

Mitsubishi, Daihatsu fulfill EPA requirements

BY PETER BLAIS

Mitsubishi and Daihatsu have worked with the Environmental Protection Agency to overcome potential violations of EPA standards and keep the Japanese utility vehicles in the golf course marketplace, according to officials of both Japanese companies.

At the request of the federal agency, Mitsubishi ceased shipping vehicles and advised its dealers to stop selling for about six weeks last summer while modifications to its Mighty Mits line were developed, said Mitsubishi Motor Sales of America Manager of Industrial Sales Robert Hertel. The

company resumed shipments in September and plans to make free-of-charge modifications to the governors of vehicles in the coming months.

Daihatsu America Inc. stopped shipments of its HIJET line of utility vehicles to dealers this fall and is working on modifications, according to an EPA spokesman who asked not to be identified. But Daihatsu dealers were still selling vehicles on hand, according to John Brozek, director of HIJET operations.

The problem revolves around the potential of both Japanese models to exceed 25 mph, the EPA's cutoff

point for a vehicle to be classified as a utility vehicle (not subject to Clean Air Act emission standards) or light truck (subject to standards).

Mitsubishi Mighty Mits are manufactured in Japan as on-road vehicles since that's the purpose they serve there and in most other countries, explained Hertel. The factory installs a governor on U.S.-bound vehicles to hold them under the 25 mph restriction.

However the EPA ruled that a qualified mechanic could tamper with the factory-installed governor so that the vehicle could exceed 25 mph. The government agency gave

the company two choices - modify the vehicle to meet Clean Air Act standards for light trucks or develop a tamper-proof way to keep Mighty Mits under the speed limit.

Meeting that limit to maintain Mighty Mits' utility vehicle status was the more practical alternative, said Hertel. Mitsubishi first removed fourth gear on its new vehicles. But they could still do 33 mph, so the EPA suggested the company also take out third gear.

That would have put too much strain on the engine and made the vehicle un-marketable, explained Hertel. So, instead, Mitsubishi agreed to design a tamper-proof,

electronic governor, said Hertel.

The EPA accepted Mitsubishi's plan and allowed the resumption of shipments and sales last fall, with the understanding the company would make the modifications as soon as possible. Hertel said his firm will begin contacting Mighty Mits owners over the next few months and set up appointments to make the modifications.

The governor can usually be replaced at the course in 15 to 20 minutes, meaning virtually no down-time for owners, said Hertel. Some vehicles may still require that fourth gear be removed, which will take somewhat longer, he added.

Mitsubishi, which began marketing Mighty Mits in the United States just last February, had any sales momentum brought to a grinding halt by last summer's sales embargo.

"Imagine being in the first year with a new product and having sales crippled after just five months," said Hertel. "But it turned out to be a good thing. The new governor is far superior to the old one. We feared the worst and got the best."

Now the company's job is to re-establish confidence in the vehicle with dealers and customers, added the company official. As for the EPA, even though it has the authority to fine Mitsubishi up to \$10,000 for each vehicle sold before the standards were met, Hertel is hopeful there will be little if any punitive action since the company thoroughly cooperated with the government agency.

Although the EPA moved against Mitsubishi under the authority of the Clean Air Act, "For all our trouble, the changes we made will have no effect on the quality of emissions," noted Hertel.

The EPA began working with Daihatsu after the agreement was struck with Mitsubishi, according to the EPA spokesman.

"They're not as far along with it (as Mitsubishi)," said the federal agency spokesman. "We're working very closely with them. . . . We're very close (to accepting a design modification)."

Brozek said most Daihatsu utility vehicles do not exceed 20 mph with their current governors. However, Daihatsu will modify certain vehicles, although what those will be has "yet to be determined," he added.

Media, Melex race for charity

Media celebrities and Sun Cities, Ariz., "VIPs" will careen through the streets of Sun City West in electric-powered golf cars on March 7 in The Second Annual Melex/Sun Cities Grand Prix.

The event, which benefits the Make-A-Wish Foundation of Central and Southern Arizona, will be held at Hillcrest Golf Club.

Preceded by a 7:30 a.m. breakfast, the 9:30 a.m. road rally through the city was held for the first time last year and raised \$6,500.



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