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EXECUTIVE SECRETARIAT

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 TRAFFIC BY 10:03 AM

Plains, Montana

Phone:

E-Mail:

January 17, 2005

NHTSA

400 7th Street, SW

Washington, DC 20550

Re: 2005 Ford Escape, 1FMYU04182K.

The 2005 Ford Escape touted as, advertised as, and sold as a 4-wheel drive with a sensor that tells its brain when to perform as a 4-wheel drive is not as "Intelligent" as advertised and, with our terrain if we were to continue to drive it in winter conditions, could result in a roll-over. This is a problem, a very big problem, a very expensive problem for us. Both the dealer from whom purchased and Ford Customer Service kissed us off. The Ford representative said, "I'll send your report to the engineering department but you won't hear anything back."

PREAMBLE

We retired to a mountainside property in Western Montana from Anchorage where we never had needed a 4-wheel drive vehicle. The 500-foot, steep driveway, with a sharp "S" turn looked very pretty in the fall of the year when we contracted for the property. We had purchased a new 2WD Ranger shortly before moving. Once the snow began falling that first year in 1992 we realized we had to have a 4-wheel drive to negotiate the driveway. In 12 years we have had six vehicles from the dealer we first contacted including a 4WD Ranger, a 4WD Expedition which we still have, and a 4WD 2002 Ford Escape. We never had a problem getting up or down the driveway with those vehicles.

THE 2005 FORD ESCAPE PROBLEM

In July of 2004 we were at the dealership with our 2002 Escape which we had bought 2nd hand 11-25-03 to ease up on mileage accumulation for our Expedition. We are nine miles from town and do a lot of running around and hope to keep the Expedition for a few more years to use for longer trips and for a myriad of other circumstances where we want the larger vehicle. We were at the dealership on another matter when the salesman and the financial person presented us with some figures suggesting we might want to trade in the '02 for the '05. We mullied it over, looked at figures, and it seemed like a good idea to have the three-year newer vehicle.

Jessica
 1/31/05

We went out to the lot to look at the 2005 and my husband when he opened the door to the 2005 Escape asked the salesman where the 4WD switches were located. The salesman explained that there were no switches and that a sensor indicated when conditions required that the vehicle go into 4WD. He explained that the concept was not new but was to the Escape. The sticker says 4WD as do other papers including the registration and insurance papers. Although the salesman and owner of the dealership have never seen our driveway, they both are aware of the necessity for us to have a 4WD in winter.,

Our first snow was in November amounting to about a two-inch accumulation. My husband drove down the driveway with some minor skidding but didn't think too much about it until the return when he went to make the "S" turn and the vehicle went into a skid which almost took him over the embankment on the one side of the driveway. It had not gone into 4WD obviously, and would not continue up the driveway until my husband coated the remainder of the way with new gravel. Its brain didn't tell it to go to 4WD. With a regular 4-wheel drive, it would have been switched to 4WD at the bottom of the driveway before starting up. We took the vehicle back to the dealer who tested it on a small roadside gully on wet grass and proclaimed there was nothing wrong with the four-wheel drive, adding that there had been no complaints about the vehicle and that we were not the only people in the country with a bad driveway.,

There wasn't another snow storm until before Christmas. This time we had 4 to 6 inches of snow. The vehicle came up the driveway okay but the problem is that it cannot be slowed going DOWN the driveway, using either low gear, or neutral as suggested by the serviceman at the dealership when we were on the phone checking it out. The 4WD does not engage going down. To brake for the "S" turn, the vehicle will go into a skid because it has gained too much speed and once again there is the danger of a roll-over if it were to go over the embankment. The vehicle does not sense that 4-wheel drive is needed to slow it and it gains momentum as it proceeds down. A left turn onto a road must be made at the end of the driveway. A fence is on the other side.

With the other 4-wheel drive vehicles, including the Expedition we have and the 2002 4WD Escape, we start in low gear at the top with 4-wheel drive switched on. The vehicle proceeds down the driveway at a speed of about 4 miles an hour with a foot neither on the brake nor the accelerator. No problem. No skidding.

Both my husband and I have driven approximately a million miles in our lifetimes. We are not neophyte winter drivers. I personally have owned or co-owned more than 30 Ford vehicles with but one other problem model, an Edsel Citation.

The 2005 Ford Escape was sold to us as a 4-wheel drive but the 4-wheel drive is selective and not doing the job it was touted to do and what we need it to do. I am

not technically inclined at all, but it seems to me that for the sensor to react and cause the vehicle to employ the 4-wheel drive function, there must be force against the front wheels. Going down a steep hill there is no or not enough force, nor would there have been force going up the driveway in the light snow that was present in early November. We have certainly had enough vehicles with which to compare performance, including the 2002 Escape.

The dealer's only suggestion was to buy four studded tires. We have never found studded tires to be of help except with icy road conditions. Nor should we be required to incur additional expense. The vehicle was sold to us as a 4WD. It is not doing its job for us and we feel strongly that it is an unsafe vehicle in this type of mountain terrain and, in our case, with the danger of a roll-over at the embankment on the driveway. (The driveway goes up the mountain on one side, slopes down on the other.) We have absolutely no other complaints with the vehicle. It is simply not a 4WD. I can't help but wonder with all the testing that went into the 2005 if it was ever tested going DOWN steep slopes as it was tested for climbing, sand, mud, off road, etc. Was the vehicle tested in mountain terrain in winter conditions?

This has been a very expensive experience for us. There seems to be no solution that would not cost us more money. We see no choice but to turn the vehicle back to Ford Credit. To keep the vehicle means throwing good money after bad. I don't believe when buying a new vehicle that the caveat "buyer beware" applies. We bought this 2005 Escape as a 4WD in good faith. In mountain terrain, in winter, it is not a safe vehicle.

Sincerely,

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