

Tech Company Alleges Toyota's Autonomous Driving Features Infringe Its Patents

A new federal complaint alleges that autonomous driving features, such as lane assist and collision avoidance in Toyota, Lexus and Scion vehicles, are infringing on patents owned by American GNC Corp., a California-based technology company.

By **Angela Morris** | May 15, 2019 at 05:49 PM



Credit: [rmcarvalhobsb/Shutterstock.com](https://www.shutterstock.com/user/rmcarvalhobsb)

A new federal complaint alleges that autonomous driving features, such as lane assist and collision avoidance in Toyota, Lexus and Scion vehicles, are infringing on patents owned by a California-based technology company.

The plaintiff, American GNC Corp., invents and licenses technologies such as sensors and gyroscopes used in vehicle navigation and collision avoidance systems. It alleges Toyota Motor Corp. and three of its Texas-based subsidiaries are aware that its vehicles are infringing on patents, yet have not entered an agreement to license the technology. The company raised the claims in a May 14 complaint in *American GNC v. Toyota Motor*, filed in the U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of Texas in Marshall.

“We’re just trying to help the true inventors of the technology receive compensation for their inventions,” said Alison Richards of the Global IP Law Group in Chicago, who represents American GNC. “Sometimes in the press, American GNC has been called a patent troll. They’re not a patent troll. They’re a high-technology company that’s done a lot of important work for a lot of entities, including NASA and the Department of Defense.”

Three Toyota subsidiaries based in Plano—Toyota Motor North America Inc., Toyota Motor Sales USA Inc. and Toyota Motor Engineering & Manufacturing North America Inc.—are defendants along with Japan-based Toyota Motor Corp.

“Toyota has not yet been served with this lawsuit so we have no further comment at this time,” Toyota spokeswoman Karen Nielsen said in an email.

The complaint lists three patents on which Toyota allegedly infringed, involving technology used in autonomous vehicle navigation, for proximity warnings when vehicles get near hazards, and involving a microelectromechanical system to produce accurate signals.

The defendants have known about one of the patents since 2006, and became aware of another patent in 2016, the complaint said. Also, a lawyer for American GNC in March 2018 wrote a letter to a group of Toyota’s top executives and general counsel to notify them about the three patents and the ways that American GNC was alleging that Toyota infringed on the patents, according to the plaintiff. In reply, a lawyer for Toyota Motor North America allegedly said the company was investigating the assertions, but American GNC said its attorney didn’t hear back from the defendants about the results.

“Toyota has continued to infringe and induce the infringement” of the patents, the complaint said.

Some of the Toyota features that the company alleges infringe its patents include a sensor that is useful for navigation and electronic stability control, for example, in preventing rollovers or skidding in turns. Another is a laser cruise control system that can maintain a set distance between the Toyota vehicle, and the vehicle driving in front of it. Also, a lane-departure assist feature, which tells drivers if they’re drifting out of their lane and can steer vehicles back to the center. Finally, American GNC alleges infringement from a precollision system, which measures the position of objects in front of the Toyota, and can automatically brake or notify the driver to do so to stop or mitigate frontal collisions.

Angela Morris



Angela Morris is ALM Media's Texas litigation reporter. She covers lawsuits in all levels of Texas state and federal courts. Based in Austin, Morris earned journalism and government degrees from the University of Texas at Austin in 2006, and since then, has worked primarily as a reporter and writer, but also has skills in videography, photography and podcasts. Follow her on Twitter at @AMorrisReports.

[More from this author](#)