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WSJ News Exclusive | Ford's Assisted-Driving Technology Under Scrutiny as U.S. Probes Fatal Texas Crash

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4–5 minutes

U.S. auto-safety regulators have opened an investigation into a recent fatal wreck involving a sport-utility vehicle that is suspected to have involved the automaker's advanced-driver assistance technology.

The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration disclosed the probe Monday, adding the wreck in Texas to a list of special investigations into auto crashes that are potentially linked to partially automated driving features.

Around 10 p.m. on Feb. 24, a 2022 Ford Mustang Mach-E SUV struck the rear of a CR-V that was stationary in a traffic lane on Interstate Highway 10 in San Antonio, according to a police report. The Ford driver told police the Honda was at a "complete stop with no lights on" in the road at the time, the report said.

The Honda driver was transported to a hospital where he was pronounced dead later that night, the report added. The report said the Ford had "partial automation" engaged at the time of the

crash.

Automakers in recent years have introduced features that take control of braking, speed and other aspects of driving in certain situations, with some allowing for hands-free driving. Ford offers a system called BlueCruise that is intended for hands-free use on most U.S. highways and is available on the Mach-E, but it wasn't immediately clear whether the Mustang involved in the crash was equipped with it.

Ford said it was recently made aware of the crash and extends its sympathies to those involved.

"The complete facts of this event are not yet clear," the automaker said. "Ford reported this incident to NHTSA as soon as we were made aware, and we are actively researching all available information."

NHTSA said it generally doesn't comment on open investigations.

The probe is the latest crash to draw federal scrutiny of the use of advanced-driver assistance systems on public roads in the U.S., and it is the first known crash involving Ford's technology to have garnered the attention of federal regulators.

NHTSA has in recent years stepped up its interest in partially automated-driving technology, and has focused heavily on systems used in Teslas. The agency has launched multiple probes of the electric carmaker's Autopilot system, and has been looking at the technology used in fully autonomous cars operated by ' Cruise unit.

The National Transportation Safety Board said Friday that it was investigating the use of Ford's advanced driver-assistance system

in the Feb. 24 crash. The NTSB said it was investigating the crash "due to its continued interest in advanced driver-assistance systems and how vehicle operators interact with these technologies."

NTSB investigators will examine the wreckage and collect information about the events leading to the collision, the organization said. A preliminary report will be available within 30 days.

NHTSA has enforcement authority over automakers, while the NTSB issues safety recommendations.

Ford introduced BlueCruise a few years ago and says it operates on 97% of controlled-access highways across the U.S. and Canada. The system deploys features such as adaptive cruise control, automatic lane changes and a driver-monitoring system to allow for hands-free driving.

NHTSA's Special Crash Investigations division, which is looking into the Texas wreck, opens more than 100 cases annually to examine crashes involving special circumstances or outcomes from an engineering perspective, according to the agency's website.

The division has launched at least 55 inquiries into incidents involving automated-driving technology from automakers, including Tesla and GM's Cruise, over the past several years.

Automakers are required to report all fatal crashes involving advanced-driver assistance systems to the federal regulator.

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