



The Online Division of The Sacramento Bee

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Editorial: Caution! Sharp turns

Ford learns about ranchers the hard way

Published 2:15 am PST Thursday, January 20, 2005

You don't want to mess with a rancher's truck. These herders of livestock can be crucial customers - and bearish adversaries - for U.S. automakers. Which is why we are mystified that Ford Motor Co. would choose to tangle with the likes of David Raboy.

Raboy, a rancher and software designer from Mariposa County, leases an electric-powered Ford Ranger truck, a distinction he shares with about 100 others nationwide.

Many of these truck users love their electric Rangers. The trucks are quiet. They have few mechanical problems. They release no emissions from their tailpipes.

Sounds like a great way for U.S companies to compete with their Japanese competition. Yet in 2003, Ford decided to end its electric truck lease program and concentrate on hybrid vehicles.

Initially, the company offered to let lessees buy their electric trucks. Then, inexplicably, company officials changed their minds. They sent letters to Raboy and others ordering them to return the vehicles. Some were threatened with repossession.

Raboy balked and kept sending his lease payments. So did William Korthof of Pomona. When Ford wouldn't budge, the two became unlikely activists. Since Friday, Raboy and his wife have been camped out at a Ford dealership in Sacramento. Their truck sports a sign that says: "Save Dave's Ranger EV!"

Ford officials need to get their story straight. Initially, they said federal law

obligated them to retrieve and destroy the trucks. Then they backed off that excuse. Now they are talking about letting Dave and others buy their trucks. Apparently, the engineers at Ford need to work on their handling. The company has trouble doing a nimble 180-degree turn.

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