



81V-008

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Ford Parts and Service Division

Ford Motor Company
3000 Schaefer Road
P.O. Box 1903
Dearborn, Michigan 48121

March, 1981

To: All Ford and Lincoln-Mercury Dealers

Subject: Owner Reminder Program--Automatic Transmission

The purpose of this letter is to provide you with additional details regarding actions being taken by the Company in connection with the resolution of the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) investigation of 1970-1979 and certain 1980 Ford-built passenger cars and light trucks equipped with automatic transmissions.

You are aware from an earlier communication, and from public statements, that the Company is convinced that there is no defect in the design or construction of any of its automatic transmission systems. We regard the preliminary defect determination made last June by the NHTSA as unjustified. Ford has demonstrated that unexpected movement of unattended vehicles results from drivers' inadvertent misplacement of the vehicle's gear selector lever between "Park" and "Reverse". Accidents stemming from such inadvertent control misplacement, though rare, can and do occur in automatic transmission-equipped cars and light trucks of all manufacture, imported or domestic.

The Company is taking several positive actions in connection with its settlement with the federal government that are intended to put information before the public that will help relieve concern regarding Ford-built vehicles. You and your personnel play an important part in this effort.

First, pursuant to the settlement agreement, letters will be sent from Ford Parts and Service Division to all owners of record of 1970-1979 and certain 1980 Ford-built vehicles equipped with automatic transmissions. The letters will remind owners of the parking-related safety precautions set out in Owners Manuals for many years.

Second, the owner mailing will include a self-sticking reminder label for owners to place in their vehicles as a day-to-day reminder of those basic precautions. A copy of the mailer being used to send the owner letter with reminder label is enclosed for your reference.

Third, because of the Company's desire to eliminate misinformation and misunderstanding on the part of all owners of our products that has resulted from the publicity given the automatic transmission controversy, owners of Ford automatic transmission-equipped vehicles built before 1970, whom we can identify, will be sent the same label and a similar letter. These owners, principally of 1967-1969 model year vehicles, will receive the letter shown in Attachment I.

Fourth, the Company has publicly offered, in the interest of safety, to make the self-sticking reminder label available, free of charge, to owners of competitive cars and light trucks who want the benefit of an on-board reminder to those who drive their vehicles.

To make this public information effort successful, your cooperation and participation is especially important in the following areas:

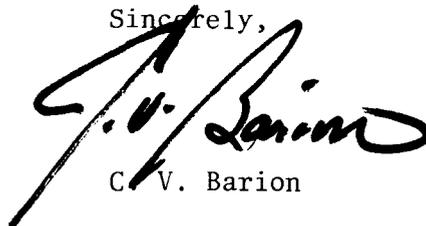
- . Under separate cover you will be receiving a supply of reminder labels. You are encouraged to make these reminder labels available to interested owners of competitive vehicles as well as owners of Ford vehicles. Additional labels may be ordered free of charge from:

Ford Parts and Service Division
P. O. Box 1904
3000 Schaefer Road
Dearborn, Michigan 48121
Attention: Reminder Label

- . You are encouraged to familiarize your sales and service personnel with the details of this effort so that they may encourage owners of competitive units to take advantage of the Company's offer; may respond to owner inquiries about the resolution of the transmission investigation; and may advise owners of the proper operation and maintenance of their vehicles' park selector systems. The question and answer guideline shown in Attachment II should be useful in responding to owner inquiries. A toll-free "800" line is also being established in the 48 contiguous states and the District of Columbia to assist your efforts in providing owners with information on the operation and maintenance of the park selector system. That number is 1-800-521-4134, except in Michigan where the number is 1-800-482-0234.

With your assistance in implementing the program detailed above, we are confident that the public will better understand the need for care in operating automatic transmission-equipped vehicles of all manufacture and that this will offset significantly the effects of the unjustified attacks on the Company's products. If you have any questions regarding this effort, please contact your Ford Parts and Service Division District Office.

Sincerely,



C. V. Barion

Enclosure
Attachments



Owner Relations
Ford Parts and Service Division

3000 Schaefer Road
P. O. Box 1805
Dearborn, Michigan 48121

Dear Owner:

Over the past few years, considerable publicity has been given to reports of automatic transmission-equipped vehicles moving unexpectedly after supposedly shifting from "Park" to "Reverse" by themselves. After extensive study, Ford remains convinced that vehicle park systems work correctly if used correctly and kept in good repair. Unexpected vehicle movement can and does occur on all automatic transmission-equipped vehicles, regardless of make, but these occurrences are due to drivers' inadvertent misplacement of the gear selector lever, or to worn, broken or grossly maladjusted components.

Unexpected vehicle movement incidents occur very rarely, but when they do, serious consequences may result. Ford believes, however, that such incidents can be avoided if before leaving the driver's seat, all drivers observe three commonsense steps to make sure that their automatic transmission-equipped vehicles are securely immobilized. These steps are: 1) making sure the gear selector lever is engaged in "Park", 2) setting the parking brake fully, and 3) shutting off the ignition. It should be remembered that as with any mechanical system, an automatic transmission and its gear shift control linkage must be kept in proper maintenance and adjustment if the park system is to work properly.

With these thoughts in mind, and in the interest of safe vehicle operation, we are enclosing for your use a self-sticking label to remind you of these three commonsense precautions. We encourage you to place the label in a conspicuous location in your vehicle to serve as a day-to-day reminder to those who drive the vehicle. The reminder label summarizes safety precautions set out in Owners Manuals of U. S. manufacturers of vehicles equipped with automatic transmissions.

This letter has been sent to you because your state's vehicle registration records indicate that you own, or recently owned, a pre-1970 model Ford passenger car or light truck equipped with an automatic transmission. But even if you no longer own the Ford vehicle indicated by state records, we encourage you to place the enclosed label in your present vehicle if it is equipped with an automatic transmission. Additional labels are available free of charge at any Ford or Lincoln-Mercury dealer should you wish to place the day-to-day reminder in other vehicles your family operates.

Sincerely,

Owner Relations
Ford Parts and Service Division

Owner Reminder Program - Automatic Transmission

Dealer Q and A Guideline

- Q. Is this a recall?
- A. This is not a recall. It is a reminder program intended to further minimize the already rare chances of failure by some drivers to engage the vehicle's gear shift lever in the Park position before leaving their vehicles.
- Q. What about the cars that jump out of park?
- A. No car can jump out of park unless something is broken or grossly maladjusted. (The accidents that have happened are typically caused by a failure of the driver to engage the gear shift lever in the Park position, not a failure of the mechanical parts of the vehicle).
- Q. What if my car is broken or grossly maladjusted?
- A. Take your vehicle to a Ford or Lincoln-Mercury dealer to have it checked and repaired if necessary. It is your responsibility to keep your vehicle in proper working condition. If your vehicle is still under warranty, Ford will pay for repair of any condition covered by the warranty.
- Q. Your letter says that I should keep my "gearshift linkage in proper maintenance and adjustment". What does that mean?
- A. The gearshift linkage is the mechanism that attaches the gearshift lever inside your car to the transmission which is under the floor. Normally, the linkage does not require maintenance but if you notice a change in the way the shift lever feels when you move it (e.g., hard to move or very loose) or in the way the indicator lines up with the gear positions (e.g., the needle no longer points to the indicator letters such as "D" when the transmission is in drive), the mechanism may be out of order and should be repaired immediately.
- Q. Your label says that I should refer to my owners manual for other important safety information. What is that information?
- A. Your owners manual provides instructions for the proper operation and maintenance of all the parts of your car or truck. For safe operation, it is important that you follow those instructions not only for automatic transmissions but for other parts as well.
- Q. Who will pay for an inspection of the linkage or pay to check out my car?
- A. Inspections are normally considered part of vehicle maintenance and, therefore, payment is your responsibility.

Q. If this is caused by operator error, why does it only happen on Fords?

A. It doesn't only happen on Fords, a fact that the government itself has acknowledged. In concluding this investigation with the government, Ford presented extensive accident data which proved that accidents can and do happen on other makes, both domestic and foreign. We recommend that the self-sticking label be used in any make to act as a reminder to the driver and we will provide labels free of charge to anyone who wants them.

Q. This happened to me and I know I had my car in park. What are you going to do about that?

A. You can easily check to make sure that your park system works properly. First, move the gear shift lever as far as it will go toward park to check the lever's latching mechanism.

- . On a steering column shift car, the lever should drop away from the steering wheel and toward the instrument panel if you have rotated it far enough toward park. A spring causes the lever to drop automatically. When it drops away, the mechanism latches. The only way the lever can rotate out of park is after you first lift the gear shift lever toward the steering wheel. It just can't do that itself.

- . On a floor shift car, the release button will pop out if you have moved the lever far enough toward park. That button controls a latch mechanism that makes sure the lever can't move toward reverse by itself. You have to push the release button before the lever can be moved out of park. (Note: 1981 Escort and Lynx do not have a release button - their operation is described in the Owners Manuals).

Second, make sure the system works by stopping on a hill and shifting into park so that the lever latches. If the system is working properly, the vehicle will roll down hill no more than a few inches before the mechanism inside the transmission clicks into place and the vehicle stops. If it doesn't, the parking mechanism is out of order and should be repaired immediately.

Q. I have had previous transmission repairs at a transmission shop - how can I be assured that the transmission park mechanism is O.K.?

A. (Follow the steps detailed in the previous question to check the operation of the park mechanism). If you have any doubts about the operation of the park mechanism, you should see the transmission shop that worked on the transmission, or bring it into the dealership.

Q. Why do I have to put on the parking brake and shut off the engine everytime I get out of my vehicle?

A. A park system that is not broken or not grossly out of adjustment will hold your vehicle even if you don't use the parking brake or shut off the engine. All you have to do is put the lever in park. However, it is bad driving practice to rely exclusively on the park system because:

(continued)

- . Children left alone in or who enter an unlocked vehicle to play may pull the shift lever out of park.
- . Even good drivers can be distracted or be in a hurry and fail to put the car in park.
- . Parts can get broken or worn out in the park system so that it won't work properly.

Don't take needless chances when a few extra seconds is all that's required to be sure your vehicle is securely parked. These are not new instructions. Vehicle manufacturers, including Ford, have recommended the practice in their owners manuals for many years.

- Q. Why send a "reminder" when the government said the cars are defective?
- A. Before giving Ford and others an opportunity to be heard, the government issued what is called an "initial" or tentative defect determination. After giving Ford and other parties a chance to present facts, it concluded the investigation and did not finally determine the cars were defective. The letter and reminder label, are being mailed as a result of an agreement between Ford and the government that this was the only appropriate thing that could be done to reduce the incidence of driver error.
- Q. I read in the newspaper that the government did find a defect, that Ford cars do have a tendency to jump out of park, and that Ford was just left off the hook because of poor car sales. Is that true?
- A. It's not true. Vehicles simply cannot "jump out of park" if a driver puts them in park to begin with. Check your own car and you'll see that the latch mechanism works. There has been great controversy over this issue in the media and that's one of the reasons Ford is mailing this letter; we hope that it will eliminate the misconceptions and concerns some drivers may have that, even though they put their vehicle in park, it might jump out. That can't happen.
- Q. I read in the newspaper that there is a cheap repair available to keep a car from jumping out of park and that Ford has just refused to acknowledge it. What is that?
- A. There can be no mechanical "fix" for a non-existent problem; cars cannot jump out of park to begin with. Ford has looked for ways to change the system so that it cannot be misused (e.g., something that would cause the transmission to shift to park no matter what the driver does) or so that a car wouldn't move if the driver failed to put it in park, but so far Ford does not know of a practicable way to do that. All makes of cars and trucks with automatic transmissions operate the same way as Fords if drivers don't put them in "Park".

- Q. This label is a joke! Who is going to fix the rear end of my car and the corner of my garage that it ran into?
- A. Try your park system to check that the latch works and the system locks the wheels on hills when the lever is latched in park. If it does, we believe that any damage is your responsibility. If the mechanism does not work, please call or write the nearest Ford Parts and Service Division Owner Relations Office listed in the back of your owners manual.
- Q. I understand that the 1980 and later Ford models don't do this any more. Is that true?
- A. Ford's 1980 and later models like our previous models and all competitor's models still require the driver to put the shift lever in park and if they are not put in park they can still move unexpectedly. Ford did put some refinements in the system in 1980 that we hope may make it somewhat less likely that a driver will make a mistake. The earlier models are simple to use and will work properly if they are operated properly. They simply cannot "jump out of park".
- (The 1980 refinements are intended to exaggerate the signals you get when you correctly put the lever in park (e.g., the lever now drops toward the instrument panel a little more in park when it is correctly operated. If it isn't in park a driver might realize that the lever didn't drop and wasn't in park more readily than on earlier Ford models and on all competitive makes which didn't drop so far). The refinements have no effect, however, if the driver doesn't shift all the way to park).
- Q. What about my 1957 Lincoln?
- A. If you maintain your vehicle properly, and you put it in park correctly, your system will keep your car from moving. We are not mailing a label to owners such as you because we have no reliable way to know who owns very old cars equipped with automatic transmissions. Any Ford or Lincoln-Mercury dealership will have labels for you free of charge if you want to put one in your car.
- Q. This happened to my 1981 Ford. Why wasn't I sent a label?
- A. Ford is sending the label to owners of Ford vehicles that were involved in the controversy with the government about which you read in the newspapers and heard on TV; the ones where there were unfounded charges that they could "jump out of park". We're sending the label to those people because they need to be informed that their park system will work properly if it is used properly. It simply cannot "jump out of park".

All makes of vehicles, foreign and domestic, including 1981 Fords can move unexpectedly if the gear selector lever is not put in the park position. We're very sorry that you have had a problem and we will provide any number of labels to you free of charge for your 1981 Ford or any other automatic transmission-equipped vehicle you may have. We recommend that you put the label in your car to act as a day-to-day reminder to put the car in park.

- Q. If there is no defect, why is Ford losing all those lawsuits?
- A. In recent times, Ford has lost only two lawsuits relating to this controversy. In both cases, witnesses for both sides (Ford and the plaintiff) agreed that the vehicles involved could not have jumped out of park. Both sides agreed that the accidents happened because the driver didn't put the car in park to begin with. Ford doesn't agree with the juries' verdicts in those two cases and we are appealing. We believe that the driver has to assume responsibility for proper operation of the vehicle. (While we don't keep a "won/lost" boxscore for such lawsuits you can be assured that we have won many times more than we have lost).
- Q. Why aren't other companies mailing out the label?
- A. Ford has recommended to the government that it urge all manufacturers to mail out a label because these kinds of accidents can and have happened in other makes, both foreign and domestic. We're deeply concerned with the safe use of our vehicles and Ford is mailing the label because we believe this is the only effective way to minimize the chances of this kind of accident. If you want a label for your (GM, Chrysler, Toyota, etc.), we'll give you one free of charge.
- Q. How can I contact the government on this issue?
- A. The letter that Ford sent you contains the address for the Administrator of the NHTSA (National Highway Traffic Safety Administration) in Washington, D.C.

2140.	CAMPNO	81V008000		
2141.	IND	*		
2142.	BGMAN	1969SEP		
2143.	ENDMAN	1980AUG		
2144.	POTAFF	21000000		
2145.	POTDEF	21000000		
2146.	NDATE	810106		
2147.	NNDATE	810106		
2148.	NODATE			
2149.	TYPE	M		
2150.	STATUS	E		
2151.	FYR	81		
2152.	REMEDY	A		
2153.	INFL	ODI		
2154.	NOPAGE	7		
2155.	ODICSN	C78002		
2156.	DOMFOR	DOM		
2157.	MFGTXT	FORD MOTOR COMPANY		
2158.	MKMODYR	FORD	ALL	1970F ALL
2159.	**	FORD	ALL	1971F ALL
2160.	**	FORD	ALL	1972F ALL
2161.	**	FORD	ALL	1973F ALL
2162.	**	FORD	ALL	1974F ALL
2163.	**	FORD	ALL	1975F ALL
2164.	**	FORD	ALL	1976F ALL
2165.	**	FORD	ALL	1977F ALL
2166.	**	FORD	ALL	1978F ALL
2167.	**	FORD	ALL	1979F ALL
2168.	**	FORD	ALL	1980F ALL
2169.	**	LINCOLN	ALL	1971F ALL
2170.	**	LINCOLN	ALL	1970F ALL
2171.	**	LINCOLN	ALL	1972F ALL
2172.	**	LINCOLN	ALL	1973F ALL
2173.	**	LINCOLN	ALL	1974F ALL
2174.	**	LINCOLN	ALL	1975F ALL
2175.	**	LINCOLN	ALL	1976F ALL
2176.	**	LINCOLN	ALL	1977F ALL
2177.	**	LINCOLN	ALL	1978F ALL
2178.	**	LINCOLN	ALL	1979F ALL
2179.	**	LINCOLN	ALL	1980F ALL
2180.	**	MERCURY	ALL	1970F ALL
2181.	**	MERCURY	ALL	1971F ALL
2182.	**	MERCURY	ALL	1972F ALL
2183.	**	MERCURY	ALL	1973F ALL
2184.	**	MERCURY	ALL	1974F ALL
2185.	**	MERCURY	ALL	1975F ALL
2186.	**	MERCURY	ALL	1976F ALL
2187.	**	MERCURY	ALL	1977F ALL
2188.	**	MERCURY	ALL	1978F ALL
2189.	**	MERCURY	ALL	1979F ALL
2190.	**	MERCURY	ALL	1980F ALL
2191.	**	FORD TRUCK	ALL	1970K ALL
2192.	**	FORD TRUCK	ALL	1971K ALL
2193.	**	FORD TRUCK	ALL	1972K ALL
2194.	**	FORD TRUCK	ALL	1973K ALL
2195.	**	FORD TRUCK	ALL	1974K ALL
2196.	**	FORD TRUCK	ALL	1975K ALL
2197.	**	FORD TRUCK	ALL	1976K ALL
2198.	**	FORD TRUCK	ALL	1977K ALL
2199.	**	FORD TRUCK	ALL	1978K ALL