



U.S. Department of Transportation  
National Highway Traffic Safety Administration

**DOT Auto Safety Hotline**  
**Vehicle Owner's Questionnaire**  
To Report Vehicle Safety Defects  
1-888-DASH-2-DOT  
(1-888-327-4236)  
INTERNET: www.nhtsa.dot.gov/hotline

FOR AGENCY USE ONLY 231

Date Received

Repository

27 JAN 2003 7:00

Reference No.  
10004743

OFFICE

Daytime Telephone Number

Mail Address

Evening Telephone Number

**OWNER INFORMATION (Type or Print)**

Name: [Redacted]  
Address: [Redacted]  
City: DORCHESTER State: MA Zip Code: [Redacted]

Do you authorize NHTSA to provide a copy of this report to the manufacturer of your vehicle?  
In the absence of [Redacted] name or address to the vehicle manufacturer.  YES  NO  
Signature of Owner: [Redacted] Date: 2/10/03

**VEHICLE INFORMATION**

17 digit Vehicle Identification Number (located at bottom of windshield on driver's side): [Redacted]  
Make: VOLKSWAGEN Model: PASSAT Model Year: 2002

Date Purchased: 1-14-2002 Dealer's Name and Telephone Number: Quick Works Inc, 617 773 8000  
Original Owner:  Dealer's City: Quincy MA 02269 State: MA Zip Code: 02269  
Engine: No. Cylinders: 4 Fuel Type: GAS

Transmission Type: AUTO  Antilock Brakes  Cruise Control  
Powertrain: 170 HP 1.8 L TURBO 20 VALVE FUEL INJECTED  
Vehicle Component Code: 116000 ELECTRICAL SYSTEM:IGNITION  
Multiple Failure: 4 Faulty Ignition Coils

**FAILED COMPONENT(S)/PART(S) INFORMATION**

Incident Date(s): 1/9/03 Failure Mileage: 12000 Failure Speed: 20 MPH  
ON Side Street, Car Suddenly Began Running Very Rough - Speed dropped to 25 MPH + Engine Light came on

**ADDITIONAL ITEMS TO BE COMPLETED WHEN REPORTING A TIRE FAILURE**

Tire Make: [Redacted] Tire Model (Name or Number): [Redacted] Tire Size (Example P215/65R15): [Redacted]  
DOT No. (Example: DOTM1A5ABC0361): [Redacted]  Original Equipment  Prior Repair Failure Location: [Redacted]  
Tire Component Code: [Redacted] Tire Failure Type: [Redacted]

**ADDITIONAL ITEMS TO BE COMPLETED WHEN REPORTING A CHILD SEAT FAILURE**

Make: [Redacted] Date Manufactured: [Redacted] Model No./Name: [Redacted]  
Seat Type: [Redacted] Installation System: [Redacted]  
Child Seat Component Code: [Redacted] Failed Part: [Redacted]

**APPLICABLE INCIDENT INFORMATION**

(Please describe in detail the incident(s), failure(s), crash(es), and injury(ies).)

Crash:  Yes  No Fire:  Yes  No  
Number of Persons Injured: 0 Number of Deaths: 0 Reported to Police: N

Narrative Description of Incident(s), Crash(es), and Injury(ies).  
Please describe (1) events leading up to the failure, (2) failure and its consequences, and (3) what was done to correct the failure; (a, parts repaired or replaced (and if old part is available)).

WHILE TRAVELING VEHICLE RIDING ROUGH, ENGINE INDICATION LIGHT FLASHING. VEHICLE WOULD NOT TRAVEL OVER 5 MPH. VEHICLE WAS SERVICED, AND TECHNICIAN NOTICED IGNITION COIL PACKS NEEDED TO BE REPLACED. PLEASE PROVIDE FURTHER INFORMATION. \*AK  
The car contains 4 ignition coils - All are faulty. They don't all fail at the same time. Manufacturer's policy is to replace faulty coils only as they fail. Consequently my car will break down 3 more times. VW will NOT replace known defective parts. My car is therefore UNSAFE + UNRELIABLE.

Include, if available: Police/Fire Department Report, Photos, and Repair Invoice. ATTACH ADDITIONAL SHEETS IF NECESSARY

The Privacy Act of 1974 (Public Law 93-502) This information is requested pursuant to authority vested in the National Highway Traffic Safety Act and subsequent amendments. You are under no obligation to respond to this questionnaire. Your response may be used to assist the NHTSA in determining whether a manufacturer should take appropriate action to correct a safety defect. If the NHTSA proceeds with administrative enforcement or litigation against a manufacturer, your response, or a statistical summary thereof, may be used in support of the agency's action.

# Automotive

BOSTON SUNDAY GLOBE, JANUARY 26, 2003

**K** Trucks K30  
Special occasions K37  
Business opportunities K38  
Market basket K39

+32

## No easy fix for failing ignition coils in Audis, VWs

ROYAL FORD

One man, looking to escape his monolithic SUV but wanting to tackle slippery New England weather with all-wheel drive, opted for an Audi A4. A shrill couple, baby on the horizon, and for a good price, reliability, and a bit of sporty performance and class Volkswagen Passat. The Passat also caught the engineer's eye: a Marlborough father whose two sons were finally of expensive braces and, though an expert of much, was able to raise expectations from the worn seat of the violet Cavalier he had been driving for years.

Hearts are not happy stories. They are among more than half a million people who purchased 2001 and

year runs) to yank out all the bad coils and put in good ones.

So what are they doing?

If a coil fails, the owner has to limp or be towed to his or her dealer and get the bad coil replaced. Very few will replace the other "bad" coils that have not yet failed. That means drivers leave their dealer ship with one good coil and a sense of great trepidation because three other ready-to-fail coils lurk beneath the hood.

Tony Fouldapour, a Volkswagen spokesman, acknowledged that a second coil failure means a second trip to the dealership—and I assume a third and fourth.

"It's not a situation we necessarily like," Fouldapour said, but added that with production limits, "We're just trying to get people back on the road as fast as possible." And for those whose cars can't be fixed quickly, VW and Audi are picking up the tabs on rental or loaner cars.

**If a coil fails, the owner has to be towed to a dealer and get the bad coil replaced. Very few will replace the "bad" coils that have not yet failed.**

There have been some reports of dealers rejecting those whose warranties have expired, even though their cars had faulty parts from the get-go. After all, there are those who drive more than 50,000 miles in a two-year period. Don't take that for an answer.

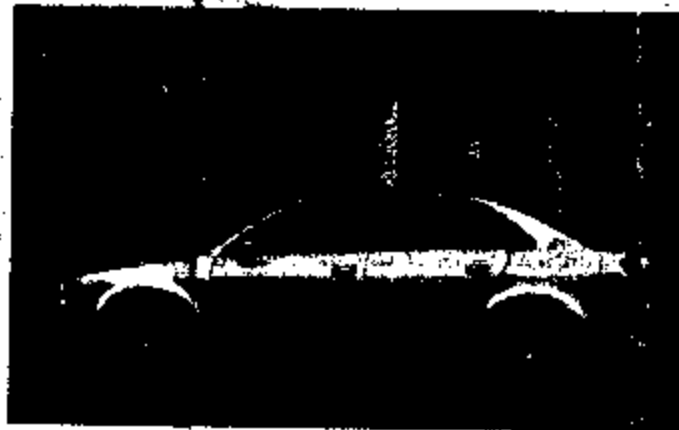
Jennifer Cortes, speaking for Audi, which has 4-year, 50,000-mile warranties, said that anyone who has exceeded the 50,000 miles should not feel left out. Contact Audi, she said. "We will not leave them high and dry."

It is the same story at VW, said Fouldapour.

"On those specific parts, we're going to make good," he said.

But even being finally back on the road does not equate with being there with any confidence.

Kathleen Spencer and her husband, Andrew McLean, of Cambridge, bought their 2001 VW Passat with a baby in their future. They bought it "because of reviews saying it was a great car" and after lots of research. They wanted a car that was not too expensive, was reliable, and did not say "Sooner Mom on Board." (The



Ignition coils in 2001 A4 Audis and VWs with 1.8-liter, 4-cylinder, turbocharged engines, including Audi's A4 (above), have been failing.

tion with Spencer.)

The car failed, was taken to a dealership, and sat for a few days before it was acknowledged that their case was symptomatic of a massive problem with these cars, but that just one coil would be replaced.

The result?

While they use the car for around-town errands, Spencer and McLean will be spending their own time to rent a car in the days ahead for a holiday trip.

"I don't want to get stuck out on some icy road in Vermont," said Spencer.

Steve Lesser, the ex-SUVer from Ashland, chose a 2001 Audi A4 when he went shopping for a sporty ride.

He'd had the car for about eight months when, right after the first of the year and on a Friday night in commuter traffic on I-28, he felt a thump, thought he had hit a pothole. Then, he said, he thought he might have a flat because of the way the car shook its way along the highway. Then the engine warning light came on, and he knew there was bigger trouble.

He called Audi assistance, was told to have the car towed, and when the tow truck had him hooked up, he climbed in with the truck driver.

"I've been towing two or three of these

ones since the driver asked him if he had heard about the coil problem.

They rolled with the Audi to his dealership, Bernard Audi in Mattick, and pulled into a yard basically closed for the night except for a yard boy cleaning up.

Lesser said the tow truck driver asked where to put the Audi.

The response?

"Over there with the other 25," Lesser recounted. And the yard boy diagnosed the problem for him—correctly.

Lesser is mad at Audi, not his dealer. "Absolutely, it's not the dealer's fault," he said.

The fault, in fact, lies with the supplier for Audi and Volkswagen, Bremi Auto Elektrik in Germany. They built bad coils. Now they are running triple shifts (only Christmas Day was a day off in recent months) to try to catch up.

Yet it remains unclear what "catching up" means.

Even though Fouldapour said supply has doubled in the past week, most cars are still reflecting the problems of a tight supply.

"The supply situation is getting better," he said. "I couldn't have said that a month ago."

Will there ever come a time when emergency demand forces people with

get them replaced, free of charge, for a year or more of time, for a sense of reliability, the faith in the car they have purchased?

They're willing. And why not a recall? Volkswagen does not see this as a recall issue, said Fouldapour, because recall issues are safety issues and, he said, this is not a safety issue.

I'd argue with that, given that I wouldn't want to find myself limping along Route 128 in high speed commuter traffic. Or crawling through Franconia Notch in New Hampshire, cold wind howling, late at night, returning from a ski trip.

There has been some buzz on the Internet that the coil problem is actually a problem originating elsewhere in the car — notably the ECU or computer "brain" for the car. Fouldapour said that is not correct, that it is strictly "a coil problem."

Of course, the Internet is abuzz with this controversy, and I wonder, without the Internet, how long it would have taken for this problem to reach critical mass.

A sampling from the Internet:

"Please tell me how is it that a car that is exactly one year old... has to be towed?"

"I tried this morning as they towed my car for the second time in five weeks. It's only 18 months old."

Douglas Philpott, the engineer from Marlborough who bought a 2002 Passat after his boys got out of braces and he got out of that well-worn Cavalier, might be considered one of the lucky ones.

His car failed back in September, before the epidemic had spread so widely, and he got all four coils replaced.

Yet he does not have faith in his car — and in the you-can-look-it-up department, lemon laws are based on the notion that when you buy a car, you purchase "more than the sum of its parts," you also purchase faith. Do I smell class action suit here?

"I keep my fingers crossed every time I start it," Philpott said of the time he spends in the car that was the glorious step up from the Chevy he drove for 12 years.

Royal Ford can be reached at

**THE ATTACHMENTS TO THIS  
DOCUMENT HAVE BEEN REMOVED  
TO PROTECT UNWARRANTED  
INVASION OF PERSONAL PRIVACY  
PURSUANT TO EXEMPTION 6 OF  
THE FREEDOM OF INFORMATION  
ACT (FOIA), 5 U.S.C. 552(b)(6).**