



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 100192

Date Received

2004 APR -1 PM 12-20  
10-MAR-2004

Repository ☐

Reference No.  
10062908

**OWNER INFORMATION (Type or Print)**

Name

Address

City

NORTH FALMOUTH

State

MA

Zip Code

Daytime Telephone Number

E-mail Address

Evening Telephone Number

Do you authorize NHTSA to provide a copy of this report to the manufacturer of your vehicle? ☐ YES ☒ NO  
In the absence of an authorization, NHTSA WILL NOT provide your name or address to the vehicle manufacturer.

Signature of Owner

Date / /

**VEHICLE INFORMATION**

17 digit Vehicle Identification Number located at bottom of windshield on driver's side

WDBJF20F5TJ011511

Make

MERCEDES BENZ

Model

200

Model Year

1998

Date Purchased

2/6/99

Dealer's Name and Telephone Number

Trans Atlantic Motors 508-795-4524

Engine: V6

No. Cylinders

6

Fuel Type:

DIESEL

Original Owner

Dealer's City

State

Zip Code

Transmission Type

AUTO

☒ Antilock Brakes

☒ Cruise Control

Powertrain

REAR WHEEL

Vehicle Component Code

181100 STRUCTURE: FRAME AND MEMBERS: UNDERBODY SHIELDS

Multiple Failure: 3

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

Incident Date(s)

4/03  
2/04

Failure Mileage

160000

Failure Speed

5-10 mph

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

Tire Make

Tire Model (Name or Number)

Tire Size (Example P215/B5R15)

DOT No. (Example: DOTM15ABC038)

☐ Original Equipment

☐ Prior Repair

Failure Location:

Tire Component Code

Tire Failure Type

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

Make:

Date Manufactured:

Model No./Name:

Seat Type:

Installation System:

Child Seat Component Code:

Failed Part:

**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

Number of Deaths

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; i.e. parts repaired or replaced (and if old part is available).

WELDED BRACKET RUSTED, AND IN APRIL 2003, LEFT HAND COIL SPRING BRACKET FAILED. ALSO, IN MARCH 2004, RIGHT HAND COIL SPRING BRACKET FAILED. \*AK

see attached complete description

Cheney

Include, if available: Police/Fire Department Report, Photos, and Repair Invoice.

ATTACH ADDITIONAL SHEETS IF NECESSARY

The Privacy Act of 1974 (Public Law 93-579) 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.

March 25, 2004

North Falmouth, MA

H W

Report Related to Spring Bracket Failure

Mercedes E300, 1996, VIN# WDBJF20F5TJ011611

On April 18, 2003 while coming thru Harrisburg, PA on a return trip – then nearly 400 miles from home – with two friends the first spring bracket failed. Fortunately we were on the by-pass in rush hour traffic traveling anywhere from 5 to 10 miles an hour. Suddenly, the front of the car leaped up in the air, noises were terrible and out of the corner of my eye I could see a large black object fly off from the right side of the car. Just about every light lit on the dash: ABS, traction control, check engine, brakes, and probably others – the speedometer failed as well. We all thought we had hit something in the road, brakes worked but obviously the stability of the car was affected. We could not pull over (Jersey barriers) until off the bypass and onto open highway – when we did stop we discovered that the front end of the car was very low and upon further inspection we saw that the left front coil spring was gone. We were able to limp home.

I contacted the local dealer on Monday where I bought the car (Transatlantic Motors, Hyannis, MA). The salesman, from whom I bought the car, told me the car was too old and there was nothing he could do but would connect me to service. Service said I must have been in an accident and basically told me "I was telling a story"; "nothing like this every happens". They were going to send a tow truck. I said no. I then contacted Viti Motors in Tiverton, RI (I work near there and often get parts thru them) and went in to see the service manager. He was direct and honest and immediately admitted that this failure happens on occasion but that Mercedes won't stand behind it. He said "no big deal". The bracket is available in the parts department and they send the cars to a local body shop to have it welded on and the spring replaced. He said if I knew a good body shop near home, have them do the welding. "Let me know how you make out". It cost me \$100 for the welding and about \$240 for the parts: the spring, the destroyed wiring to the wheel, and the bracket. I did get back to him expressing my concerns that this was a dangerous situation, not only for me with a car that now was fairly unstable but for others on the road avoiding the spring: a 30 lb missile flying down the road. (Fortunately in our case we were not at highway speed nor was the traffic around us. Although we do not know for sure but we assume the spring rolled harmlessly to the side of the road and we did get home but with real trepidation given the handling qualities of the car.) Effectively, now, I was being tuned out by the dealership at this point and I finally gave up – I was simply too busy to deal with it. The service manager was not returning my calls or e-mail and again told me that Mercedes would not be bothered with it. "Not worth it, I tried once before".

Before replacing the left side bracket we checked out the right – it looked fine. On February 19<sup>th</sup> of this year, about a month ago, I came off the highway and left the car outside my office. When I came out, there was the right spring and the bracket lying in

front of the car. I did drive it home (32 miles) but at least this time no wires were destroyed and I had both the spring and the failed bracket. I bought another bracket from Viti motors and went back to the same body shop. He also replaced the spring again because the original spring had a tip missing. It was obvious to both the body shop and me what the problem is: the "ears" from the bracket that are welded along the body capture water behind them and show no visible problems on the exterior. The destruction is totally invisible without actually pulling the bracket off. Once these ears fail, the bracket turns up, is sheared off and the spring goes flying.

This is obviously no fluke, hence I have contacted NHTSA. As far as I know no changes have been made in the entire series of this body style. It should be noted that this year (1996) was the first year with the restyled E300 body style. I feel a moral obligation to get this out there. Again, the car does have brakes after this happens but is very unstable with only one coil spring in place; we were probably pretty lucky that we didn't have to make a panic stop in the impaired situation. I worry more about the flying debris: the spring lifted my car before it went, not sure how the car (s) behind would have fared with a spring thru the windshield - tough to avoid as I am sure it was "bouncing". I often wonder where we would be if the failure happened at highway speed!

I am sure the body shop owner would be pleased to give his take on this situation for further colaboration. Although I do not have the bracket from the first failure, I do have the second one and it is clear evidence of a very faulty design. One final note, I am an engineer myself with two degrees from MIT and believe I speak with some credibility with regard to this design failure.

  
3/25/04