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GM makes Saturn recall a happy event

Record news services

DETROIT — Saturn, the newest car division of General Motors, announced its first recall recently and seemed determined to make the occasion a cheerful one.

The company, based in Spring Hill, Tenn., said that it was notifying owners of 1,210 Saturns — roughly 15 per cent of the cars it has built — of a possible problem with the front seat recliner mechanisms.

The seatbacks might slip a few notches on their own, "so of course you'll want to get this repaired right away," Saturn said in letters it sent by overnight mail this week to affected owners.

To make sure there is no confusion, Saturn notified all the other buyers of its car by overnight mail that their vehicles are not affected by the recall.

And to be extra forthright, Saturn representatives telephoned reporters in Los Angeles, Detroit and other cities to alert them to the recall, in addition to issuing the usual news release.

Dealers, meanwhile, were gearing up to visit owners of the affected cars and offer to fix the problem at their homes, at work, or wherever they would like.

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The response of Saturn, which has had production start-up problems but received generally high marks for its cars, recalls the full-court press by Toyota's luxury Lexus division when it faced a similar early recall.

"Saturn has an opportunity to really turn this into a positive thing," said Chris Cedergren, analyst at J.D. Power & Associates in Agoura Hills, Calif. "When they go to such lengths, a lot of buyers will actually be somewhat flattered at all the attention they're getting for a \$10,000 U.S. car."

Saturn officials said that they knew of no accidents or injuries resulting from the problem. Mike Smith, general manager of Saturn of Santa Ana, Calif., said that none of his customers had even complained of the problem. He learned of it when Saturn officials divulged the repair program, he said.

"Don't call it a recall," he said. "We're enhancing the seat mechanisms."

The article EM9106 reprinted above is used, together with EM9212 and EM9810, in Figure 11.5c of the STAT 221 Course Materials.