

Weather 75° F Pollen 19 | Traffic Make ajc.com your home page | Customer Care | Subscribe to the paper

Home News Sports Entertainment Travel Business Lifestyle Obituaries Homes Jobs Cars Classifieds

1 Trick for "Whiter Teeth"!

best-teeth-whitening.com

We often underestimate the importance of having a brighter smile. Aside from your eyes, which **first impression** characteristic do people usually remember **about you**? Think about it! A whiter, brighter smile equals youth and friendliness!

[Click here for 3 Tips for Whiter Teeth!](#)

ajc.com > Metro

[EMAIL THIS](#) [PRINT](#) [REPRINTS](#) [SHARE](#)

Sign up for Breaking News Alerts

[Privacy Policy](#)


SPOTLIGHT WATCHING OUT FOR YOUR SAFETY AND POCKETBOOK

Complaints claim SUV safety risk

By ALISON YOUNG

The Atlanta Journal-Constitution
Sunday, April 19, 2009

Owners of 2004 Ford Explorers have filed more than 200 complaints to regulators about their vehicles' transmissions, with most saying the SUVs shift into reverse without warning and surge backward, federal records show.

Ford officials say the transmission problem has never posed any safety threat and was addressed years ago through a service program at dealerships. But complaints continue, and the issue has caught the attention of the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration.

SPOTLIGHT: BY ALISON YOUNG

• Send us an e-mail
with comments,
questions or ideas

**RECENT COLUMNS**

Medical mistakes are
an unhappy reality

CDC sits on documents dealing with
its reputation

Complaints claim SUV safety risk

ID theft protection not always a
bargain buy

Students exposed to toxic bus
exhaust fumes

• Complete Spotlight coverage,
including product and food recalls

• More health news

"We have not launched a formal investigation. But we are certainly very much aware of the potential problem and have been watching it very closely," Rae Tyson, a spokesman for the watchdog agency, said last week.

Of particular concern are complaints alleging Explorers' transmissions don't fully go into park, then slip into reverse, Tyson said.

On Monday, a trial is scheduled to start in [DeKalb County](#) involving Jessica Mundy, whose spine was fractured when she was run over by her 2004 Ford Explorer after she got out to mail a package in McDonough. She was 22 at the time.

In court records, Mundy, who is suing Ford for damages, alleges she is a paraplegic because of a transmission design defect that let her Explorer unexpectedly shift from park to reverse. The suit alleges that the defect also allows drivers to put the shifter in what appears to be park — but really isn't.

Officials at Ford Motor Co.'s headquarters outside Detroit said in a written statement: "While our sympathies go out to Ms. Mundy and her family, we do not believe the Explorer or its transmission are defective or to blame for this tragic accident. We believe operator

error led to the accident because Ms. Mundy failed to shift her vehicle into Park before exiting the vehicle."

The company points to an audio transcript from a dashboard camera on a police car that responded to the accident in November 2005. As Mundy was lying on the ground, her spine fractured and complaining of serious pain, she said to a police officer: "I was getting out of the car to drop something, that's when I fell and, obviously, I only put it in reverse, because it ran over me and it happened so fast."

Recently, as Mundy reviewed the tape during a deposition, she said that's what she "assumed" happened. Mundy said she believed at the time of the incident she had put the Explorer in park, "but I just logically thought that since it ran over me it was in reverse."

Mundy's attorneys declined to comment for this article.

Court papers note that Mundy's Explorer was one of several Ford vehicles covered by a transmission repair service bulletin issued by the automaker in January 2005. Mundy's lawyers have alleged that the automaker's fix, which was done on the woman's Explorer, could have contributed to the vehicle slipping out of park. Ford's lawyers, in court papers, say the allegation is without any basis.

Ford officials objected to The Atlanta Journal-Constitution writing about the service bulletin, saying it has nothing to do with any safety defect and has nothing to do with the Mundy case.

The bulletin — which Ford calls a "customer satisfaction program" — notified owners that the factory-installed transmission fluid may over time cause their vehicles to experience "delayed/harsh reverse engagements." Ford told owners to take vehicles to dealers, who would install a transmission fluid additive to correct the existing fluid.

 Select carrier
NEW ARTICLES FROM [HowLIFEWORKS.COM](#)

[Facelifts: Is It Possible to Get Similar Results Without Surgery?](#)



[How To Check Your Credit Without Hurting Your Score](#)



[Explanation: How Quercetin Delivers All-Day Energy with No Crash](#)

E-mail newsletters

Breaking news alerts

Mobile edition

RSS feeds

Print edition

Tools and widgets

Search Atlanta homes for sale

[Advanced search »](#)
[Sell or rent your home](#)
Now Hiring: Henry Medical Center

Industry associations are valuable assets
Tackle your fears about job searching

[Find a job »](#)
[Post a resume](#)
**Find new and used cars in Atlanta**

[Hyundai's Genesis is loaded](#)

[Chrysler minivans still set the standard](#)

[Find a car »](#)
[Sell your car](#)
Search Atlanta classifieds

[Browse categories »](#)
[Post an ad](#)
Most Popular

1. [Honor Farmer says dogs should be turned loose on Vick](#)
2. [Thunderstorms today, tornadoes possible Wednesday](#)
3. [Man abandons car, wife, kids after chase](#)
4. [Three sought in carjacking, shooting near Ga. Tech](#)
5. [Half ton of pot seized in Fayette](#)

"The longer that your vehicle is operated with the original fluid, the greater the possibility that your vehicle will experience transmission shifting concerns in the future," Ford said in an April 2005 follow-up letter to vehicle owners.

Consumers have filed more than 200 complaints with the NHTSA about the automatic transmission in 2004 Ford Explorers. Most involve a delayed engagement of the transmission when the SUV is shifted from park into reverse, or into reverse from another gear. Some complaints indicate problems with the vehicle slipping into gear from park — though Ford officials repeatedly said that they read the reports differently and that "none of them claim that the transmission went from Park to Reverse."

According to the NHTSA complaints available online, one Explorer owner said: "when shifted into park will show it is in park but is really still in reverse. This is a major safety issue which has not been recalled." Another reported: "I have problems with the car lurching into reverse and not engaging in park correctly. The car rolls about 2-4 feet when in park..."

"The transmission shifts violently into reverse," said another, who like many urged the NHTSA to take action. "You all are the watchdog, please do your job."

Nobody was injured in most of the reported cases.

Tyson, the NHTSA spokesman, encouraged Explorer owners of any model year who have had transmission problems to file complaints with the agency to help it spot any trends. They can do it online at safercar.gov or call 1-888-327-4236, he said.

"At a certain point we make a decision: Is there sufficient evidence to justify the opening of a real investigation," he said. "We aren't at that point with this particular issue."

Most consumers complain directly to automakers and only a fraction of vehicle owners file complaints with the agency, experts say.

Ford spokesman Wes Sherwood would not say how many reports the automaker has received of 2004 Ford Explorers slipping out of park into reverse. He said the information is proprietary and is shared privately with the NHTSA. "We have not seen a trend with this type of issue," Sherwood said.

Sherwood said consumer complaints alleging park-to-reverse shift problems are not uncommon for automatic transmission vehicles and have also been filed against other makers' vehicles. Automakers often say drivers are at fault for not ensuring they shift fully into park.

In 2002, Chrysler recalled about 1.6 million Jeep Grand Cherokees made from 1993 to 1998 after consumers complained the vehicles could shift into reverse when the gearshift appeared to be in park. In news reports at the time, Chrysler said its vehicles were not defective, but that the company was installing an additional part to make it more difficult for drivers to fail to put the vehicle fully into park.

IN THEIR OWN WORDS

The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration has received more than 200 complaints about the automatic transmission in 2004 Ford Explorers.

Ford spokesman Wes Sherwood said the company has seen no trend indicating any safety problem with the Explorer's transmission. He said problems consumers have complained about to the NHTSA don't have any "direct parallel with what's going on in the court case" involving Jessica Mundy.

Here are excerpts from some consumers' complaints:

- "While the vehicle was parked and the engine was running, the vehicle rolled into the contact's home. ... The mechanic stated that the vehicle had a defective shift indicator and it was replaced."
- "Transmission got stuck in neutral when column shifter was put in the park position. As my wife got out to help her sister with her newborn and baggage the Explorer started rolling, my niece (in the back seat) got scared and jumped out of the vehicle and got ran over. The vehicle hit a pole and trapped my niece under the rear tire."
- "When put into reverse, engine revs, feels like there is no connection to the transmission, as if in neutral, then unexpectedly it engages, causing the vehicle to lurch backward. ... The reverse problem is getting worse."
- "It has become a public hazard to drive. It seems to jump in and out of gear as it wishes with a clunking sound, especially when put into reverse. ... I urge you to please take action so that this issue may be deemed part of a recall. These vehicles are posing a public threat and Ford is doing absolutely nothing about it."
- "When putting the vehicle into park the lever is in the park position; however the transmission is still in reverse."

CHECK OUR SOURCES

[More popular stories »](#)

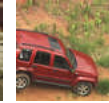
[Put this on your site](#)

1. [Swine Flu and Atlanta](#)
2. [Atlanta Proms 2009](#)
3. [Doctor Is In](#)
4. [Tyler Perry](#)
5. [Spotlight](#)

[More topics »](#)



Stepmom faces the judge



Suspect's Jeep found

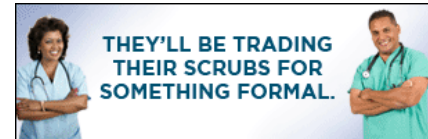


Room & Board makes high-end splash



Supreme Court possible for Sears, Patrick?

[More photo galleries »](#)



[Do Good Locally »](#)

Find nonprofit causes near you

HELP: [Sheltie foster homes needed](#)

GIVE: [Tools for community gardens](#)

[Find more causes »](#)

List your nonprofit

[KUDZU Services »](#)

Find the right people for the job

Enter keyword or business name

Get help with your money: [Find an advisor.](#)

Deals: [Find them on home projects and more.](#)

[Visitor Agreement](#) | [Privacy Statement](#)
© 2009 The Atlanta Journal-Constitution

Search ajc.com...



To review consumer complaints, recalls and service bulletins filed with the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration for the 2004 Ford Explorer or any other vehicle, go to www-odi.nhtsa.dot.gov/index.cfm

REPORT AUTO DEFECTS

To report problems to federal regulators, go to safercar.gov or call 1-888-327-4236.

HOW NHTSA WORKS

The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration has a process it must undertake before opening a formal investigation. It's not uncommon for recalls to occur after vehicles have been on the road for years. Here's what's involved:

Initial screening process: The agency's Defects Assessment Division reviews consumer complaints, manufacturer service bulletins, consumer advisories and other available information.

Panel review: If the Defects Assessment Division staff determines the available information indicates a safety trend or that a "catastrophic failure" is developing, they present their findings to a panel within the Office of Defects Investigation for a recommendation on whether to open a formal safety defects investigation. There is no established number of reports that triggers an investigation, the agency says.

Petition analysis: Separately, any person may submit a petition to the NHTSA requesting it open a formal investigation into an alleged safety defect. Petitions trigger the agency to conduct a technical analysis of the issue. If the petition is granted, an investigation is opened. If it's denied, the agency will publish its reasons for denial in the Federal Register.

Do you suspect a consumer rip-off, government waste or a threat to public safety? Tell us what you want investigated. E-mail spotlight@ajc.com or call 404-526-5041.

MORE ON AJC.COM

[Auto industry on plug-in hybrids and electric cars](#)
[PROMISES, PROMISES: Plug-in cars goal hard to hit](#)
[NASCAR'S KOBALT TOOLS 500: Final turn for Chevy?](#)
[NASCAR fans worried about Chevy's survival](#)
[Ford banks on Ranger, Harley-Davidson](#)

RELATED SUBJECTS

[Automotive Safety](#)
[Automotive Technology](#)
[Ford Explorer](#)
[Ford Motor Company](#)
[Science and Technology](#)

Inside AJC.COM



It's Cinco de Mayo



Find a great place to grab a few cervezas or tequila shots or just absorb some Mexican culture.

Pals at the prom



Metro Atlanta juniors and seniors are making a lifetime of memories. See our latest prom galleries.

MTV movie nominees ...



'Twilight' -- big surprise -- picked up six nominations in the MTV Movie Awards.

[ford explorer transmission](#)

Read 83 user reviews for this car.

www.CarGurus.com

[Get 4 Vehicle Ins Quotes](#)

1 Form, 4 Quotes - Compare Vehicle Insurance Rates & Save. Go Now.

[USaveCarInsurance](#)

[Weekly Ford Explorer Deals](#)

Find Top Car Dealer Offers! Get Discounted Price On New Ford.

[CarBargainsWeekly](#)

Ads by Yahoo!

Subscribe »

Sign up for home delivery
 The Atlanta Journal-Constitution

Customer Care »

Vacation stops, manage subscriptions and more

NEWS SECTIONS

[News](#)
[Sports](#)
[Entertainment](#)
[Travel](#)
[Business](#)
[Lifestyle](#)
[Obituaries](#)

GUIDES

[Best of Atlanta](#)
[School Guide](#)
[Neighborhood Guide](#)
[Wedding Guide](#)
[AJC in Education](#)
[GA Top Public Companies](#)
[Atlanta Home Sales](#)

ADVERTISING

[Advertise with us](#)
[esheets](#)

AJC SITES

[ajc.com](#)
[AccessAtlanta](#)
[ajcPets](#)

WE WANT TO KNOW WHAT YOU THINK

Send us your suggestions and feedback about our site or this page.

Your e-mail address (will not be shared)

Send Feedback

AJC SERVICES

- [Make ajc.com your home page](#)
- [ajc staff contacts](#)
- [ajc Contests](#)
- [Submit event listings](#)
- [Send us news tips](#)
- [Careers at Cox](#)
- [ajc Store](#)
- [ajc Blog](#)

OTHER EDITIONS

- [Sign up for newsletters](#)
- [Sign up for ajcMobile](#)
- [RSS and Widgets](#)
- [Print Edition | A1 image](#)

Atlanta Topics

- [Travel Guide](#)
- [Peachtree Road Race](#)

Atlanta Jobs

- [Atlanta Homes](#)
- [Atlanta Apartments](#)
- [Atlanta Cars](#)
- [Atlanta Classifieds](#)
- [Mundo Hispánico](#)
- [BuenRato](#)

http://www.ajc.com/metro/content/metro/stories/2009/04/19/ford_explorer_transmission_spotlight.html?cxntlid=inform_sr