

## **Consumer Reports Calls on Tesla to Disable and Update Auto Steering Function, Remove “Autopilot” Name**

*Automaker is under federal investigation following fatal crash*

Washington, DC ([PRWEB](#)) July 14, 2016 -- [Consumer Reports is calling on the automaker Tesla to disable the automatic steering function in the Autopilot driving-assist system available in its Model S vehicles](#) until the company updates the function to confirm that the driver's hands remain on the steering wheel at all times.

Tesla should also change the name of the Autopilot feature because it promotes a potentially dangerous assumption that the Model S is capable of driving on its own, Consumer Reports said. The auto company is under intense scrutiny for how it deployed and marketed the Autopilot system after a series of crashes. Federal safety officials are investigating a fatal crash involving a Tesla and a tractor-trailer in Florida.

“By marketing their feature as ‘Autopilot,’ Tesla gives consumers a false sense of security,” said Laura MacCleery, Vice President of Consumer Policy and Mobilization for Consumer Reports. “In the long run, advanced active safety technologies in vehicles could make our roads safer. But today, we’re deeply concerned that consumers are being sold a pile of promises about unproven technology. ‘Autopilot’ can’t actually drive the car, yet it allows consumers to have their hands off the steering wheel for minutes at a time. Tesla should disable automatic steering in its cars until it updates the program to verify that the driver’s hands are kept on the wheel.”

Specifically, Consumer Reports is calling for Tesla to do each of the following:

- Disable the Autosteer function of the Autopilot system until it can be reprogrammed to require drivers to keep their hands on the steering wheel
- Stop referring to the system as “Autopilot” as it is misleading and potentially dangerous
- Issue clearer guidance to owners on how the system should be used and its limitations
- Test all safety-critical systems fully before public deployment; no more Beta releases

Consumer Reports contacted Tesla about these concerns, and the company sent this response via email:

“Tesla is constantly introducing enhancements, proven over millions of miles of internal testing, to ensure that drivers supported by Autopilot remain safer than those operating without assistance. We will continue to develop, validate, and release those enhancements as the technology grows. While we appreciate well-meaning advice from any individual or group, we make our decisions on the basis of real-world data, not speculation by media.”

Tesla also defended the safety record of the system, writing that “130 million miles have been driven on Autopilot, with one confirmed fatality.” The company underscored that its beta software development process includes “significant internal validation.”

Last week, the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) sent a letter to Tesla requesting detailed information about Autopilot, including any design changes and updates to the system, as well as detailed logs of when the system has prompted drivers to take over steering. The Securities and Exchange Commission is reportedly investigating whether Tesla failed to tell investors about the crash in a timely fashion.

MacCleery said automakers must commit immediately to name automated features with descriptive, not exaggerated, titles, noting that these companies should roll out new features only when they are certain they are safe. “Consumers should never be guinea pigs for vehicle safety ‘beta’ programs,” she said. “At the same time, regulators urgently need to step up their oversight of cars with these active safety features. NHTSA should insist on expert, independent third-party testing and certification for these features, and issue mandatory safety standards to ensure that they operate safely.”

The most serious of the Autopilot crashes happened on in Florida on May 7. According to the accident report, Joshua Brown, a 40-year-old Ohio resident, died in a collision with a tractor trailer that was making a left turn in front of his Model S. Tesla later acknowledged that the car was in Autopilot mode at the time. On June 30, Tesla published a blog post on the accident, stating “neither Autopilot nor the driver noticed the white side of the tractor trailer against a brightly lit sky, so the brake was not applied.” That crash has prompted investigations by NHTSA, and the National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB).

Consumer Reports has owned three Teslas (2013 Model S 85, 2014 Model S P85D, and 2016 Model X 90D), and has seen first-hand how such “beta” software is transmitted wirelessly into the cars. When software in a desktop computer or handheld electronic devices is labeled as “beta,” it is typically means that functionality is not fully developed and is still being fine-tuned.

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#### About Consumer Reports

Consumer Reports is the world’s largest and most trusted nonprofit, consumer organization driving marketplace change to improve the lives and amplify the voices of consumers. Founded in 1936, Consumer Reports has achieved substantial gains for consumers on food and product safety, financial reform, health and other issues. The organization has advanced important policies to cut hospital-acquired infections, prohibit predatory lending practices and combat dangerous toxins in food. Consumer Reports' independent testing and rating of thousands of products and services is made possible by its member-supported 50 plus labs, state-of-the-art auto test center and consumer research center. Consumers Union, a division of Consumer Reports, works for pro-consumer laws and regulations in Washington, D.C., the states, and in the marketplace. With more than eight million subscribers to its flagship magazine, website and other publications Consumer Reports accepts no advertising, payment or other support from the companies whose products it evaluates.



**Contact Information**

**David Butler**

Consumers Union

<http://www.ConsumersUnion.org>

+1 202.462.6262

**C. Matt Fields**

Consumer Reports

<http://www.ConsumerReports.org>

914.378.2454

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