



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 100148

Date Received

06-MAY-2005

Repository ☐

Reference No.  
10120149

**OWNER INFORMATION (Type or Print)**

Name

Address

City

STATEN ISLAND

State

NY

Zip Code

Daytime Telephone Number

E-mail Address

Evening Telephone Number

Do you authorize NHTSA to provide a copy of this report to the manufacturer of your vehicle? ☐ YES ☒ NO  
In the absence of your signature, provide your name or address to the vehicle manufacturer.  
Signature of Owner \_\_\_\_\_ Date 5/12/05

**VEHICLE INFORMATION**

17 digit Vehicle Identification Number located at bottom of windshield on driver's side

2B3R516R11M

Make

DODGE

Model

INTREPID

Model Year

2000

Date Purchased  
04-FEB-03

Dealer's Name and Telephone Number  
REPEAT PERFORMANCE

Engine:  
No. Cylinders 6

Fuel Type:  
Gas

Original Owner  
☐

Dealer's City  
STATEN ISLAND

State  
NY

Zip Code  
10314

Transmission Type  
AUTOMATIC

☒ Antilock Brakes  
☒ Cruise Control

Powertrain  
REAR WHEEL DRIVE

Vehicle Component Code

D61110 ENGINE AND ENGINE COOLING-ENGINE:GASOLINE:BELTS &

Multiple Failure: 1

**FAILED COMPONENT(S)/PART(S) INFORMATION**

Incident Date(s)  
17-APR-2005

Failure Mileage  
96400

Failure Speed  
30 MPH

HEAVY KNUCK IN ENGINE. ENGINE STOPPED.  
ALL POWER WAS GONE (BRAKES, STEERING)  
CAME TO SLOW STOP

**ADDITIONAL ITEMS TO BE COMPLETED WHEN REPORTING A TIRE FAILURE**

Tire Make

Tire Model (Name or Number)

Tire Size (Example P215/65R15)

DOT No. (Example: DOTM15ABC036)

☐ Original Equipment  
☐ Prior Repair

Failure Location:

Tire Component Code

Tire Failure Type

**ADDITIONAL ITEMS TO BE COMPLETED WHEN REPORTING A CHILD SEAT FAILURE**

Make:

Date Manufactured:

Model No./Name:

Seat Type:

Installation System:

Child Seat Component Code:

Failed Part:

**APPLICABLE INCIDENT INFORMATION**

(Please describe in detail the incident, including location, date, and time.)

Crash

Fire

Number of Persons Injured

Number of Deaths

Reported to Police

☐ Yes ☒ No

☐ Yes ☒ No

0

0

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).

DT: ENGINE SEIZED, AND READ ON RALPH NADER'S CENTER FOR AUTO SAFETY THAT THIS IS A COMMON PROBLEM: "BROKEN TIMING CHAINS AND SLUDGE BUILD UP". TOOK TO A CHRYSLER DEALER, AND THEY SAID THERE WAS SLUDGE AND THEY DON'T COVER THAT. TOOK TO ANOTHER MECHANIC AND THEY REPLACED THE ENGINE FOR \$6000.00. \*AK BOUGHT AFTER MARKET WARRANTY FROM AUTOMOTIVE PROFESSIONALS INC, TOWERS II, SUITE 1206, 1701 GOLF RD ROLLING MEADOWS, IL 60008. THIS WARRANTY CO. MADE ME TOW VEHICLE TO DEALER. DEALER SAID SLUDGE, SLUDGE IS NOT COVERED. BOUGHT CAR WITH 68,000 MILES ON IT. THAT'S WHY BOUGHT WARRANTY. SLUDGE WAS IN MOTOR BEFORE I BOUGHT IT. API NEVER INSPECTED IT. BUT INSURED IT KNOWING SLUDGE IS A PROBLEM WITH THESE 2.7 LITER ENGINES

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

\_\_\_\_\_

Complaint filed by:	[REDACTED]
Complaint filed against:	Automotive Professionals, Inc. <a href="#">(More)</a>
Complaint status:	Forward Business response to Consumer <a href="#">(More)</a>
Case Description:	Purchased 3 year warranty on used car in Feb. 2003 for \$1,195.00. I have been changing the oil every 3,000... <a href="#">(More)</a>
Category:	Warranty / Guarantee
Case opened date:	05/03/2005
Case closed date:	
Desired Resolution:	Have engine fixed or rebuilt or replaced. Honor their contract. I have... <a href="#">(More)</a>

\* \*\* YOU need to respond to this complaint before it can be processed further. Please see below for instructions. \*

**On May 11, 2005, the business stated the following:**  
5/11/05. Company states they are unable to research the facts and circumstances surrounding the claim. Company requests the consumer supply a copy of the Vehicle Service Contract Declaration Page or the Vehicle Service contract number along with the 17-digit Vehicle Identification Number so the matter can be investigated.

**Andrew Walsh**

## Response

**Do you accept the response from the business?**

Yes ☐ No ☐

**If not please enter your rebuttal below (max 5000 characters)**

My name is [redacted] surrounding my  
[redacted]  
[redacted] [redacted] [redacted]

**Faintly**

Items in **bold** are required in order to proceed. Items in *italics* may be required in order to proceed.

Since 01/15/03 [REDACTED] - - - You are not alone —> [Click here see the Web Stats](#)

Visit our New website  
[www.DontBuyOne.com](http://www.DontBuyOne.com)

We are posting your email messages for the president of Chrysler to read.

**Ralph Nader's - Center for Auto Safety's  
Thanksgiving Letter to Daimler Chrysler CEO Dieter Zetsche  
You really need to read this letter**

[Link to Thanksgiving Letter to Daimler-Chrysler](#)

Excerpt from letter - "It's not the consumers who are "defective" in following maintenance schedules; it's the 2.7L engine. Ask what changes Chrysler made in the 2.7L engine when it went from a 3 year/36,000 mile warranty in 2002 to a 7 year/70,000 mile warranty in 2003 to prevent the below 70,000 mile failures so common in 1998-2002 models? Ask why Toyota, Volkswagen and yes, Mercedes, owners are given extended warranties for engine oil sludge damage but not 2.7L Chrysler owners?"

**If your Chrysler or Dodge engine failed while driving immediately call 1-800-424-9393**  
which is the number of the U.S. National Highway Traffic and Safety Institute. They are very interested.

CANADIAN Residents - - - >>> <http://intrepidhorrorstories.blogspot.com/> <<< - - - CANADIAN Residents

**Chrysler & Dodge 2.7 liter Engine Failures - Ask about them at any Auto Parts Store - These engines are Terrible**

We have received email from hundreds of Dodge and Chrysler owners since March 2003 whose engines have failed but Chrysler has refused any assistance and blames everyone for not maintaining their car. Chrysler makes pretty cars but they don't last and worse yet they don't care. This engine is notorious for broken timing chains and sludge build up. Everytime you see a Dodge Intrepid or Chrysler Concord look at the exhaust pipe - if you see a very light trace of very light blue gray smoke that engine is just about ready to go - no warning just a \$7,000 repair bill. What ever you do - don't buy one of these cars.

Tell us about your problem - [email](#)

Chrysler is no longer American owned the Germans have it and they simply don't care about existing customers, particularly Americans. Their stock is way down and not expected to recover for a long time because they have so many unresolved 'warranty liabilities'.

What you can do -

<http://www.datatown.com/chrysler/>

5/21/2005

- Call Chrysler and have them open a case file on your vehicle. This will give you a record of your case with the company. The number is 1-800-992-1997.
- Call the Zone Rep and open a case file with him or her. The Zone Rep is often the most influential person in getting money to fix your vehicle.
- Call NHTSA and CAS and file complaints with them, especially with NHTSA if you are having a problem like transmission, air conditioning or ABS failure. The more complaints they get, the more likely that they will investigate and order a recall, and the more likely you'll get your money back. The more people that call, the more likely something will get done! In addition, someone like CAS can put pressure on the company to fix the problem.
  - National Highway Traffic Safety Institute: 1-800-424-9393
  - Center for Automotive Safety: (202) 328-7700
- Inform the media! Consumer Reports, local media (if your area is small enough)...let them know how bad you are being treated by Chrysler and it's dealerships!

**If your Dodge Intrepid or Chrysler Concord engine seized or quit while you were driving please Email us right away.**

We are working to compile a list of everyone whose safety was jeopardized due to an engine failure. The U.S. National Highway Traffic and Safety Association is very serious about protecting consumers from defective cars that can cause accidents and injury. You should also use the NHTSA link below to file a report. If your engine failed while driving they need to know. Many elderly people drive the Chrysler Concorde and they often will not have the strength to control this large car if the engine fails and power steering and braking is lost.

**The NHTSA is a consumer protection government agency.**

**Click here for link to the U.S. National Highway Traffic & Safety Association online complaint form.**

**OR**

**You can call the DOT Auto Safety Hotline at 1-888-DASH-2-DOT (1-888-327-4236) and a NHTSA representative will record your complaint information.**

## **Intrepid and Concorde Engine Failures - Overview - (more links at bottom of this page)**

**Chrysler Concorde and Dodge Intrepid - Intermittent Cabin Heat Problem may lead to total engine failure -** If you have had trouble with your car heater not operating properly serious damage may have already occurred to your engine. The primary symptom is that the car heater, for no reason, does not blow hot air - then it starts working. If this has been happening it is likely that your car engine has been overheating and causing sludge to build up in the top half of the engine. Ultimately your engine will fail with very little warning. Some symptoms are car starts to burn oil, very light traces of white smoke from exhaust and the engine may seem to run a little rough at idle. If you have had this loss of cabin heat problem you need to have your engine checked for sludge right away.

**Concorde and Intrepid Owners with 2.7 liter engine - Check your engines -** Immediately examine your oil fill cap to see if there is any build up of a black grease like gunk. If you see this immediately contact your mechanic to determine if you have a sludge build up. The Chrysler factory warranty and most of the Extended Warranty plans WILL NOT cover engine repairs if they find sludge in your engine. If sludge is present your engine will almost certainly fail with little or no warning. Cost for repairs averages \$6,500. Class action lawsuits are being filed that may ultimately offer some

compensation.

Chrysler Motor company which is now owned by Mercedes Benz is producing a flood of reliability complaints. The apparent lack of concern for car owners who experience major problems such as total engine and transmission failures is inexcusable. Complete engine failure may happen with absolutely no warning due to sludge build up in low mileage well maintained cars. Owners are typically stuck with \$6,500 plus repair bills. Below is a gathering of links that speak to this and other issues with Chrysler products. Both Chrysler Factory and Extended Warranties have denied coverage when sludge was found. Decide for yourself as to the integrity of the company which promises unsurpassed quality and engineering.

Contact or send links to [drm@datatown.com](mailto:drm@datatown.com)

We have reports that many repair shops will not work on these engines because they are too hard to work on and that others have begun to specialize in them because so many are failing. We are told that Chrysler does not offer what is called a 'long block' replacement and that the engines have to be repaired piece meal instead of having all major components come in one assembled package.

The number below was working on March 12th but we do not know how long it will continue to ring and be answered. This investigator says he has not heard anything about this problem, especially the cooling related issues. Perhaps everyone who has had a major engine failure should give him a call. If they hear from enough of us, something might be done.

**Dodge Intrepid Problems** <http://intrepid.clan-510.org> - Chrysler and Dodge Intrepid Problems Support Group

**Dodge Ram Problems** [http://www.minerich.com/dodge\\_ram.htm](http://www.minerich.com/dodge_ram.htm)  
devoted to educating the consumer on the "NEW DODGE RAM"

**Contact Person at Chrysler:**

M. R. Porterfield  
Special Investigations  
Phone: (248) 944 - 7134  
Fax: (248) 512 - 8748

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#### **Class Action Lawsuits against Chrysler**

- [http://www.brakeshift.com/chrysler\\_lawsuit.html](http://www.brakeshift.com/chrysler_lawsuit.html) - Brake Shift Interlock lawsuit
- <http://www.alexanderlaw.com/class.html> - Rear Hatch door lock failure lawsuit
- <http://www.safetyforum.com/lemon/release3.html> - Fraudulently Recycling Lemons lawsuit
- <http://www.consumersunion.org/products/hb3125sw301.htm> - Sued for Selling Lemons lawsuit
- <http://www.bigclassaction.com/automotive.html> - Premature engine failure due to sludge lawsuit
- [http://www.sptimes.com/2002/07/06/Business/Business\\_digest.shtml](http://www.sptimes.com/2002/07/06/Business/Business_digest.shtml) - Seatbelt controversy

**Engine Failures Concord - Intrepid** - The 2.7 liter engine is one of the first all computer designed engines.

- <http://www.bigclassaction.com/automotive.html> - Premature engine failure due to sludge lawsuit
- [http://www.complain-complain.com/com/display\\_complaint.asp?table=chrysler&id=69](http://www.complain-complain.com/com/display_complaint.asp?table=chrysler&id=69) - Intrepid

<http://www.datatown.com/chrysler/>

5/21/2005

**2000 blown engine, sludge**

- [http://www.complain-complain.com/com/display\\_complaint.asp?table=chrysler&id=78](http://www.complain-complain.com/com/display_complaint.asp?table=chrysler&id=78) - Intrepid

**1999 blown engine, sludge**

- [http://www.complain-complain.com/com/display\\_complaint.asp?table=chrysler&id=48](http://www.complain-complain.com/com/display_complaint.asp?table=chrysler&id=48) - Intrepid

**blown engine, sludge**

- [http://www.complain-complain.com/com/display\\_complaint.asp?table=chrysler&id=32](http://www.complain-complain.com/com/display_complaint.asp?table=chrysler&id=32) - Concorde

**1999 blown engine, sludge**

- [http://www.complain-complain.com/com/display\\_complaint.asp?table=chrysler&id=21](http://www.complain-complain.com/com/display_complaint.asp?table=chrysler&id=21) - Intrepid

**1998 blown engine**

- [http://www.complain-complain.com/com/display\\_complaint.asp?table=chrysler&id=13](http://www.complain-complain.com/com/display_complaint.asp?table=chrysler&id=13) - Intrepid

**1999 blown engine**

- [http://www.carsurvey.org/viewcomments\\_review\\_24736.html](http://www.carsurvey.org/viewcomments_review_24736.html) - Intrepid 1998 - blown engine

- <http://www.dodge-chrysler-auto-truck-engines.com/quality.html> - Rebuilt engine supplier

**Consumer Comments/Complaints**

- <http://forums.vnag.com/mvgrandcaravan1199/messages/746.html> - Minivan complaints

- <http://cartalk.cars.com/Columns/Archive/1996/January/07.html> - Peeling paint

- <http://www.complaints.com/complaintofthedaymarch302001.2.htm> - Reselling lemons

- <http://www.mychryslerucks.com/> - self explanatory

- <http://www.ptripoff.com/DCsays.html> - PT Cruiser wheels

- <http://www.madisoncountydodge.com/1.html> - 96 Dakota - bad experience

- <http://www.flinksnorph.com/chrysler.html> - Plymouth Neon

- <http://www.butlerconti.homestead.com/files/story.htm> - 1995 Eagle Vision

- [http://dodgeram.info/survey\\_dealer/MO/RoyalOaks.htm](http://dodgeram.info/survey_dealer/MO/RoyalOaks.htm) - Concorde 2000

- [http://www.minerich.com/dodge\\_ram.htm](http://www.minerich.com/dodge_ram.htm) - Dodge Ram

- [http://www.carsurvey.org/viewcomments\\_review\\_18577.html](http://www.carsurvey.org/viewcomments_review_18577.html) - 1998 Dodge Intrepid

**News Items**

- [http://consumeraffairs.com/news02/chrysler\\_import.html](http://consumeraffairs.com/news02/chrysler_import.html) - No warranty claims allowed for gray market cars

- <http://www.iltla.com/may2001torts.htm> - Chrysler sued for selling repurchased lemons at auction

- <http://www.unsafebelts.com/mediatools.shtml> - Chrysler seatbelt controversy

- [http://kutv.com/gephardt/local\\_story\\_330160845.html](http://kutv.com/gephardt/local_story_330160845.html) - Seatbelt controversy

- <http://www.unsafebelts.com/mediatools.shtml> - Seatbelt controversy

- <http://www.lemonaidcars.com/car-mini.htm> - Bad Car Buys (Concorde, Intrepid, LHS....and more)

- [http://www.popularmechanics.com/automotive/sub\\_care\\_sat/1999/3/right\\_coolant/print.phtml](http://www.popularmechanics.com/automotive/sub_care_sat/1999/3/right_coolant/print.phtml) - get the right coolant

**Chrysler/Dodge Problem Web Pages**

- <http://www.wam.umd.edu/~gluckman/Chrysler/index.html> - Resource for Chrysler owners who have had problems

- <http://www.cartrackers.com/Forums/live/Chrysler/> - CarTrackers.com - Chrysler page

- <http://philip.greenspun.com/politics/litigation/automobile-disputes.html> - warranty disputes

- [http://www.complain-complain.com/com/list\\_complaint.asp?table=chrysler](http://www.complain-complain.com/com/list_complaint.asp?table=chrysler) - Complain-Complain.com - Chrysler page

- <http://peelingpaint.homestead.com/> - Chrysler Peeling Paint Page

- <http://classaction.findlaw.com/recall/mv/nhtsa1/files/2001/pr09-01.html> - U.S. Dept. of Transportation recall stats

- <http://www.tirekick.com/nov00/recl-700.htm> - NHTSA Safety Recalls

- <http://www.allpar.com/ed/tips/trans.html> - suggestions to Chrysler

**Car Defect Webpages**

- <http://www.autosafety.org/autodefects.html> - common problems and advice (most manufacturers)

**Dodge Intrepid Problems**

- <http://intrepid.clan-510.org> - Chrysler and Dodge Intrepid Problems Support Group

**Dodge/Chrysler Power Train Warranty**

- <http://intrepid.clan-510.org/warranty.htm> - The new Chrysler 7 year/ 70,000 mile warranty, things you should know

- <http://www.arifleet.com/pnews/2002/207-fn.doc>

**Chrysler Labor Issues**

<http://www.thestarpress.com/tsp/business/local/02/sep/0912Chryslerlawsuit.php> - Chrysler workers sue

Send link suggestions to [drm@datatown.com](mailto:drm@datatown.com)

**Chrysler Service Contact:**

1-800-521-9922

M-F 8:30AM-5:00PM EST

P.O Box 2700

Troy, MI 48007-2700

Please provide the last 8 characters of your VIN (Vehicle Information Number)

1E4GP15RW2P511910 ← Last 8 of VIN

**Recall Information:**

1-800-853-1403

M-F 8:00AM-8:00PM EST

P.O. Box 1040

St. Charles, MO 63302-9804

Click on the globe below to see the visitor statistics for this web page - your not alone.





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Washington, DC 20009-5708  
(202) 328-7700  
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## Thanksgiving Letter to Daimler Chrysler CEO Dieter Zetsche

November 25, 2004

Dieter Zetsche  
President & Chief Executive Officer  
DaimlerChrysler Corporation  
1000 Chrysler Drive  
Auburn Hills MI 48326-2766

Dear Mr. Zetsche:

Today is a day of Thanksgiving for most Americans – but not for owners of 1998-2002 Dodge and Chrysler vehicles with 2.7-liter V6 engines. They have been stuck with lemon engines that often fail catastrophically and always with an economic slam. The Center for Auto Safety (CAS) has received almost 500 complaints of 2.7L engine failure, more than twice as many as on 1997-2002 Toyota vehicles with sludging 2.2 and 3.0L engines. on a sales weighted basis, CAS has five times as many complaints on Chrysler 2.7L oil sludge than on Toyota.

On this Thanksgiving day, Toyota owners can be thankful for the 8 year, unlimited mileage warranty Toyota gave to aid their oil sludge woes. So can VW and Audi owners who got the same 8 year, unlimited mileage warranty for oil sludge. Mercedes owners can be thankful for the 10 year, unlimited mileage warranty Mercedes gave to aid their oil sludge woes. Chrysler 2.7L vehicle owners have nothing to be thankful for as Chrysler has given them nothing but grief.

Consider the emotional distress Darla Wilson of Jacksonville FL went through when the 2.7L engine on her 1999 Intrepid failed (despite 3,000 mile oil changes) at 49,000 miles on the way to a funeral.

On October 24, 2004 I was driving my friend, her daughter and granddaughter from Jacksonville, FL to Jackson, MS to attend the memorial service for her fiancée who had passed away suddenly. We were



almost 25 miles from Mobile, AL, when suddenly and without warning the engine began to knock. I immediately pulled off the road and barely made it when the engine stopped completely. We had to wait over an hour for AAA to pick us up and he had to make 2 trips because the law doesn't allow him to have more than 2 passengers in his truck. It was a Sunday and all local car rental offices were closed except for those at the airport. The tow truck driver dropped my friends off at a truck stop, took my car to the local Dodge dealership where we had to leave it outside the gate because it was closed and then took me on to the airport. I got a rental car, drove back to the dealership, unloaded all the suitcases out of my car and put it in the rental, drove the 25 miles back to get my friends. This took almost 4 hours and you can imagine the mental and emotional turmoil that we were going through, especially my friend who had suffered such a tremendous and heart wrenching loss. When I found out the following day that my car's engine was dead I called Enterprise and was told I had to return the car to the Mobile Airport as they do not have one-way rentals. We had to drive back to the Mobile Airport on our way to Jacksonville unload and drop off the Enterprise car pick up a Hertz rental and load that. Everyone was already fatigued and exhausted from all the emotional distress of the past few days. Now I also have to figure out how to get my car home and repaired.

DaimlerChrysler's response to date has been to stonewall and deny there is a problem on Chrysler vehicles but to take care of Mercedes vehicles. It is this combination of stonewalling Chrysler owners about safety and reliability while providing better customer care and safety to Mercedes owners that led to a \$98 million punitive damage award against DaimlerChrysler this week in Tennessee when a collapsing front seat killed 8-month old [REDACTED] in a child seat behind it. What DaimlerChrysler does for its German half, whether it's oil sludge or strong seat backs, it must do for its American half.

To condemn Chrysler owners to the torture of the company's voice mail system shows the insincerity and ineptness of the company's response. It not only does deny compensation for Chrysler's engineering mistakes but also angers consumers so that they will not buy Chrysler vehicles in the future.

Take time out of your Thanksgiving to read some of your 2.7L customer letters. See for yourself the anguish of your customers over 2.7L engine oil sludge and ask why are our engines in similar vehicle not suffering from oil sludge? It's not the consumers who are "defective" in following maintenance schedules; it's the 2.7L engine. Ask what changes Chrysler made in the 2.7L engine when it went from a 3 year/36,000 mile warranty in 2002 to a 7 year/70,000

mile warranty in 2003 to prevent the below 70,000 mile failures so common in 1996-2002 models? Ask why Toyota, Volkswagen and yes, Mercedes, owners are given extended warranties for engine oil sludge damage but not 2.7L Chrysler owners?

Give your Chrysler customers a reason to be thankful this Thanksgiving. Extend their warranties to cover oil sludge damage. It's the right thing to do.

Sincerely,

Clarence M. Dittlow

Executive Director

#### **Related Documents**

- [Thanksgiving Letter to Daimler Chrysler CEO Dieter Zetsche](#)



## Campaigns

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## Sludged

Expensive oil sludge becomes public relations headache for Chrysler, other automakers

By Mark Rechtlin  
Automotive News / April 18, 2005

Bob Melasner is furious. With barely 20,000 miles on his wife's 2002 Chrysler Sebring convertible, Melasner was told that the car's engine was caked with oil sludge. In short, it couldn't be driven.

His Chrysler dealer told him it would cost \$6,100 to replace the engine. And, no, oil sludge wasn't covered under the warranty.

### Who's angry

Consumer complaints to Center for Auto Safety, a consumer group, about engine oil sludge since January 2004

Make	Complaints
Saab	7
Dodge/Chrysler	737
Toyota/Lexus	209
VW/Audi	42

Source: Center for Auto Safety

### At-risk engines

Saab, Toyota and VW have said that these engines are prone to sludge. The Center for Auto Safety contends the listed Chrysler engines are, too.

U.S. Automaker	engine population	Engines affected	Years built
Chrysler group	1 million	2.7-liter V-6	1998-2002

Meissner said that when he appealed to Chrysler group headquarters, he was told he was driving in extreme conditions and should have changed the oil nine times since purchase, not the three times his owner's manual suggested. Case closed.

Saab	132,000	2.0-liter I-4; 2.3-liter I-4	1998-2003
Toyota	3.3 million	2.2-liter I-4; 3.0-liter V-6	1997-2002
VW	426,000	1.8-liter I-4	1997-2004

"We have to get it fixed. We have 2½ years of \$400-a-month payments on a car without an engine," said Meissner, a 49-year-old salesman from Westerville, Ohio. "I guess I have to wait for a class-action suit to get any sort of resolution. I'm telling everyone I know how badly Chrysler treated me."

### Nightmare

Sludge is turning into a customer-relations headache for some automakers. What had been a setback for Toyota Motor Sales U.S.A. Inc. a couple of years ago is creeping into the service drives of several other carmakers. The Chrysler group, Volkswagen of America and Saab Cars USA Inc. also are facing the sludge problem.

It's impossible to know how many sludge complaints have been made. Reporting is imprecise, and automakers in many cases aren't eager to provide details.

Some sludge sufferers complain both to automakers and government officials, so there are duplicate complaints. And some general engine complaints likely are related to sludge problems.

A good guess, based on interviews with automakers and government agencies, is 5,000 to 10,000. Sludge is gelled oil that fails to lubricate engine parts. It can lead to damage, often requiring a new engine.

The number of sludged engines will escalate as vehicles age, engineers and mechanics say.

It can cost as much as \$12,000 to replace an engine, sometimes more than the car is worth. Automakers don't want to eat the cost unnecessarily. So they inspect claims very carefully, which often makes them look like Scrooge to owners.

Some auto companies blame customers who fail to change their oil frequently enough. The automakers say they are protecting themselves from customers who abuse their vehicles, frequently lessees and rental fleet owners.

But consumer advocates complain that automakers are not taking their share of the blame. If it were simply a matter of poor maintenance, all engines would be failing, not specific engine families from certain manufacturers. (See information box on next page.)

"Oil sludge is our No. 1 priority this year," said Clarence Ditlow, executive director of the Center for Auto Safety in Washington, D.C. "It's a big-ticket item with a high failure rate."

#### How many?

Manufacturers are touchy about giving exact numbers of sludge complaints they have received.

Toyota said it had received 3,400 complaints before it extended its vehicle warranty to eight years and unlimited miles on 3.3 million at-risk vehicles in 2002. The company will not give an updated number.

A Chrysler group spokesman said the company has received "fewer than 400" sludge complaints about 2.7-liter V-6 engine, which was produced from 1998 to 2002.

But the Center for Auto Safety has logged more than 700 calls for help since January 2004 from Chrysler sludge complainants, and Ditlow is petitioning NHTSA to order a recall of the Chrysler engines. Several Web sites also show hundreds of complaints about the 2.7-liter V-6 engine.

Chrysler says many of the complaints are duplicates, don't have vehicle identification numbers that match the complainant's name, or simply have "bad data."

"We can help or review cases of those who come to us directly, or if we are provided data to find the customer," says Chrysler group spokesman Sam Locicchio. "If we don't have records, we can't begin to help."

Dealers also are reluctant to talk about sludge for fear of angering the manufacturer. When queried about sludge, one Chrysler dealer in the Northeast snorted, "Don't ask."

The dealer said he had one or two sludge repairs every month, but added that he was a small dealer with a slow service department. Chrysler and Dodge have about 5,800 total franchises in the United States.

The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration has received 185 complaints specifically regarding engine oil sludge. But sludge complaints also can be categorized under the broader category "engine stalls or stops," which have "many, many more" entries, says NHTSA spokeswoman Liz Nebitt.

Rami Amaro, a lawyer in Coeur d'Alene, Idaho, said she has talked to "literally thousands" of consumers with engine sludge problems. Amaro, whose 1998 Toyota Sienna croaked because of sludge, is attempting to get a class-action lawsuit organized against Toyota - despite the automaker's decision to extend its warranty.

Meanwhile, Internet chat rooms are ablaze about claim denials by automakers.

#### **36 miles too far**

One sludge sufferer said his claim was nixed because he changed his oil 36 miles beyond the stated interval.

Another claimant said he was accused of deliberately dumping debris in his engine to create the sludge.

Several Internet respondents said they unloaded their cars when given the bad news by mechanics, leaving the new owners in the dark about the problem.

Many customers say they were turned down because not all oil changes were performed by a franchised new-car dealer. Such a requirement is illegal under federal law, the Center for Auto Safety's Dillow says.

Some sludge victims have resorted to more intriguing methods to get satisfaction.

After fighting Toyota for six months about a sludged 2003 Corolla with 26,000 miles, Mazie Passeri vowed to picket the local dealership and drive the car with the words "Toyota Sludgemobile" painted on it. Within days, the claim to rebuild the engine was authorized.

"I will never buy another Toyota," says Passeri, of Jacksonville, Fla. "The funny thing is, the car trouble itself never shook my confidence in Toyota. It was Toyota's poor customer service and their unwillingness to accept responsibility and make things right that did it."

#### **Slipping through cracks**

Automakers are quick to defend their record of addressing legitimate sludge claims.

Dave Camden, vice president of dealer operations for Toyota Customer Services, admits that some claims have been

"mishandled" and that others "slip through the cracks." "Our full intent is to take care of our customers," Camden says. "A turn-down is due to not making an attempt to reasonably maintain the vehicle."

To help prevent sludge, Toyota in 2003 shortened the recommended oil-change interval from 7,500 miles to 5,000 miles on its vehicles. It also has given lessees incentives to maintain their vehicles properly.

Saab in March extended the engine warranty to eight years for the engines it considers at risk.

Of the companies with significant numbers of sludge complaints, only Chrysler has refused to increase warranty protection or loosen the claim process.

Locicchio said that many of the sludged Dodge and Chrysler engines belong to owners who bought their cars used from a rental fleet. About half of the 2.7-liter engines were placed in rental fleet cars.

Meissner purchased his Sebring new.

DaimlerChrysler is attempting to funnel sludge complaints through mediator Impartial Services Group of Dallas. Two calls to Impartial Services' headquarters were not returned.

After a rash of customer complaints, Volkswagen of America in February loosened its policy for oil sludge claims. VW no longer requires a customer to have every oil change receipt or to follow the maintenance schedule exactly. Dealers have asked VW to install a process that does not require an area service representative to be involved.

"You can't nail people to the exact schedule," says Len Hunt, vice president of Volkswagen of America. "When we came out with it at first, we were a little too rigorous."

"When we hear of any inconsistencies of treatment, it strikes me with horror. But you have to treat it case by case. You have to trust your dealer to be an arbitrator."

#### Communication breakdown

Consumer watchdog Dittow doesn't buy Hunt's explanation. He sees a communication breakdown among the manufacturer, regional service rep, dealer and customer. No one seems to be on the same page. Dittow says he still gets complaints from Toyota owners who say their dealer still does not know about the extended sludge warranty.

"When consumers call auto company 800 numbers these days, they normally get shuttled back to the dealer," Dittow says. "No complaint process is set up. It's intimidating and burdensome."

Communications from automakers also confuse matters. Many owners' manuals cite two different oil-change intervals, one for "normal" use and one for "extreme" use. The former is usually 7,500 miles, but can be as high as 10,000 miles. Extreme cycles can be as short as 3,000 miles.

But the manuals rarely give specific operating conditions for the cycles, keeping consumers guessing and letting the manufacturer off the hook.

Even for those whose sludge complaints have been resolved, there is dissatisfaction.

Brian McNelly, a 38-year-old quality-assurance manager from Stanhope, N.J., spent seven weeks fighting with Volkswagen. His past service records for his oft-repaired 1999 Passat had used the license plate number instead of the VIN, and VW had voided the claim. Finally, VW reversed itself and paid to repair the engine.

Nonetheless, McNelly is unhappy. "The only reason that I was able to persevere on this issue was that I have a backup car. I can't imagine what I'd do if I were in dire need of this car and had to pay to fix it, and then look to get the money back later on," McNelly says. "Now that I have this car back, it's going to sit in my driveway until I can trade it in on something else."



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