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April 16, 2005

U.S. Department of Transportation  
National Highway Traffic Safety Administration,  
Office of Defects Investigation  
NSA-10.01, 400 7<sup>th</sup> Street, SW  
Washington, DC 20590

Subject: Safety-related defect in a 2000 Mercury Grand Marquis LS

My 2000 Mercury Grand Marquis LS developed a safety-related defect in the steering gearbox within the Factory Warranty period. This defect was a defective bushing in the steering gearbox that put a binding motion on the steering mechanism. This binding action was overridden by the power assist on turns, but necessitated that the power assist be used to complete the "return" after the turn was completed. This would cause the overall steering of the car to be very difficult and at highway speeds the car would tend to zigzag with small corrections to the steering - which bordered on being a real safety hazard.

Baldwin Motors in Covington, LA did not diagnose or fix the defect in my steering gearbox in three specific occasions that I returned the car for service during the factory warranty period. On the first occasion the Ford Factory trained mechanic said that the steering was OK and on the second occasion claimed that they fixed the problem with a front wheel adjustment --that did not relate to the problem at all. On the third time the car was returned with the same complaint they said the steering was OK and that the problem was that I was not used to "rack and pinion steering."

Even though the problem was in the steering, Baldwin Motors mechanics apparently never drove the car at highway speeds. I had to eventually take the car to an independent garage to get the problem properly diagnosed and fixed.

It also took four months and six complaint letters for the Ford Customer Service Division to acknowledge or respond to my complaint. Their final response was that they would not reimburse me for the expense of fixing the steering defect because I had had the repair preformed by an independent garage.

For Baldwin Motors to miss-diagnose a potentially serious safety defect three times is inexcusable. I think that Ford Motor Company's (and Baldwin Motors) cavalier attitude about these three specific incidents of a safety related problem deserves your attention.

Sincerely,

[Redacted Signature]

*Handwritten:*  
Buckner  
5/3/05