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November 27, 2004

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National Highway Traffic Safety Administration
400 - 7th Street S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20590

Subject: Engine Fires In 2004 Honda CRVs

Dear NHTSA:

I am writing to you regarding a concern I have regarding my Honda CR-V. Back in July of this year, I noticed reports concerning vehicle fires in 2003-2004 Honda CRVs. These fires occurred because something was not done properly when the oil change was performed on these cars and the vehicle would burst into flames, usually as the driver was driving home after perhaps a first oil change. The number of vehicles affected at that time was around 30, I believe. The number of vehicles affected to date is small, but if I happened to be driving a vehicle that suddenly burst into flames I would consider it to be a very major problem.

Back in July, I wrote a letter to Honda (copy attached) and their customer service representative telephoned me and assured me that there was no problem, just sort of verbally "patted me on the head" and told me not to worry. I further understand that Honda has sent out service bulletins concerning the oil change situation on 2003-4 Honda CRVs. That may be well and good, but I am very skeptical that all service managers/mechanics that perform oil changes in the US are going to be aware of the problem and perform the oil change in the right manner.

I am also enclosing the "Click and Clack" column from my local newspaper on November 19 describing one owner's dealings with the service manager at his dealership, who seemed to be unaware of the problem!!! So, you understand my being skeptical and worried.

Also, according to the "Click and Clack" writers, who are mechanics, there would be a very simple fix to this problem. It wouldn't be expensive and certainly might well save lives in the future.

I understand also from this column that you have reopened your investigation on these vehicles. I certainly hope that your investigation will lead to a recall of these vehicles to get this problem permanently fixed.

I hope to hear something positive from your Agency. Thank you very much.

Sincerely,

Fair Oaks, CA

M. Argant
12/13/04

Copy

July 9, 2004

American Honda Motor Co.
Automobile Division
1919 Torrance Boulevard
Torrance, CA 90501-2748

Subject: 2004 Honda CR-V

After checking out several different vehicles on the market, I opted to purchase a 2004 Honda CR-V in April of this year. I liked the compact size and relative economy of this small SUV—and I was especially impressed that Consumer Reports Magazine gave it a very good rating for safety.

Today I read in my newspaper and saw on television news a report that the 2003-2004 Honda CR-V's have experienced a problem with these vehicles bursting into flames following an oil change. According to the article, at least 27 vehicles have been affected to date. The television reporter said that Honda pooch-pooched the severity of the problem, saying that it was due to improperly installed oil filters and that it was "small potatoes." Further, I understand that Honda does not plan to develop an engineering solution to this problem and have these vehicles recalled and the problem fixed.

Let me assure you, if my new Honda CR-V burst into flames, I would NOT consider it "small potatoes." I am outraged that Honda does not plan to fix these vehicles so that this problem does not reoccur.

It is only a matter of time before there are injuries/fatalities relating to this vehicle defect and I do not think Honda will consider it "small potatoes" when it is hit by lawsuits and very bad publicity for an automobile company that has such a spotless record to date.

Please, someone, get this problem fixed—permanently—by engineering a solution to fix this dangerous vehicle.

Fair Oaks, CA

cc: Consumer Reports
101 Truman Avenue
Yonkers, NY 10703-1067

SUV's fire problems a concern for many motorists

I was pretty freaked out recently to learn that more than 20 2003-04 Honda CR-Vs had caught fire after their first oil change. I own a 2003.

I called my dealership, and the service manager gave me a story about fly-by-night oil-change places and basically patted me on the head and told me not to worry.

This begs the question of owners who change their own oil. I went in for my second oil change and had a chat with the manager. It was disappointing because he said he had never heard of this problem. When I pointed out that his service manager was well-versed, he said, "Oh, well, we get different bulletins."

I wasn't happy and told him that I felt scared and that if anything ever happened to myself or my family, I would sue his dealership and Honda.

He told me that he didn't want a customer like me and offered to buy me out (at a fair price). I spent a lot of time researching cars before I bought the CR-V. It's not a perfect car (gas mileage/road noise), but it is comfortable and easy to drive. What do you think I should do? Thanks, - Mel

RAY: Geez, I just assumed that those fires were due to Honda's factory gas-

grill option.

TOM: It's a tough one, Mel. Here's what's happened so far: The fires have been reported in 2003 and 2004 Honda CR-Vs. And they seem to happen immediately after oil changes.

RAY: The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, the folks who can order recalls, looked into it last spring. And they agreed with Honda that the problem was sloppy mechanics. Honda says that every CR-V fire had a "double gasket" on the oil filter - which means that the mechanic didn't remove the old oil-filter gasket (the rubber seal) before installing a new one - although the NHTSA's own reports also cite cases where improperly installed (pinched or distorted) gaskets led to fires.

TOM: In either case, that allows the filter to drip oil onto the hot exhaust system while the car is running, when the exhaust is at its hottest, and ... voilà, flaming Honda!

RAY: So the NHTSA closed its investigation. And Honda, for its part, agreed to warn all of its technicians about this



potential problem and insist that they be extra careful when replacing oil filters on CR-Vs. Problem solved, right?

TOM: Well, unfortunately, even after Honda sent out this dire warning, the NHTSA continued to get complaints about

flaming Hondas. Why? Well, perhaps some technicians - despite Honda's efforts - did not get the message.

RAY: Perhaps there are lots of non-Honda technicians at gas stations and independent shops who just haven't heard about the charbroiled CR-Vs.

TOM: Or perhaps the simple jobs like oil changes are left to kids who are working part time after school and are distracted by the latest plot twist on "The O.C."

RAY: In any case, the NHTSA has wisely reopened the investigation. That makes sense to us. The real problem, in our opinion, is most likely either a flaw in the filter design or that the hot exhaust is just a little too close to the oil filter on this car.

TOM: A true idiot-proof solution - and this happens to be my area of exper-

tise - would require abridging the exhaust so the oil could not drip on it.

RAY: But if and until that happens, Mel, you have to be very careful. You have to either discuss this with your mechanic before every oil change to make sure he remembers, or you have to dump the car and get something else.

TOM: If the dealer gave you a fair offer for it, I wouldn't blame you if you dump it. For most people, the prospect of your car going up in flames is not a worry you need to add to your life.

RAY: We'll let you know what comes from the NHTSA's reopened investigation. But meanwhile, those with 2003 and 2004 CR-Vs need to be sure that anyone changing the oil is fully aware of this problem - and how to prevent it.

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Tom and Ray Magliocco can be reached by mail at Car Talk Plaza, P.O. Box 3500 Harvard Square, Cambridge, MA 02238 or through www.cartalk.com. Their "Car Talk" radio show is aired locally at 10 a.m. Saturday and Sunday on KKJZ (88.9 FM).