



Ralph Seekins

It's not uncommon for our service department to get a call from an owner whose car or truck will suddenly turn over but not start. Our service advisors will then routinely ask if the vehicle has just been in a fender bender, hit a snow berm or had any other sudden stop or even if just they've loaded something heavy in the trunk that could have jarred their vehicle. Why do we ask? Because there is this little switch in all vehicles that have electric fuel pumps called a Fuel Pump Inertia Shutoff Switch that may have shut off all power to the fuel pump. Let's see if I can explain why this switch is there and how it works.

If a vehicle is in an accident, one thing nobody wants is gasoline spewing all over the place from say a broken fuel line. And that can happen unless power to the electric fuel pump (almost all modern vehicles are equipped with one) is shut off. Unless it is shut off the pump will just keep on pumping until the tank is dry.

FUEL PUMP SHUTOFF SWITCH

A driver may or may not shut off the ignition key when in an accident – particularly if severely injured or knocked unconscious. So, to protect vehicle occupants, the manufacturers have added an impact-activated fuel pump shutoff switch. Get in a moderate to severe stop and, bingo, the switch shuts off the electric supply to the fuel pump. Then, the engine won't run again until the switch is reset. Note here that not every impact will cause a shut-off.

If you don't already know how to reset the switch, here is where you need to consult your vehicle's owner's guide. Some vehicles require a manual reset before the engine will run again. Others can be reset by just using the ignition switch. If your vehicle has a manual reset switch, the owner's guide will indicate where it is and how to reset it. If it can be reset with the ignition switch, it may only take shutting the ignition off and then back on once or twice to reactivate the pump (my Ford Flex is set up that way). Again, consult with your owner's guide to be certain which system you have and how to reset the switch. And, if you have misplaced your owner's guide, most are now available for reference or download on the internet these days. I've personally found it quicker and easier to find

information for my truck or SUV on the internet edition than on the printed one. After all, the internet version is always available at my office desk, at my home or from my cell phone. The manual is usually stuck in the glove box.

Now, here's something I really want you to remember. If you are in a collision of any kind – particularly one in which the inertia switch has shut off the fuel pump – there could be an increased risk of fire when you reset the switch. ALWAYS – again – ALWAYS inspect the fuel system for any leaks after a collision of any kind or after any situation that shuts off the fuel pump.

Additionally, I highly recommend you have the fuel system checked by your vehicle's authorized dealer for fuel system leaks. I have heard of vehicles that only had small cracks in the fuel line that later caught fire – most often while idling but sometimes while driving down the road. Your safety and your life, and those of any passengers with you, may be in danger if a leak – even a small one – is present.

Here's hoping you never have to reset your vehicle's Fuel Pump Inertia Activated Shutoff Switch. But it's a good idea to know what it is, where it is, how it works and how to reset it.

Ralph Seekins has more than 41 years' experience in the automotive industry. He started as a mechanic, worked in sales, and for the past 34 years, has been the owner of Seekins Ford Lincoln.