

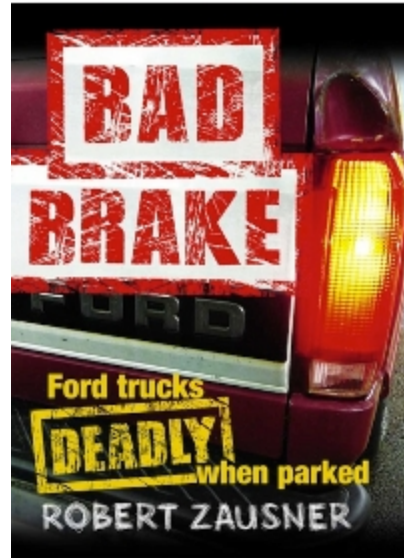
# Bad Brake

## Ford Trucks -- Deadly When Parked

Robert Zausner

### The Brakes

The strange occurrences started in 1992. Ford pickup trucks were moving on their own, rolling off when drivers' seats were empty. The vehicles were running into fences, houses, other cars. First a few, then a few dozen. Then more and more.



Mr. Bremser reported that he engaged the parking brake, leaving the engine running and the transmission in neutral, and got out of the vehicle. He heard a "pop" and the vehicle began rolling down his driveway, striking a fence.

Mrs. Snyder reported that she was removing a boat from its trailer when she heard a "snap." The vehicle allegedly then began to roll into the lake and struck the boat.

The vehicle was reported to be parked on an incline with the transmission in neutral and the parking brake applied. Approximately five minutes later, the vehicle allegedly rolled and struck another parked vehicle.

Reports of "rollaways" were being received by the Ford Motor Co., which then passed them along to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA), as required by law. The reports concerned a particular Ford vehicle, the company's top-selling F-Series trucks, the F-150, F-250, and F-350 pickup trucks. Some of the trucks seemed to have a will of their own, not unlike the title character in the 1983 Stephen King movie *Christine*, a red and white 1958 Plymouth Fury with a murderous mind. There was just one difference. King's story was fiction. These stories were true.

At first the incidents didn't appear so serious. A fender scraped here, a bumper damaged there. And Ford seemed to dismiss the reports that the vehicles' parking brakes were somehow disengaging, terming the incidents "reported" and "alleged." But then some of the incidents began to get serious.

Reportedly, Mr. Lynn's daughter parked the vehicle in the driveway with the engine running and the parking brake applied. The parking brake allegedly failed to hold the vehicle, which rolled and struck Mr. Lynn's house, damaging the vehicle.

The vehicle was reported to be parked on an incline with the transmission in neutral and the parking brake applied. A "popping" noise was allegedly heard, the vehicle began to roll, and subsequently the vehicle overturned before coming to a stop.

The driver allegedly had applied the parking brake and exited the vehicle to shut the garage door. The vehicle rolled toward the driver and struck him.

Some of the incident reports were more than a tad understated, at least by the time NHTSA got them. For instance Mr. Lynn's car had not struck his house, causing unspecified, presumably minor damage. Years after the mishap Lynn still remembered his truck rolling away as if it had just happened.

"I got out of the truck and went to open the garage," he recalled. "Then I heard a 'pop.' Just for one second I turned around and looked at the truck. Nothing. Then, I look again and I see it's moving. It rolls backwards about the length of itself. Now I had this concrete pad in front of the garage that was fairly level, and it rolls off the pad and now it's really moving . . . My daughter, Sally, who was thirty-two at the time, she starts running for the passenger side and I holler, 'Stay back! Sally, stay back!' I had the driver's door open but I couldn't run fast enough to get around it and into the truck. It was going too fast."

That was probably a good thing. Within seconds Lynn's truck rolled off his driveway and down a 27-foot embankment, its tail end striking with such force that the truck bed was shoved two to three inches into the cab, buckling its frame. Damages totaled \$7,000.

"You know what, if I would've tried to get back in that truck I would have gotten hurt," said Lynn. "We were really lucky no one got hurt on that truck that day."

After he climbed back into the truck the parking brake (also called an emergency brake) popped again. "After the repairs were done, I was real careful with it," said Lynn, "and one day it just popped off again."

Without being touched. Spontaneously.