



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

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

OCT 31 2005

NVS-216 et
Ref. No. 10130047

[REDACTED]
Arlington, VA [REDACTED]

Dear [REDACTED]

Thank you for your correspondence dated July 26, 2005, concerning the problems you have encountered with your 1998 Dodge Durango vehicle. Your correspondence was received on August 12, 2005. Due to limited resources we were not able to respond to you in a more timely manner. We regret any inconvenience our delay may have caused you.

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. In order for the agency to initiate an investigation, we look carefully at the body of consumer complaints and other available data to determine whether a defect may exist. We cannot act on isolated problems or resolve disputes between individual owners, dealers, or manufacturers.

We appreciate this; the report you filed with the U.S. Department of Transportation's Vehicle Safety Hotline (Hotline) on July 26, 2005; and the Vehicle Owner's Questionnaire (VOQ) you returned to the agency to supplement your report, which we received on August 17, 2005. Reports from motorists are a very important source of information for us. Each report is analyzed and entered into a database to help us determine whether an investigation into a possible safety defect or recall inadequacy is warranted.

On July 16, 2003, NHTSA's Office of Defects Investigation (ODI) opened a preliminary evaluation investigation (PE03-032) into reports alleging failure of the suspension system, specifically the upper ball joint, in 1998 through 2003 Dodge Durango vehicles. On November 19, 2003, ODI upgraded that investigation to an engineering analysis investigation (EA03-023) and redefined the scope of the investigation to include only 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.



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

During the course of its investigation, ODI observed that the vast majority of wheel separations occurred in 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 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.

On December 15, 2004, DaimlerChrysler Corporation notified NHTSA that it would conduct a recall campaign (NHTSA Campaign No. 04V-596) to remedy four-wheel drive versions of 2000 through 2003 Dodge Durango and Dakota vehicles for a defect determined to exist with the 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, the closing resume for EA03-023, and the summary of NHTSA Campaign No. 04V-596.

ODI has reviewed its database in an effort to identify whether a safety defect trend exists with regard to problems associated with the suspension system, specifically the upper and lower control arms and ball joints, in 1998 Dodge Durango vehicles. At this time, there is insufficient evidence to warrant revisiting this issue. The information you provided has been entered into our database. ODI will continue to monitor reports associated with this issue and take future action as appropriate.

We sympathize with you concerning your request for reimbursement; however, since your vehicle is not subject to DaimlerChrysler's recall, this does not fall under our jurisdiction. If you have not done so, you may consider contacting your local Consumer Protection Agency, Better Business Bureau, or the Virginia State Office of the Attorney General regarding your request. You may also ask your dealership for a meeting with DaimlerChrysler's district manager regarding your request.

Should you encounter a safety-related problem with a motor vehicle or item of motor vehicle equipment in the future, you can contact our toll-free Hotline at 1-888-327-4236. One of our representatives may be able to assist you on matters concerning 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 Hotline representative will return your call.

Additionally, as you are already aware have an Internet Web site at <http://www.nhtsa.dot.gov> that you may want to visit. An electronic VOQ is also available on this Web site at <http://www.nhtsa.dot.gov/ivog>. This form is for vehicle owners to report safety related problems about their motor vehicles or motor vehicle equipment, e.g., child safety seats, jacks, tires, brake fluid, etc. The reports submitted are transferred to our database and are used to identify safety-related defect trends that require our attention. Also, a summary listing of vehicle owners' complaints, safety recalls, manufacturers' service bulletins, etc., can be obtained at <http://www.nhtsa.dot.gov/cars/problems>.

If further assistance is needed, please contact Mr. Michael J. Jordan, Safety Defects Program Assistant, Correspondence Research Division, Office of Defects Investigation, at (202) 493-0576.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "A. Jimenez", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right. The word "for" is written in smaller letters below the signature.

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

Enclosures