cadillacs still on the road that a mysterious brake failure, called "phantom brakes," may plunge them into an accident at any time.

Nor has GM notified the federal government, which monitors such defects. Yet the strange brake malady, which can afflict a Cadillac without warning and vanish before it reaches the garage, has been known to GM since 1968.

There have also been rarer reports of "phantom brake" failures in Chevrolets and Oldsmobiles.

GM has denied to us that any of its cars have dangerous brakes. Said a spokesman: "The brakes on the Cadillac ... are among the most effective in the industry ... tested thoroughly under the most exacting conditions for millions of miles.

"Every failuer," he added has a specific definable cause. Whenever an alleged braking complaint is filed, Cadillac attempts to determine the cause." The same is true, he said, for other GM models.

Yet we have had access to documents, which GM seems to have hidden in its deepest files. These reports, which we have made available to the Center for Auto Safety, dispute the disclaimer from Detroit.

Not only have "phantom brakes" caused sudden crashes, according to the documents, but the GM wizards may not even

know what causes the terrifying brake failures.

A typical experience was reported by Ethel Harris who was driving her Cadillac sedan in New Kensington, Pa., at about 35 miles per hour. Ahead, she saw cars stopped at a light.

She pressed on her brake pedal, but to her horror the pedal sank flat on the floor. Thinking quickly, she swerved off the road to avoid injuring those in the cars ahead.

Her decision sent her to the hospital, with a broken nose and bad bruises. For the Cadillac crashed into a house, causing \$2,000 damage to the car and \$1,000 damage to the home.

Police on the scene tested her brakes and reported the pedal "went all the way to the floor." Yet a few days later, a GM representative found a "good brake pedal" and full brake cylinder. The GM man listed the cause of accident vaguely as "brake pedal fade."

The GM documents cite "phantom brake failure" as the cause of a crash in Colorado involving a new Cadillac. And in Georgia, a Fleetwood owner reported two "phantom brake failures" before a third one sent him jolting into the rear end of a Pontiac, causing two injuries and \$2,800 worth of damages.

In the limited number of Cadillac documents we were able to survey, there were 28 "phantom brake" reports. But the documents hint of many more cases. States one Cadillac official: "We have experienced several of these cases and so far have not

been able to diagnose the cause."

The suppressed facts in the GM documents is supported by additional evidence of our own. The Center for Auto Safety has also received complaints from Cadillac owners.

A military officer wrote, for example, that he watched in horror as his wife pumped "the brakes down to the floor" and the big Cadillac rolled helplessly into a crash.

There have been complaints, too, from the owners of other GM cars. An Illinois lawyer wrote to us about a Chevrolet Impala whose "brake pedal went to the floor without any braking action," causing three injuries. Yet mechanics who checked the car shortly before the accident found no defect.

The Auto Safety Center received a similar complaint from a driver whose Oldsmobile crashed through a store window.

GM sent the master cylinders of "phantom brake" cars to brake experts at Delco Moraine, according to the internal documents. But no final solution to the problem was found.

The center is preparing a complaint to the Transportation Department that GM has had more than five years to find out the reason for "phantom brakes" and to recall the 1968-72 Cadillacs for repairs.

If the Transportation Department finds that GM purposely concealed the "phantom brake" dangers from the government and Cadillac owners, the center

will call for federal prosecution.

Spying on Jane—Two years ago, we began a series of exposes, based on FBI files, of the federal government's surveillance of prominent Americans. One of those being spied upon, we revealed, was anti war activist Jane Fonda.

"The secret FBI file on actress Jane Fonda," we wrote, "would choke a hippopotamus." The sleuths had followed her to college campuses and military bases around the world, had confiscated and copied her personal address book under cover of a customs search, had obtained her confidential financial records, and had faithfully recorded her conversations on national television. The transcripts were then stamped "Top Secret."

Jane Fonda asked us for her file, and we gave it to her. She subsequently filed suit, naming 22 defendants, including President Nixon. The government has now responded with an admission of virtually all our accusations.

In addition, however, the Justice Department disclosed "that at various times during the period 1970-1971 some conversations of the plaintiff were incidentally intercepted and overheard during national security electronic surveillance directed at others..."

The wiretaps, the government lawyers stated, "were conducted without a prior judicial warrant" but were "authorized by the President..."

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