Jaguar, Ford Defeat Auto Display Patent Claims

By Scott Flaherty
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Handing a win to Jaguar Land Rover North America LLC and Ford Motor Co., a Delaware federal judge has invalidated a patent on automobile user interface displays, finding that it was anticipated by a car dashboard display that predated the patent.

Barring a reversal, Wednesday’s ruling signals the successful conclusion of a three-year battle for the two automakers, which were represented by lawyers at Latham & Watkins and the boutique firm Erise IP.

The plaintiff, a nonpracticing entity called Vehicle Interface Technologies LLC, is a subsidiary of patent licensing company and serial litigant Empire IP LLC. VIT sued in 2012, accusing Jaguar and Ford of infringing a patent for automobile dashboard displays. The patent specified displays for information like speed and gas levels, and described multiple "pages" that a driver could scroll through using input devices mounted on a steering wheel.

Lawyers for the car companies, including Latham's Matthew Moore for Jaguar Land Rover and Erise IP's Eric Buresh for Ford, argued that there were multiple prior art references that anticipated VIT’s patent, which had a 2003 filing date.

Wednesday's summary judgment ruling picked up on arguments made by Moore, who presented the display in the 2001 Mercedes-Benz E-Class as a prior art reference. The 2001 Mercedes, Andrews concluded, offered a display with submenus that met the definition of the "pages" referred to in VIT's patent.

"Therefore, there is no genuine issue of material fact with regard to anticipation, and the court finds that all of the asserted claims in the … patent are anticipated by the 2001 Mercedes," the judge wrote.

Latham's Moore told us Thursday that Jaguar Land Rover has taken pains to contest what the company views as unsubstantiated patent infringement suits.

"It's a significant victory for Jaguar Land Rover because it has made a practice of fighting against weak patent claims," said Moore. "This vindicates Jaguar Land Rover's willingness to do this."

Andrews' decision also marks the second time Latham has led Jaguar Land Rover to an invalidity ruling in a patent case brought against the luxury automaker by an Empire IP subsidiary. In December 2013, a New Jersey federal judge sided with Jaguar in a patent case that Empire IP's Secor View Technologies LLC brought over rearview video camera technology. The judge in that case found Secor's patent invalid for indefiniteness.

In addition to Erise IP's Buresh, Ford was represented by McGuireWoods and Morris James.

Robert Freitas of Freitas Angell & Weinberg, who represents VIT, wasn't immediately available for comment.