

August 1, 2005

2005 AUG 19 AM 3:26

U.S. Department of Transportation  
National Highway Traffic Safety Administration  
Office of Defects Investigation  
NVS-210, 400 7<sup>th</sup> Street, SW  
Washington, DC 20590

101 34532

Dear NHTSA:

This is to file a formal complaint pertaining to my 1997 Volkswagen Passat. I strongly suspect that the problem I am about to discuss is prevalent in many of the Passats of that year. Even the dealer representative, while unable to help with this problem, recommended that I contact Volkswagen America, which I did, since the problem I was experiencing was so frequent with this model. More specifically, the problem has to do with this model's door locks. I purchased the vehicle in January 2004, after the then owner delayed the purchase long enough to repair the driver's side door handle, which had literally pulled away from the door. In May 24, 2004, I found it necessary to have the passenger side handle repaired at a cost of \$213.68. During the past few months, I have found that the swing portions of all four doors handles remain in the pulled-open position should they not be pushed back in prior to closing the door. In other words, if someone just gets in and doesn't properly prepare the handle on the outside, the door will not completely close. Also, importantly, one cannot lock the doors from inside the vehicle—a most dangerous condition.

Following the advice of the dealer representative, I contacted Volkswagen America by email on May 9, 2005 and spoke to its representative, Gina Farida, on May 11, 2005. At the time, I told Ms. Farida of the previous repairs that had been performed, and of the hazard of having doors not closing properly and popping open, and, of course, of the danger of not being able to lock the doors from the inside. I told her that due to extensiveness and basic nature of the problem, this was clearly an engineering flaw that we were discussing. She replied that due to the age of the vehicle, Volkswagen would be unwilling to do anything of a corrective nature. I told her that this leaves an owner like me with the options of leaving the vehicle in its dangerous condition, or repairing a design flaw that will only repeat itself. When I asked if this problem was being reported by others, she indicated that she was unaware of any other similar complaints. That notwithstanding, I subsequently looked up the 1997 Volkswagen Passat on the web site for mycarstats.com and found that of the 23 complaints shown for its most complained about category, "Misc. Components," eight of these pertained specifically to the sub category of, "Latches/Locks/Linkages:Doors:Latch." I have enclosed copies for your review.

Manin  
8/24/05

**The question in my mind is rather simple. When does an engineering design flaw that likely exists across many similar vehicles become the manufacture's responsibility, irrespective of the model year? On something as basic as door locks or steering columns, it would seem that a manufacturer should never be able to hide behind time, when the cause of the problem is the manufacturer itself. Thank you for your review of this matter. I look very much forward to hearing from you.**

**Sincerely,**

**[REDACTED]**  
**Palm Desert, CA**  
**[REDACTED]**

**Attachment: myCarStats.com "Custom Report on 1997 Volkswagen Passat"**

**myCarStats.com**  
 The key to protecting you and your family

## Custom Report on 1997 VOLKSWAGEN PASSAT


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Created on: 8/21/2005  
 Report Type: COMPLAINTS  
 Prepared for: [REDACTED]  
 Warranty Expires On: Unknown  
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### CONSUMER COMPLAINT: ODI Case Number: 10049671

Component: LATCHES/LOCKS/LINKAGES:DOORS:LATCH

**Details:** 1997 VW PASSAT TDI: RR DOOR LOCK CANNOT BE OPENED FROM INSIDE. PROBLEM DEVELOPED OVER PERIOD OF TIME, SAFETY HAZARD BECAUSE A PASSENGER WOULD BE UNABLE TO ESCAPE. LF DOOR AND RF DOOR DEVELOPING DIFFICULT OPENING. DOOR CAN BE OPENED FROM OUTSIDE WITH DIFFICULTY. LF DOOR WILL OPEN ONLY BY POWER.\*AK

**Cause:**

**Result:**

Occurrences: 1      Injuries: 0  
 Fail Date: 12/09/2003      Deaths: 0  
 Internal use: 12/12/2003

### CONSUMER COMPLAINT: ODI Case Number: 10103731

Component: LATCHES/LOCKS/LINKAGES:DOORS:LATCH

**Details:** CONSUMER COMPLAINED ABOUT DOOR LOCKS AND LATCHES. THE DOOR LOCKS AND LATCHES FROZE IN COLD WEATHER. CONSUMER HAD TO TIE A BELT FROM THE DOOR TO DRIVER'S LEG TO KEEP THE DOOR FROM OPENING WHEN DRIVING THE VEHICLE. CONSUMER CONTACTED THE DEALER AND THE MANUFACTURER. THE DEALER LUBRICATED THE LOCKS, AND IT HELPED FOR ONLY TWO WEEKS AND THE PROBLEM RECURRED. MANUFACTURER WAS NO HELP. \*AK

**Cause:**

**Result:**

Occurrences: 6      Injuries: 0  
 Fail Date: 12/13/2004      Deaths: 0  
 Internal use: 12/14/2004

### CONSUMER COMPLAINT: ODI Case Number: 10114019

Component: LATCHES/LOCKS/LINKAGES:DOORS:LATCH

**Details:** DRIVER'S POWER WINDOW REGULATOR MECHANISM HAS REPEATED FAILURES DESPITE REPLACEMENT/REPAIR ON SIX OCCASIONS. THIS IS A SERIOUS SAFETY HAZARD, SINCE THE WINDOW MUST BE CLOSED BY GRASPING THE GLASS AND MANIPULATING IT WHICH CAN RESULT IN FINGERS BEING TRAPPED AND BROKEN. ALSO, ONCE THIS FAILURE HAS HAPPENED, THE WINDOW MAY DROP DOWN INTO THE DOOR UNEXPECTEDLY AT HIGH SPEED CAUSING DRIVER DISTRACTION, OR FAIL TO OPEN IN AN EMERGENCY PRECLUDING AN ESCAPE PATH. THIS IS COMPOUNDED BY FAULTY DOOR LATCH MECHANISM ACTUATORS WHICH PRECLUDE DOOR OPENING FROM OUTSIDE BY RESCUE PERSONNEL. THE FAILURE IS CAUSED BY A FAULTY ROLL PIN SLIPPING OUT OF THE DOOR LATCH TRIGGER MECHANISM CAUSING FAILURE OF AND BINDING OF THE LINKAGE WHICH CAUSES THE DOOR LOCK ACTUATING MECHANISM TO FAIL, TRAPPING PASSENGERS INSIDE THE VEHICLE. PLEASE NOTE THAT PER THE GE INFORMATION SERVICES, JAPAN ISSUED A RECALL FOR THIS PROBLEM.\*AK

**Cause:****Result:**

Occurrences: 6      Injuries: 0  
 Fail Date: 06/01/2004      Deaths: 0  
 Internal use: 3/13/2005

**CONSUMER COMPLAINT: ODI Case Number: 715889****Component:** LATCHES/LOCKS/LINKAGES:DOORS:LATCH**Details:** THE DOOR LOCKS AND LATCHES INTERMITTENTLY HAVE FAILED TO SECURE THE DOORS FROM OPENING,**Cause:****Result:**

Occurrences: 10      Injuries: 0  
 Fail Date: 11/30/1999      Deaths: 0  
 Internal use: 12/6/1999

**CONSUMER COMPLAINT: ODI Case Number: 723084****Component:** LATCHES/LOCKS/LINKAGES:DOORS:LATCH**Details:** DOOR LATCHS THAT FAILED WOULD NOT BE REPLACED BY MANUFACTUER DO TO THE MILAGE ON THE CAR. WHAT MY DOOR HANDLES HAVE TO DO WITH THE MILAGE I DON'T KNOW!!! \*AK**Cause:****Result:**

Occurrences: 3      Injuries: 0  
 Fail Date: 04/01/1998      Deaths: 0  
 Internal use: 5/31/2000

**CONSUMER COMPLAINT: ODI Case Number: 785480****Component:** LATCHES/LOCKS/LINKAGES:DOORS:LATCH**Details:** CONSUMER STATES THE PIVOT AND PLUNGER PIVOT POINT OF THE DOOR LOCKS HAVE FAILED NUMEROUS TIMES.\*JB**Cause:****Result:**

Occurrences: 3      Injuries: 0  
 Fail Date: 09/01/1999      Deaths: 0  
 Internal use: 9/12/2001

**CONSUMER COMPLAINT: ODI Case Number: 8017243****Component:** LATCHES/LOCKS/LINKAGES:DOORS:LATCH**Details:** 3 DOOR LATCHES DO NOT WORK PROPERLY, AND CURRENTLY ARE COMPLETELY INOPERATIVE. HAVE TO PULL WITH EXTREME FORCE IN ORDER TO OPEN DOORS. \*AK \*YH**Cause:**

**Result:**

Occurrences: 1      Injuries: 0  
 Fall Date: 08/01/2002      Deaths: 0  
 Internal use: 8/26/2002

**CONSUMER COMPLAINT: ODI Case Number: 849599**

**Component:** LATCHES/LOCKS/LINKAGES:DOORS:LATCH

**Details:** ALL 4 DOOR HANDLES WILL QUIT WORKING INTERMITTENTLY , CONSUMER THEN WILL NOT BE ABLE TO OPEN DOOR OR UNLOCK DOOR. DEALER HAS REPLACED ALL 4 HANDLES, BUT DEFECT KEEPS OCCURRING. \*AK

**Cause:****Result:**

Occurrences: 1      Injuries: 0  
 Fall Date: Unknown      Deaths: 0  
 Internal use: 9/30/1999

**CONSUMER COMPLAINT: ODI Case Number: 857020**

**Component:** LATCHES/LOCKS/LINKAGES:DOORS:LATCH

**Details:** DUE TO POORLY DESIGNED DOOR LATCHES ON FRONT DRIVER'S SIDE/PASSENGER'S SIDE, AND REAR DRIVER'S SIDE, DOORS DO NOT OPEN FROM THE OUTSIDE. DEALER SAID VEHICLE NEEDED NEW DOORS IN ORDER TO FIX THE LATCH PROBLEM. \*AK \*ML

**Cause:****Result:**

Occurrences: 4      Injuries: 0  
 Fall Date: 07/01/1998      Deaths: 0  
 Internal use: 2/16/2000

**Manufacturer Contact Information**

Volkswagen of America  
 Customer Relations  
 3800 Hamlin Road - 2F02  
 Auburn Hills, MI 48326  
 1-800-DRIVE VW  
 Toll free: 1-800-822-8987  
 Fax: 248-340-4660  
 Web site: www.vw.com

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