



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

400 Seventh Street, S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20590

APR 05 2005



New Milford, CT [REDACTED]

NVS-216 mrc
Ref No. 10109612

Dear Mr. and Mrs. [REDACTED]

Thank you for your e-mail to NHTSA's Webmaster, which was received by NHTSA's Office of Defects Investigation on January 13, 2005. We apologize for the delay in answering your e-mail and use of this form letter; however, due to the number of e-mails received and limited resources, we are responding to your correspondence in this manner.

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, sufficient data must exist to warrant the expenditure of agency resources. We cannot act on isolated problems or resolve disputes between individual owners, dealers, or manufacturers.

During the course of its investigation of upper ball joint failure in certain model years (MY) 1997-2002 Dodge Durango and Dakota vehicles, ODI observed that the vast majority of wheel separations occurred in MY 2000-2003 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 vehicles (MY 1997-1999) found 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: 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 (Chrysler) is conducting a recall campaign" (NHTSA Campaign No. 04V-596, summary and details available on NHTSA Web site at www.nhtsa.dot.gov. Select "Recalls from the index) to remedy four-wheel drive versions of the MY 2000-2003 Durango and Dakota. Field data indicated that eighty to ninety percent of the upper ball joint-related separations reported involved four-wheel drive vehicles.



DOT AUTO SAFETY HOTLINE
888-DASH-2-DOT
888-327-4236

I hope this information is helpful. You can contact our toll-free DOT Auto Safety Hotline (Hotline) at 1-888-DASH-2-DOT (1-888-327-4236). One of the representatives may be able to assist you on matters concerning other 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 DOT Hotline representative will return your call.

Sincerely,



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

Enclosure