

Have you driven a 'time bomb' lately?

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5 Dec 2016

Ford is facing a backlash from drivers of its family SUV - the Kuga - after reports of sudden fires in the car which have left one person dead and many more afraid that the same might happen to them.



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Kaveen Jimmy, whose brother Reshall burned to death when his 2014 Ford Kuga caught alight, wants the car-manufacturing giant to take responsibility and recall that specific model.

He has the support of dozens of South African Kuga owners whose vehicles have also caught alight. The Kuga owners have launched an awareness campaign on Facebook on which they have posted stories about how their car suddenly combusted. The campaign has gone viral with more than 2 million page views.

But Ford said it was not considering a recall.

"We take the safety of our customers very seriously. While we continually evaluate our processes for potential improvements, our decisions are driven by the data available. When the data indicate a safety recall is needed, we move quickly on behalf of our customers," the company said.

Reshall Jimmy burned to death in his Kuga in December last year while on holiday in Wilderness, Western Cape.

Two forensic reports said that, based on an inspection of the vehicle in January, the fire was caused by an electrical fault behind the dashboard on the passenger side of the vehicle.

One report, by the police forensic laboratory, said "natural fire" and negligence could be excluded as causes. "An electrical fault is the cause of the fire," the police forensic report said.

The second report, by Fire Wise Consultants on behalf of Jimmy's insurance company, said: "It has been confirmed and accepted by all parties during the primary brief that the vehicle in question was a 2014 model and that this year model did not form part of the vehicles that were recalled by Ford Motor Company."

Ford recalled 150,000 of its popular Escape models in the US and China, citing risk of engine fire. The Escape is known as the Kuga in Europe and South Africa. The recall did not apply to South Africa.

Jimmy's family believe the reports point to a manufacturing fault and they want answers from Ford. Kaveen Jimmy said that if Ford had issued a recall warning - as it did with the 2013 Kuga - Reshall would still be alive.

"They did it elsewhere in countries where the Kuga is sold, why not here?" asked Kaveen.

He believes Ford has deliberately chosen to ignore the electrical-wiring fault.

"Last month another two Kuga's caught alight. We know of 17 other Kuga fires in South Africa.

"People need to be aware that they are sitting on a ticking time bomb," he said.

Jimmy said he wanted Ford to accept responsibility.

"My brother supported my mother financially. Without him the family has been battling. Not once has Ford expressed its condolences or tried to contact my mother to say how sorry it is for what happened."

Jimmy family lawyer Rod Montano said he had met Ford's legal representative in October to reach a settlement in respect of Reshall's death.

"The meeting went nowhere. Instead, their lawyer said he was only meeting me to get a third sight of the vehicle."

Montano questioned the need for a third inspection of the vehicle a year after the fire. The third inspection is scheduled for today.

Ford denies reopening the investigation by wanting to inspect the car this week.

"We are working with the authorities on the investigation of the fire. Until that investigation is complete, we do not have further information," Ford said.

Several other motorists have told how their Kuga's suddenly caught fire.

Johannesburg resident Rojene Roman said her 2013 Kuga caught alight while she was driving home in December last year. "A motorist drove next to me screaming that my car was on fire. I managed to jump out. Within minutes the entire car was ablaze."

She said Ford had taken no responsibility, despite her insurance's inspectors saying that the fire was caused by an electrical fault. "All Ford did was say thanks for informing them of the 'thermal incident'. "This was meant to be the car for the family we want to start but now there is no way I will have a Ford as a family car."

Cape Town resident Shamiegha Uygunh said she still shudders when she thinks about how she and her 12-year-old daughter barely survived. Her 2014 Kuga caught alight just after she dropped off her son at school.

A motorist saw smoke coming from the car. He helped her and her daughter to safety. "If it wasn't for the motorist driving past, I don't think we would be alive today. The way the car 'exploded', it's a miracle we survived."

She said: "I insisted on a forensic investigation. I was told it was ready but when I requested it I was told it would cost me R30,000 for a copy.

"From day one they [Ford] have tried to escape responsibility."

Source: The Times

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