



## Darvish Praises Toyota’s Recall Efforts

*gypsy replacement parts are part of the problem*

Tamara Darvish, Vice President of DARCARS Automotive Group, pushing back against the negative press surrounding the Toyota recall, said: “Yes, this is the first mandated recall for Toyota Motor Sales in its 52 years in the U.S. Last year in the U.S. the Detroit Three had 141 recalls. Does that make GM, Ford and Chrysler bad? No, it doesn’t. It’s just something that happens. And, unfortunately, through the media it became such a sensational issue that it got blown way out of proportion...When Mr. Toyoda was asked to testify before Congress you would have thought they were bringing in Hannibal Lector.”

Darvish, a director for the National Automobile Dealers Association and director and past chairman of the Washington Area New Car Dealer Association, has been leading the charge of Toyota dealers at the recent hearings on Capitol Hill, where she has been an outspoken advocate in the furious lobbying and PR battle to protect the Toyota brand and its 172,000 dealership employees. She spoke at the March 25 WAPA luncheon.

Continuing her accusation of irresponsible reaction to the Toyota recall, Darvish pointed to a statement by DOT Secretary Ray LaHood cautioning consumers to stop driving their Toyotas after a Feb. 23 hearing. One of her customers was driving on the Woodrow Wilson bridge and called the dealership to see if she should get out of her car.

When there is a safety problem, Darvish said, it is important to get to the root of the problem and get it fixed. Anything manufactured can have a recall but it is the fix that is important.

Toyota, she said, responded to the recall by

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Tamara  
Darvish

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holding training sessions for dealer associates. "In the 26 years she has worked in the Darvish dealerships, "never once did a manufacturer ask us to go to training for a recall." Often customers show up with a recall at a dealership, she said, and that is the first the dealership has heard of a recall. However, not many recalls have received as much publicity as the current Toyota recall.

Recalls generally are only 50 percent successful because consumers do not bring their vehicles in for repair. Darvish said they contacted all their customers and urged them to bring in their vehicles, and extended their store hours to 24/7. "We don't have anyone coming in at 2 a.m. but we do have customers coming in on Sundays."

Although she has sold over 53,000 of the vehicles under recall, Darvish said that "I don't have one documented complaint from a customer about unintended acceleration. At the close of business yesterday, I have completed 15,352 recall repairs. I do not have one customer that has come back and said it is not working, the accelerator is still sticking."

If the Congress and government agencies are really concerned about the safety of consumers, Darvish said they would spend more time on the "X" brand parts and accessories sold to consumers. To emphasize her point, Darvish held up a set of mats she bought for her Camry at a local Target store. She asked the sales clerk if these mats would fit her Camry and was told, "absolutely." (Improper mats were to blame in the original Toyota recall for unintended acceleration) However, the materials with the mats said they were proper for use in cars, trucks and vans.

Then Darvish held up the OEM mat for the Camry which had cut outs for the brake and accelerator. "Now, I'm not an engineer and I don't know anything about electronics," Darvish said, "but you can see there is a reason for cutouts in this mat." She said "gypsy" accessories and parts are a safety hazard that has not been addressed by the government. "We have engines blowing up because of aftermarket parts that are not genuine," she added.

She also held up a photo taken by a Toyota technician during a NHTSA inspection of an unintended acceleration in the Washington, D.C. area which showed the replacement mat covering the lower part of the accelerator in a Toyota Corolla. "There is no disclosure on those mats that I bought at Target other than for cars, trucks and SUVs. That's how people get hurt. That's where the focus should be. That's how people die."

Toyota is not suffering in the sales department, Darvish said. Consumers are still buying Toyotas and, she said, without heavy incentives offered by other manufacturers. "We were down last month but we had stop sales for 20 days and 51 inches of snow that hasn't been seen in Washington. And, she added, none of the rental companies have been required to repair their cars. The accident in San Diego that touched off the national furor was, she said, a loner car with gypsy bran mats.

Commenting on her successful grassroots effort to gain passage of a new arbitration law for dealers eliminated by GM and Chrysler bankruptcy proceedings, Darvish made it clear she found it "shocking" that the Obama administration Auto Task Force would call for a reduction in dealerships as part of reorganization plans; that businesses that had been operated by families for generations could simply be taken away.

"It wasn't right, and I knew I had to do something," said Darvish. "I knew Congress didn't get it.

What she did, along with local dealer Jack Fitzgerald and Ohio dealer Alan Spitzer, was form the Committee to Restore Dealer Rights, made up of canceled dealers. The group produced reams of documentation to counter the argument that eliminating dealerships would save automakers money, and furiously lobbied Congress, with the support of Maryland Congressmen Chris Van Holland and Stenny Hoyer, to push for dealer arbitration legislation.

The bill passed the House in December and, in a classic case of the power of grassroots, dealers made over 10,000 calls to Senate offices to insure passage of the bill three days later. President Obama signed the bill December 16, 2009, which so far has led GM to reinstate 661 dealerships and Chrysler 86 dealerships.

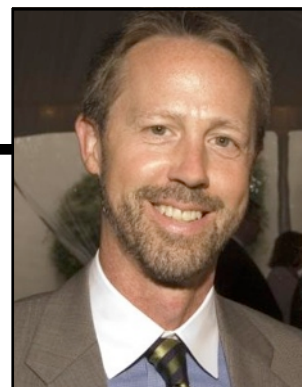
"This is history for next generation," said Darvish, who perhaps not surprisingly, was not one of the dealerships reinstated by GM or Chrysler.

## April 21 WAPA Meeting Michael Stanton President AIAM

Join WAPA at noon on April 21 at the National Press Club, when Michael Stanton, president and CEO of the Association of International Automobile Manufacturers, translates the new fuel economy regulations into consumer-friendly terms and looks at their impact on the auto industry. Lunch will be provided (at no cost) by AIAM

RSVP [www.washautopress.org](http://www.washautopress.org)  
April 21, Wednesday  
National Press Club  
Zenger Room

# President's Message...



**Mark Solheim**  
2010 WAPA

Dear WAPA members,

I'm pleased to report that, according to all indicators, WAPA is alive and well. Our extended membership drive produced surprisingly strong renewals and some new members. And we just compiled results of the WAPA survey, which asked what you thought was most important about our organization. A few highlights:

--The most important thing to our members is the directory (83.3% responded that they "definitely want" it). Good news on that front—we're about to go to press with the new directory.

--Some 61% of members want to see the quality of speakers improve in 2010. In March we hosted Tammy Darvish, VP of DarCars, who gave a lively talk on the Toyota recalls and the problem with aftermarket floor mats. The April 21 presentation from Association of International Automobile Manufacturers is on the new fuel economy regs, and NHTSA administrator David Stickland is on tap for our May 19 meeting.

--Generally, members care more about the speakers than they do about networking. Along the same lines, roughly 60% of members aren't interested in happy hours, while 40% are. (When we schedule the happy hours, I hope 40% of you show!)

--Most members (91%) learn about WAPA events through email. About half of our members visit our website. Only one respondent looks at our Facebook page. (Search facebook.com for "wapa" and you'll see that we have 29 fans. It's a great way to see what's up with WAPA.)

As always, feel free to email me at [msolheim@kiplinger.com](mailto:msolheim@kiplinger.com) with comments.

*Mark Solheim*

*2010 WAPA President*

## WAPA Board 2010

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## WAPA Grapevine...

**Marc Stertz** is opening a consulting business relying on his years of experience in publishing, both in print and on the Web for NADA. You can contact him at M.H. Stertz & Associates, 198 Halpine Road, Suite 1102 Rockville, MD 20852, 301.881.1053.

**Joan Mooney**, is teaching Business Writing at the University of Maryland.

**Francesca Smith, PR Manager for Aston Martin** is on maternity leave. While on leave, PR duties will be handled by Sara Durose: [sdurose@astonmartin.com](mailto:sdurose@astonmartin.com) / 949 632 8277. Fleet Manager, Viana Mehl will handle press drive requests: [vmehl@astonmartin.com](mailto:vmehl@astonmartin.com) / 949 379 3112.