

NVS-216 jls/mjj
Ref. No. 10098952

JUN 1 2005

Dear [REDACTED]

Thank you for your e-mail dated October 23, 2004, concerning a problem you have encountered with your 2001 Dodge Dakota sport utility vehicle (SUV). Your correspondence was received on October 28, 2004. Due to limited resources we were not able to respond to you in a more timely manner. We regret any inconvenience our delay may have caused you.

The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) is the Federal agency responsible for improving safety on our Nation's highways. We are authorized to order manufacturers to recall and repair vehicles or items of motor vehicle equipment when our investigations indicate that they contain serious safety defects in their design, construction, or performance. We also monitor the adequacy of manufacturers' recall campaigns. In order for the agency to initiate an investigation, we look carefully at the body of consumer complaints and other available data to determine whether a defect may exist. We cannot act on isolated problems or resolve disputes between individual owners, dealers, or manufacturers.

We greatly appreciate the report you provided. Reports from motorists are a very important source of information for us. Each report is analyzed and entered into a database to determine whether an investigation into a possible safety defect is warranted.

On July 16, 2003, NHTSA's Office of Defects Investigation (ODI) opened a safety defect investigation (PE03-032) into reports alleging failure of the suspension system, specifically the upper ball joint, in 1998 through 2003 Dodge Durango vehicles. On November 19, 2003, ODI upgraded that investigation to an engineering analysis (EA03-023) and refined the scope of the investigation to include only 2000 through 2002 Dodge Durango and Dakota vehicles. An engineering analysis is a more detailed and complete technical analysis of the character and scope of an alleged defect.

During the course of its investigation, ODI observed that the vast majority of wheel separations occurred in 2000 through 2003 vehicles. This population, manufactured between January 7, 1999 and December 31, 2002, contained maintenance-free upper ball joints supplied by New Castle Machine. A laboratory test comparison of these ball joints to the TRW-supplied ball joints found in the earlier 1997 through 1999 vehicles indicated that the New Castle Machine ball joints were far more prone to separations than the TRW ball joints. This difference is also reflected in field data collected. Field data indicated that 80 to 90 percent of the upper ball joint-related separations reported involved four-wheel drive vehicles. While both vehicle populations are the subject of numerous upper ball joint wear complaints, which NHTSA considers to be a customer satisfaction concern, only the later model years equipped with the New Castle ball joint show a related wheel separation trend.

DaimlerChrysler Corporation is conducting a recall campaign (NHTSA Campaign No. 04V-596) to remedy four-wheel drive versions of 2000 through 2003 Dodge Durango and Dakota vehicles for a defect determined to exist with the upper ball joints, which could result in wheel separation. On February 11, 2005, ODI closed EA03-023. For your information, we have attached a copy of the closing resume for PE03-032, the closing resume for EA03-023, and the summary of NHTSA Campaign No. 04V-596.

Should you encounter a safety-related problem with a motor vehicle or item of motor vehicle equipment in the future, you can contact our toll-free Vehicle Safety Hotline (Hotline) at 1-888-327-4236. One of our representatives may be able to assist you on matters concerning motor vehicle and motor vehicle equipment safety recalls or to report an alleged safety problem. You can also request safety information. If our telephones are busy, or you call during non-working hours, you can leave your name, telephone number, and a brief subject on our recording system. A Hotline representative will return your call.

Additionally, we have an Internet Web site at <http://www.nhtsa.dot.gov> that you may want to visit. An electronic Vehicle Owner's Questionnaire (VOQ) is also available on this Web site at <http://www.nhtsa.dot.gov/ivoq>. This form is for vehicle owners to report safety related problems about their motor vehicles or motor vehicle equipment, e.g., child safety seats, jacks, tires, brake fluid, etc. The reports submitted are transferred to our database and are used to identify safety-related defect trends that require our attention. Also, a summary listing of vehicle owners' complaints, safety recalls, manufacturers' service bulletins, etc., can be obtained at <http://www.nhtsa.dot.gov/cars/problems>.

If further assistance is needed, please contact Mr. Michael J. Jordan, Safety Defects Program Assistant, Correspondence Research Division, Office of Defects Investigation, at (202) 493-0576.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Alberto A. Jimenez", with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Alberto A. Jimenez, Chief
Correspondence Research Division
Office of Defects Investigation
Enforcement

Attachments