



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

NVS-216
400 Seventh Street, S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20590

MAR 4 2005

NVS-216 aac
Ref. No. 10113005

[REDACTED]
Ormond Beach, FL [REDACTED]

Dear Ms. [REDACTED]

Thank you for your correspondence dated February 8, 2005, concerning a problem you are encountering with your model year (MY) 2002 Dodge Dakota vehicle. Your correspondence was received on February 17, 2005.

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.

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 MY 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 MY 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 MY 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 MY 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.



DOT AUTO SAFETY HOTLINE
888-DASH-2-DOT
866-327-4238

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

A review of the information you provided in your letter, specifically the vehicle identification number, indicates that you own a MY 2002 Dodge Dakota 4x2 vehicle. Therefore, you will not receive a recall notification letter concerning the upper ball joints from DaimlerChrysler since your vehicle was not determined to contain a safety-related defect. If you have not done so, you may consider contacting your local Dodge dealership and scheduling an appointment to have them determine the cause of the noise coming from the front-end of your vehicle.

If further assistance is needed, please contact Mr. Alberto A. Jimenez, Chief, Correspondence Research Division, Office of Defects Investigation, at (202) 366-5211.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Kd', with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Kathleen C. DeMeter, Director
Office of Defects Investigation
Enforcement

Enclosures

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/ s /

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Enclosures

NHTSA: NVS-210: General Response
NVS-216: aaidd ext:6-6903
NHTSA Control No. ES05-001628
ODI Control No. 10113005
Draft: aae 03/02/05
Revised: aae 03/03/05, mjj 03/03/05
Final: mjj 03/04/05
cc:
NVS-200, NVS-010, NEC-110, NVS-216
Subject/Chron/Optical Disk/CRD
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