



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 1220

Date Received **2005 JAN 24** Repository ☐
03-JAN-2006 Reference No. **46**
10106625

OWNER INFORMATION (Type or Print)

Name **[REDACTED]** Daytime Telephone Number **[REDACTED]** E-mail Address **[REDACTED]**
Address **[REDACTED]** Evening Telephone Number **[REDACTED]**
City **ARLINGTON** State **VA** Zip Code **[REDACTED]**

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 **[REDACTED]** Date **1/24/05**

VEHICLE INFORMATION

17 digit Vehicle Identification Number Located at bottom of windshield on driver's side: **WDBUH8217V [REDACTED]** Make **MERCEDES BENZ** Model **E320** Model Year **2000**
Date Purchased **11/20/99** Dealer's Name and Telephone Number **AMERICAN SERVICE CENTER 703-525-2100** Engine: **[REDACTED]** Fuel Type: **[REDACTED]**
Original Owner ☒ Dealer's City **ARLINGTON** State **VA** Zip Code **22203**
Transmission Type **AUTOMATIC** ☒ Antilock Brakes ☒ Powertrain **[REDACTED]** Vehicle Component Code **102000 POWER TRAIN:MANUAL TRANSMISSION**
☒ Cruise Control Multiple Failure: **1**

FAILED COMPONENT(S)/PART(S) INFORMATION

Incident Date(s) **23-DEC-2004** Failure Mileage **58875** Failure Speed **-0-**
PARKED

ADDITIONAL ITEMS TO BE COMPLETED WHEN REPORTING A TIRE FAILURE

Tire Make **[REDACTED]** Tire Model (Name or Number) **[REDACTED]** Tire Size (Example P215/B5R15) **[REDACTED]**
DOT No. (Example: DOTMALBABC036) ☐ 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;
i.e., parts repaired or replaced (and if old part is available).

THE VEHICLE WAS PARKED. CONSUMER SPILLED COFFEE INTO THE SHIFTER AND VEHICLE WOULD NOT MOVE. CONSUMER CONTACTED THE DEALER, WHO TOLD THE CONSUMER HOW TO LOOSEN THE SHIFTER. HOWEVER, CONSUMER TURNED THE VEHICLE OFF AND IT WOULD NOT START AGAIN. *AK

PLEASE SEE ATTACHED

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 responses, or a statistical summary thereof, may be used in support of the agency's action.

Ref no 10106626

[REDACTED]
Arlington, VA
[REDACTED]

U.S Department of Transportation
National Highway Safety Traffic Administration
Office of Defects Investigation
400 7th St., SW
Washington, DC 20590

Subject: Tablespoon of Spilled Coffee by Shifter Renders Mercedes E-320 Inoperable
VIN: WDBJH82JYYX [REDACTED]
Enclosure:

- (1) Repair Receipt, David Michael Motors
- (2) Google Newsgroups Letter

Dear NHSTA,

Events leading up to the failure

On the evening of December 23rd in the town of Mantoloking, New Jersey, I spilled about a tablespoon of cold coffee into the shifter area of my 2000 E320 4matic wagon. The car was parked and I was reaching for an umbrella before getting out of the car. The cup was the type made for automobiles and was in the Mercedes cup holder, which is located directly above the shifter. The lid was on at the time, but of course there is an opening from which to drink. I sopped up most of the coffee immediately, went to the party that I had driven to and returned two hours later and attempted to start the car.

Failure and its consequences

I was able to start the engine, however the shifter would not move from Park. I pressed the SOS button, and described the problem to the person answering my call. Her first response was, "Oh, did you spill something?" (an indication that Mercedes is well aware of this problem) With her guidance, I was able to insert a ballpoint pen in the designated spot and shift the car to drive, which enabled the car to drive up to 25 mph. When I arrived at my summer home in Mantoloking, I turned the engine off. I then tried to restart the car, but the engine would not even turn over at this point. No dealerships in the area were open on the 24th, so I rented a car so my family could travel to Montclair, NJ where we were spending the Holidays.

What was done to correct the failure

Returning to Mantoloking on Sunday, I arranged for AAA to tow the car to David Michael Motors of Freehold, NJ where it was repaired by replacing the shifter on Monday, December 27th for a fee of \$801.19.

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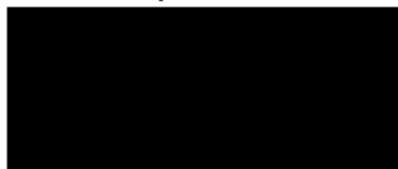
Safety Implication and design flaw

I strongly believe that this is a severe design flaw; and that a little bit of spilled coffee is a normal and expected occurrence and should not incapacitate any car much less a car that promotes a reputation for quality. First the spill shouldn't be allowed to reach the electronics in the first place, second the electronics should be shielded. My other car is a 2000 BMW 528i. That car has leather surrounding the shifter so that a spill can't reach down below. This incident occurred while my car was parked, so the consequence to me was only inconvenience and an unnecessary expense. **What would happen if a spill occurred while the car was moving? Has Mercedes done any testing?**

A search of Google's newsgroups revealed a report of almost the exact same incident that happened four years ago. I've enclosed a copy for your convenience, but it can be found by going to Google's Newsgroups and typing: Mercedes Benz shifter spill.

I hope you will look into this matter and would be grateful if you would advise me of any action that you might take. Please do not hesitate to contact me at the above address if you require more information or if I can provide any other assistance. I thank you for your attention to this matter.

Sincerely



Ref no: 10106626

Sep 14 2000, 12:00 am

Newsgroups: alt.auto.mercedes

From [REDACTED]

Date: 2000/09/14

Subject: Re: The SLK320 is not a REAL Mercedes!!

This story is related in the spirit of good fun. Please take no offense!

I have a "real" Mercedes; an SLK 320 Sport (the doors go thru, etc.) and I truly LOVE the car. Last weekend (took 3 days off to make a 6 day weekend) the weather was beautiful and the road beckoned. Unfortunately for me, the cupholders on the car sit right above the shifter. An unfortunate spill of about 2 ozs. of coffee onto the console rendered the car inoperative!

It went into limp mode because a control unit in the shifter was shorted out. Because of this it would intermittently refuse to go into gear and when it did go into gear it would only go into second or reverse. I waited three hours for the dealer to fabricate a rental to me and take my SLK away (more pathetic with tail between legs than punching death in the throat). God bless MB service. It was then a 5 day wait for the repairs to be completed because of the extent of the damage!

Think or say anything you want about real German cars not having cup holders, or that such a spill could only happen to a complete idiot, but I argue that in a convertible an occasional doweling of the interior is to be expected and with cup holders there will be occasional spills. Upon speaking with Roadside Assistance it became apparent that this was far from being a unique situation. Take heed if you've got the 5-speed Touch Shifter in any MB!

So, my real Mercedes; my SLK 320 which beat the Z3 and TT in the latest Motor Trend (I think) round-up, was beaten by an 8th of a cup of coffee! (And I wouldn't trade it for the world :)



**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).**