

To: Workhorse Custom Chassis
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From: [REDACTED]
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10138878

Subject: Serious safety defect in Workhorse Custom Chassis.

I own a 2004 Southwind 36B with a Workhorse Custom Chassis. Vin number 5B4MP67G443 [REDACTED]

You have a very serious safety defect in the brakes on your chassis but before I explain let me give you a little of my background.

I've been driving for more than 50 years with no accidents. I had a Class "A" license for about 15 of those years (licensed to drive 18 wheeler and siml trucks in California). I have 32 units of college credits in automotive technology and held a "A" average in these classes. You can confirm this if you wish by calling Allan Hancock College records department in Santa Marta, Calif. I've worked as a Mechanic for Union oil Co. (now UNOCAL). I was a supervisor in charge of mechanics and crews that worked on oil wells and drove oilwell repair rigs. These repair rigs weighed between 30,000 and 40,000 pounds and larger one's required a permit to drive on California roads. I was also licensed to drive these rigs.

The motorhome I traded in on this Southwind was 1988 Bounder 34C and it had 25,000 miles on it when I bought it used. When I traded it in it had 75,000+ miles on it and still had the original brakes. I had put new tires on it about 200 miles before I traded it in and had the brakes checked at the time. After 13 years of my driving it the brake pads still had 60% wear left on them. I'm not hard on brakes.

Now to your safety problem. Let me tell you what happened.

My wife and I were taking a vacation going to Lake Tahoe, Lake Almanor, Oregon, Sacramento and then home. This would be the first time we had had this motorhome above 5000 feet elevation. About 3/4th of the way up the grade going to Lake Tahoe, after pulling into a turnout to let some cars pass, I noticed a big drop in power and uphill speed. This was at about 6000ft elevation and I commented to my wife that this thing sure doesn't like altitude and the old Bounder would run off and leave it. Dropping downhill into Lake Tahoe I was going about 20 or 30 mph in second gear and really never used the brakes much and didn't notice anything unusual with the brakes.

We left Tahoe by another route a few days later. A few miles from where we were camped we had a fairly long uphill grade, but not real steep, maybe 4%. We could only get about 25 or 30 mph going up this not so steep grade. We had to stop and make a left turn onto another road at the top of the hill and again we couldn't get any speed out of the motorhome. I'm still thinking this is an altitude problem, so I got my altimeter out and checked the elevation. We were at 7600ft. The old Bounder did much better at this altitude.

Shortly after making the turn on this road we started down a fairly long but not to steep hill following a truck. This was a winding type road and we were doing about 20 to 25 mph in second gear hardly using the brakes at all. When we reached the bottom there was some road construction and we stopped for about 5 minutes waiting for the "follow me pickup".

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While we were stopped my wife commented that she could smell hot brakes. I said I could smell them too and it must be from the truck in front of us because I had hardly used our brakes. I had not noticed the truck brake lights coming on very often or hear his Jake Brake. The hill just wasn't that steep.

The road continued to be winding for the next few miles but fairly flat. We were traveling at a pretty slow speed due to road conditions. A few miles past Incline Village we were on a straight flat stretch of road that was long enough that I couldn't see the end of it. I was trying to get the motorhome up to 55 mph so I could use the overdrive. I couldn't quite reach that speed at wide-open throttle so I backed off to about 45mph still thinking this motorhome sure doesn't like altitude.

It was on this straight flat stretch of road that the ABS light came on and stayed on. It is not unusual for the ABS light to come on because it has come on periodically ever since the motorhome was new. I've called in about it in the past and I was told that nothing could be done about it unless it stays on.

Shortly after this straight stretch of road is Old Town Truckee. It was in Truckee that I realized that I had a pretty serious brake problem. I had trouble getting stopped at a stop sign in town and then had trouble pulling away from it. This is a congested little tourist town with no place to get off the road with a motorhome. I got just outside of town and pulled off the road in a wide spot. I could hardly climb a little hill to get out off town. I got out and walked around the motorhome and saw oil running out of the right front hub and all 4 brakes were smoking. I wasn't off the road as far as I wanted to be so I started up and moved forward about 50ft. The brakes were locked up and I had trouble getting completely off the road.

My lack of power wasn't due to the altitude. It was because my brakes weren't releasing all the way and were dragging.

If I hadn't made a wrong turn and went through Truckee, I would have been going down Hwy 89 at 55mph (maybe) without brakes. If anyone had pulled out in front of me, or if I came up on slower traffic, I would not have been able to stop.

I called your Roadside Service people. They arranged for me to be towed back to Carson City, Nevada to Carson Truck and Auto Repair.

During all this I talked to several of your Roadside Service people and they have all been very nice, courteous and helpful.

It took about 4 hours from the time I stopped until the tow truck arrived (rush hour traffic in Reno). The first thing I did when he got the front wheels off the ground was to spin them to see if they were still bound up. They weren't. They tow truck driver was moving the motorhome back and forth a few inches and it appeared that the back brakes were also free. While he was disconnecting the driveshaft he discovered why the ABS light had come on. The sensor and wire were completely melted.

At Carson Truck and Auto they put the motorhome inside the bay on jacks and removed everything that needed to be replaced. It was at this point that he told me the repairs would cost about \$3,300 and that Workhorse never pays for burned up brakes but that he would contact the factory rep. He had the motorhome inoperable in a garage so I couldn't take it to another shop if I had wanted to so I authorized him to make the needed repairs. The bill was \$3,450.80 and Workhorse refused to pay it.

I asked him if they had tried to find what was causing the brakes to drag. He said yes they had and the bell crank was free and nothing else could cause the brakes to drag. I guess he never heard of a mastercylinder piston sticking, or a booster pump hanging up, or a booster pump switch sticking. That's a few of the possibilities. He told me they had road tested the motorhome and checked the brakes with an infrared sensor. They weren't getting hot (and I believe he was right). They fixed the result of the malfunction but not the malfunction.

We left Carson City and headed to Lake Almanor. Everything was working well. Lots of power, good brakes and averaging 10.2mpg. (Best mileage I've had for a long time). We stopped in the town of Quincy for lunch

and as soon as we left town, I could feel a loss of power and a see a drop in gas mileage. Now I know this loss of power is not the altitude, so I turned off the fans, a/c and radio and got the motorhome as quiet as I could. I could hear something similar to the engines clutch fan coming on but a little different. I tapped on the brake pedal a couple of times and the noise went away. My power returned and the mpg started going up. The problem is either the booster pump or booster pump switch sticking and preventing the brakes from releasing all the way. I can't duplicate the problem by putting on the brakes again and again. The problem is intermittent and I just have to really watch and listen for it.

When I got in the Sacramento area, I called two of your shops to try and get them to fix my problem. Village RV agreed with my diagnoses but couldn't get the motorhome in for a couple of weeks and I couldn't wait that long before I had to be home. Dan Gamble RV (who I've never heard a good word about) said they could get to it in about a week, put it on jack stands and take the wheels off and diagnose it for \$300.00.

I've heard from a couple different service writers that its not unusual for the brakes to burn up on a Workhorse in 10,000 to 15,000 miles. Mine had 7,400 miles on it.

If it's true that your brakes are burning up in 10 to 15,000 miles most likely other motorhomes are having the same problem that I'm having. Since you are not paying for them, maybe the right people are not hearing about this very serious safety problem. I don't know why you don't pay for these repairs. I have not been able to talk to a factory rep.

On the 400-mile trip home from Sacramento I caught the brakes dragging 3 times. I tapped on the brake pedal a couple of times to clear the problem. I stopped every 100 miles or so and checked to make sure the brakes weren't getting hot without my knowledge. At my second stop (about 200 miles) the right rear brake was considerably warmer than the other 3 but not real hot. This is the wheel that the ABS sensor burned up on. When I arrived at my house all 4 brakes were hotter than they should have been. I had just gone about 3 miles in town through several stop signs and stoplights. The brakes were probably dragging between stop signs and lights.

I don't expect Workhorse to pay for the hundreds of dollars it cost me for meals and motels while I was stranded in Carson City for 6 days, or to compensate me for the trip to Oregon that I had to cancel. I believe strongly that I should be compensated for the \$3,450.90 that Carson Truck and Auto Repair charged me to replace the brakes that were burned up due to a malfunction in the brake system.

I also strongly believe that someone from Workhorse, maybe in your Safety or Legal Departments, should be interviewing, at least by phone, all Workhorse Custom Chassis owners who have had their brakes burn out prematurely. You need to determine if this is an isolated incident or if you have a serious safety defect in your product that could very easily kill someone (if it hasn't already).

Cc: National Highway Traffic Safety Administration
Fleetwood Owner Relations