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September 14, 2005

Kathleen C. DeMeter, Director  
Office of Defect Investigation  
NHTSA Headquarters  
400 Seventh Street SW  
Washington, D.C. 20590

REC'D  
NVS

2005 SEP 21 A 9 30

Dear Ms. DeMeter:

I am writing to you to document the problem I recently had with my 2000 VW Eurovan, in the hope that you will be able to offer me some assistance.

My Eurovan may be 5 years old, but it had less than 28,000 miles on it at the time of the incident. I am the original owner and have taken very good care of my van, including having all of the periodic maintenance performed as specified. I use this vehicle mainly for trips. It has always been housed in a garage. I think it still looks very much like it did when it was new.

On my recent vacation, I was driving on a very busy section of freeway when my van began to have a vibration. It was not unlike the sound and feel of a tire when it is about to blow out. I immediately pulled over to the shoulder of the freeway. Upon inspection, and with the assistance of a kind passing motorist, I realized that one of my engine cooling fans had broken apart. The other fan followed suit soon thereafter.

I have been told by three different VW dealers that these fans should have a life expectancy of at least 100,000 miles.

I had the fans replaced at Schmelz Countryside Volkswagen in St. Paul, MN during my vacation. I was astounded that they charged \$337.38 for each fan, plus labor to install them, bringing the invoice total to \$1095.72. I do not understand how a small electric motor with a plastic fan assembly attached to it can cost that much. Even the VW service advisor seemed embarrassed by the cost. I also do not understand why two perfectly good motors needed to be replaced, simply because the blade assemblies were not offered separately. The blade assembly is obviously manufactured separately and then attached to the motor shaft.

I belong to a group of Eurovan owners and found out from them that there had been a recall of 1998-2000 Eurovan/Rialta models for exactly the problem I had. Upon questioning the dealer about this, I was informed that my VIN number was not included in the recall. I am amazed, as my van obviously had the identical problem that is outlined in the recall, yet VW refused to take responsibility for it. I have since learned from an owner of a 2003 Eurovan that he had the same thing happen to his vehicle at 16,000 miles. This leads me to believe that VW has

*Maria*  
9/22/05

done nothing to resolve this problem. My new fans are made by Siemens, just like the original ones, but were made in Mexico, not in Canada like the originals. I have zero faith that the new fans are any different than the originals and will most likely fail at some point as well. Is there any documentation from VW that the design problem of these fans has ever been changed?

The VW Safety Recall Circular, code WB, states that the "two engine cooling fans may fracture and break apart, creating a risk of personal injury and vehicle damage." That is exactly what happened to my vehicle. When the fans broke apart, a piece of the blades severed the nipple and vacuum line that are part of the heater control module, creating a problem with ventilation and air conditioning air flow to the cabin. When I took my van into VW for the fan replacement, I told them about this problem. They had my van for two days and were unable to diagnose the cause. They told me they would have to charge me "additional diagnostic time", if I wanted them to pursue it. As I was on vacation, I did not have the extra time, and I also could not understand why factory-trained technicians could not find the problem during the two days they had my van. I have since taken my van to an independent VW repair technician. He found the problem in less than 60 seconds and plugged the severed vacuum line. I need a new heater control module to repair this permanently, which I have not yet done, but at least the air flows properly in the cabin now. I feel this problem is directly related to the failure of the fans and should be covered by VW as well.

I do not like to think about what might have happened if a fuel line had been severed, instead of a vacuum line. I can certainly see the potential for "risk of personal injury", as stated in the recall. Obviously, I incurred additional "vehicle damage" as a result of the fan failure.

Section 154 (d) of the National Traffic and Motor Vehicle Safety Act of 1966 states that dealers must correct defects that relate to motor vehicle safety. I feel that my safety was seriously compromised as a result of VW not taking action to correct the fan defect on my vehicle. They were obviously aware of it, as shown in the documentation.

I filed a report/claim with VW Customer Service for this incident. I spoke with Latasha and the case reference number is 50334176. Their determination was that my repair could not be covered under the recall because my VIN number was not included. I would very much like to know what their criteria was for which VIN numbers were fortunate enough to be included in this recall? With the problem still existing in 2003 models, it seems to me that all vehicles should be covered, regardless of their model year or VIN number.

I know that your office has worked on this very issue with VW, reference NVS-jfa/EA03-013. I also know that your ODI RESUME under the same number, opened 08/13/2003, states that "an engineering analysis investigation has been

opened for further study. I would very much like to know if you have documented any further information since that time.

My feeling is, due to the low number of Eurovan units sold in the past several years, VW does not feel that they need to be responsible or accountable for this potentially life-and-property-endangering problem. I think they feel it can be "swept under the rug" and quickly forgotten. I do not feel that they should be allowed to get away with this mode of thinking.

Believe me, I have many other much more valid uses for my \$1100 dollars. This is a repair bill that is very difficult for me to pay and justify. I feel that I have been taken advantage of by a huge automobile manufacturer who has no regard for the "little guy" or his safety. I assume that there are others out there, like myself, who have encountered this same problem, or will in the future. Please, can you do something to help me and other Eurovan owners?

I have the defective fans in my possession and have attached photos of the fans and copies of the pertinent documentation to this letter. I am also sending a copy of this letter and documentation to Elizabeth Gwinn, the Supervisor of the VW Customer Care Center.

This year's Consumer Reports' annual auto issue ranks VW as #32 in a list of 36 vehicle makes for reliability. Their survey claims that VW is almost 140% worse than the average. I thought when I purchased my Eurovan that I was buying a quality product. This incident and reading that article have definitely changed my viewpoint.

I would like to receive reimbursement from VW for the \$1095.72 that I spent on this repair and would also like to have my heater control module replaced at no charge by them. I would sincerely appreciate anything that you can do to help me. Thank you very much.

Sincerely,

[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]  
Ocean Shores, WA  
[REDACTED]

cc: Elizabeth Gwinn, Supervisor  
VW Customer Care Center  
Volkswagen of America  
3499 West Hamlin Road  
Rochester Hills, MI 48309

**Important! Please Provide A Copy To All Personnel With Campaign-Related Responsibilities!**



## Safety Recall Circular

Code: **WB**

April 2004

**Subject: 1998-2000 Model Year Winnebago Rialta Vehicles  
Replace Two Engine Cooling Fans, Affix Underhood HVAC  
Information Label and Affix Radiator Fan Service Position  
Warning Label**

This is to inform you of the initiation of a safety recall involving some 1998-2000 model year Winnebago Rialta vehicles.

**Problem Description** Volkswagen has found that the affected 1998-2000 model year Winnebago Rialta vehicles (built on EurpVan incomplete chassis) have two engine cooling fans that may fracture and break apart, creating a risk of personal injury and vehicle damage.

**Remedial Action** Replace two engine cooling fans, affix an underhood HVAC information label, and affix a radiator fan service position warning label.

**Vehicle Identification Number Range** The vehicles affected by this recall action are within the following vehicle identification number range:

1998-2000 Winnebago Rialta  
WV3...70\_WFH09838 - WV3...70\_YH162482

Please note that the above VINs represent the lowest and highest serial numbers of affected vehicles. Use of the OTIS campaign inquiry system will allow you to determine whether or not a particular vehicle, within the above VIN range, requires the corrective work.

Note: Volkswagen will not reimburse under this recall any diagnostic recall repair work or a repair outside the VIN range.

**Limitation of Sale or Lease of Certain Vehicles** Section 154 (d) of the National Traffic and Motor Vehicle Safety Act of 1966 mandates that dealers correct, prior to delivery for the sale or lease, any vehicle which fails to comply with an applicable Federal Motor Vehicle Safety Standard or which contains a defect relating to motor vehicle safety. It is therefore imperative that any vehicle in your new or used car inventory and affected by this recall is corrected prior to delivery for sale or lease.

**Owner Notification Mailing** Volkswagen will notify all known owners of affected vehicles directly by first-class mail on or about April 12, 2004. A sample copy of the owner letter is enclosed for your information.



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

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

**REGISTERED MAIL  
RETURN RECEIPT REQUESTED**

SEP 2 2001

Mr. John Maddox  
Product Compliance  
Volkswagen of America, Inc.  
3800 Hazeln Road  
Autumn Hills, MI 48326

NVS-jh  
EA03-013

Dear Mr. Maddox:

This letter is to advise you that the Office of Defects Investigation (ODI) has completed Preliminary Evaluation (PE03-015) concerning allegations of separation of the blades of the engine's electronic cooling fan in Escarvan and Winnebago Rialta vehicles built on a Escarvan chassis. Based on our analysis of the information received, ODI has upgraded this matter into an Engineering Analysis (EA), which has been assigned identification number EA03-013. As part of the investigation, this letter requests clarification of certain data submitted under PE03-015, as well as updated and additional information.

ODI does not agree with Volkswagen's assessment that the alleged defect is a rare event. This is evidenced by two model years, 1999 and 2000, that are over-represented in the report data. Nor does ODI agree with Volkswagen's assessment that fuel lines are not in the vicinity of the cooling fan system. The video provided by Volkswagen clearly shows fuel lines directly behind the driver's side fan. There are over 20 reports where separated blades have damaged other components within the engine compartment.

As a fan begins to fail, the vehicle may start making noise. The operator may investigate the noise created by a failed fan blade and look into the engine compartment. The risk is increased because the fan is controlled thermostatically and can be energized even with the ignition turned off and the engine not running. An untrained customer, or technician, could be struck by a separated blade, or piece of a blade, should the fan be energized during this inspection.

Unless otherwise stated in the text, the following definitions apply to these information requests:

- **Subject vehicles:** all 1996 through 2003 Volkswagen Escarvan and Winnebago Rialta vehicles built on a Escarvan chassis manufactured for sale or lease in the United States.



DOT AUTO SAFETY HOTLINE  
888-DASH-4-DOT  
888-387-4242



U.S. Department  
of Transportation  
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## ODI RESUME

Investigation: EA 03-015  
 Proposed By: FE 03-015  
 Date Opened: 08/13/2003  
 Principal Investigator: JOHN ABBOTT  
 Subject: ENKENS COOLING FAN BLADE SEPARATION

Manufacturer: VOLKSWAGEN OF AMERICA, INC.; WINNEBAGO INDUSTRIES, INC.  
 Products: 1996 THROUGH 2003 WINNEBAGO REALTA ON VW EUROVAN CHASSIS  
 Population: 9,000

Problem Description: Separation of the blades from the engine's electronic cooling fan.

### FAILURE REPORT SUMMARY

	ODI	Manufacturer	Total
Complaints:	5	107	112
Crashes/Fleets:	0	0	0
Injury Incidents:	0	0	0
# Injuries:	0	0	0
Fatality Incidents:	0	0	0
# Fatalities:	0	0	0
Other*:	0	18	18

\*Description Of Other: Fan blade separation in VW Eurovan vehicles; 15 with Siemens fan, 3 with Bosch fan.

Action: Upgrade to Engineering Analysis

Engineer: *John Abbott*  
 Div. Chief: *Thomas E. Cooper*  
 Office Dir: *William C. DeMeyer*

Date: 08/13/2003

Date: 08/13/2003

Date: 08/13/2003

Summary: The Office of Defects Investigation opened a Preliminary Evaluation (PE) 03-015 on April 15, 2003 based on three reports alleging that fan blades separated from the engine electronic cooling fan. All three vehicles were Winnebago Realta class "C" motor homes built on a Volkswagen Eurovan chassis. During the PE investigation, Volkswagen provided 125 additional reports of fan failures. The additional reports included 107 reports on Realta vehicles (all using a Siemens manufactured cooling fan) and 18 reports on Eurovan vehicles (15 using Siemens fans and 3 using Bosch fans).

An Engineering Analysis investigation has been opened for further study.

8/15/03  
 JD



THE ATTACHMENTS TO THIS  
DOCUMENT HAVE BEEN REMOVED  
TO PROTECT UNWARRANTED  
INVASION OF PERSONAL PRIVACY  
PURSUANT TO EXEMPTION 6 OF  
THE FREEDOM OF INFORMATION  
ACT (FOIA), 5 U.S.C. 552(b)(6).