



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

DOT Auto Safety Hotline
Vehicle Owner's Questionnaire
To Report Vehicle Safety Defects
1-888-DASH-2-DOT
(1-888-327-4236)
INTERNET: www.nhtsa.dot.gov/hotline

FOR AGENCY USE ONLY 100148

Date Received

2006 JAN -5 AM 8:55
05-DEC-2006

Repository

Reference No.
10144482

OWNER INFORMATION (Type or Print)

Name _____
Address _____
City RICHMOND State IN Zip Code _____

Daytime Telephone Number _____

E-mail Address _____

Evening Telephone Number _____

Do you authorize NHTSA to provide a copy of this report to the manufacturer of your vehicle? YES NO
In the absence of an authorized signature, DOT provide your name or address to the vehicle manufacturer.
Signature of Owner _____ Date 12/12/05

VEHICLE INFORMATION

17 digit Vehicle Identification Number Located at bottom of windshield on driver's side
1G2WR521 _____ Make PONTIAC Model GRAND PRIX Model Year 1999
Date Purchased 31-JUL-99 Dealer's Name and Telephone Number BUCKLES MOTORS 937-662-1366 Engine No; Cylinders 6 Fuel Type: Gas
Original Owner Dealer's City URBANA State OH Zip Code 43078
Transmission Type AUTOMATIC Antilock Brakes Cruise Control Powertrain FRONT WHEEL DRIVE Vehicle Component Code 021000 SUSPENSION:FRONT Multiple Failure: 1

FAILED COMPONENT(S)/PART(S) INFORMATION

Incident Date(s) 01-DEC-2005 Failure Mileage 101000 Failure Speed _____

ADDITIONAL ITEMS TO BE COMPLETED WHEN REPORTING A TIRE FAILURE

Tire Make _____ Tire Model (Name or Number) _____ Tire Size (Example P215/65R15)
DOT No. (Example: DOTM15BAC038) Original Equipment Prior Repair Failure Location: _____
Tire Component Code _____ Tire Failure Type _____

ADDITIONAL ITEMS TO BE COMPLETED WHEN REPORTING A CHILD SEAT FAILURE

Make: _____ Date Manufactured: _____ Model No./Name: _____
Seat Type: _____ Installation System: _____
Child Seat Component Code: _____ Failed Part: _____

APPLICABLE INCIDENT INFORMATION

(Please describe in detail the incident(s), failure(s), crash(es), and injury(ies).)

Crash Yes No Fire Yes No Number of Persons Injured _____ Number of Deaths _____ Reported to Police N

Narrative Description of Incident(s), Crash(es), and Injury(ies).
Please describe (1) events leading up to the failure, (2) failure and its consequences, and (3) what was done to correct the failure; i.e. parts repaired or replaced (and if old part is available).
POPPING

DT: THE CONTACT STATED WHILE ATTEMPTING TO MAKE A TURN THERE WAS A STRANGE GRINDING NOISE THAT CAME FROM UNDERNEATH THE VEHICLE. HE PULLED THE VEHICLE INTO GARAGE AND INSPECTED UNDERNEATH THE VEHICLE. HE DISCOVERED THE SWAY BAR BROKE. HE CONTACTED THE MANUFACTURER, AND THEY OFFERED NO ASSISTANCE IN THE REPAIR OF THE VEHICLE. THE CONTACT TOOK THE VEHICLE TO A DEALER. THE SERVICE MECHANIC DETERMINED THE SWAY BAR BROKE BECAUSE IT WAS HOLLOW, THE PREVIOUS DESIGN ON EARLIER MODELS WAS SOLID. NO REPAIRS HAVE BEEN MADE DUE TO THE EXCESSIVE COST. *AK

SWAY BAR BROKE UNDER NORMAL DRIVING CONDITIONS. END LINKS & BUSHINGS REMAINED INTACT AFTER SWAY BAR BROKE. SEE ATTACHED LETTER TO MANUFACTURER, MEETING MINUTES WITH DEALER SERVICE DEPT, AND PICTURES. VEHICLE WILL RECEIVE NEW SWAY BAR ON 12-16-05 @ Little Posters, Greenville, Ohio so wife may drive it again.

Include, if available: Police/Fire Department Report, Photos, and Repair Invoice.

ATTACH ADDITIONAL SHEETS IF NECESSARY

The Privacy Act of 1974-Public Law 93-502 This information is requested pursuant to authority vested in the National Highway Traffic Safety Act and subsequent amendments. You are under no obligation to respond to this questionnaire. Your response may be used to assist the NHTSA in determining whether a manufacturer should take appropriate action to correct a safety defect. If the NHTSA proceeds with administrative enforcement or litigation against a manufacturer, your response, or a statistical summary thereof, may be used in support of the agency's action.

Richmond, IN
December 6, 2005

Mr. Mark LaNeve
GM North America Vice President,
Vehicle Sales, Service, and Marketing
General Motors Corporation
300 Renaissance Center
P.O. Box 300
Detroit, MI 48265-3000

Dear Mark,

I am the original owner of a 1999 Pontiac Grand Prix whom has been very pleased with its performance during our past (6) years of ownership. My wife and I have been fortunate to have such a car, as we do not have much time in our busy lives to deal with unexpected problems, particularly with automobiles. We have owned several GM vehicles during the past (15) years, and after owning our 1999 Grand Prix, we are eager to own another GM product to experience another (6) years of trouble-free ownership.

However, a recent incident occurred with our Grand Prix which has left us both concerned and frustrated. During a return trip to our house, I heard an unusual sound from the floorboard when the vehicle was turning right. When I looked under the vehicle, I noticed the front sway bar had broken into (2) pieces. I was confused, to say the least, as to how this would happen since the car is maintained and driven responsibly.

I decided to contact Pontiac Customer Service about the issue to see if this problem has been reported, or if there was a recall that I missed. Neither proved to be true, and Pontiac advised that a dealer inspect the car. I asked our local Pontiac dealer (Studebaker Buick Pontiac GMC) inspect the vehicle to confirm my suspicions, which they did. I have enclosed the details of my interaction with the Service Director and their findings, which I was told at that time the sway bar broke for an unknown reason. Needless to say, I was starting to question the integrity of my vehicle when a dealer cannot tell me why a major component such as a sway bar would snap into (2) pieces.

I decided to call Pontiac Customer Service back to report what the dealer observed. My position to Stacy Waples (Manager Pontiac Customer Service) was simple: Fix the problem for the \$225 estimate, which Studebaker quoted. I've assumed that a major structural/suspension component was supposed to be good for the life of the car. When a GM Master Technician tells me that he's replaced (4) or (5) sway bars on GM vehicles with the same failure conditions, I see that as a product design flaw. Ms. Waples then contacted Studebaker Buick Pontiac GMC, whom contacted a GM area representative regarding the issue. The claim was denied based upon the following (as explained over the phone):

1. Car has not been seen in over (4) years by the dealer (I do not have the dealer perform any service or routine maintenance work, as called out in the scheduled maintenance program in the owners manual - I assure you the car is maintained).
2. The age and mileage of the vehicle.
3. Incident can be considered normal maintenance.
4. Service Director at Studebaker Buick Pontiac GMC reported the sway bar was rusty (which conflicted with what she previously told me that the source of the problem was unknown).

Based upon these (4) items, the GM area representative denied the claim. Needless to say, I take great concern with all of the reasons which I was told the claim was denied, and have the following counter points:

1. *"Car has not been seen in over (4) years by the dealer."*
The car has been maintained since new. How would taking the car to a Pontiac dealer prevent the sway bar failure? Is there an inspection procedure specifically for the sway bar? Does the Pontiac dealer keep records of the observed sway bar conditions of all vehicles authorized for warranty claims?
2. *"The age and mileage of the vehicle."*
I've worked on vehicles for over (15) years now, and this is the first vehicle I've seen that's broken a sway bar under normal driving circumstances. Is there a calculated life expectancy for this component? I wonder what the mileage was on the other (4) or (5) vehicles that experienced the same problem. Are you aware that you cannot buy a replacement sway bar from any of the local auto part suppliers? I would assume they would sell the part given the number of 1999 and older Grand Prix's on the road today, if age and mileage is a factor.
3. *"Incident can be considered normal maintenance."*
Is it normal for a sway bar to snap into (2) pieces while driving? The bushings and end links remained intact. I guess this is the part where I'll put on my Engineering hat (I'm a Engineer by trade) and confirm that you never intentionally design a part to snap into (2) pieces. And if somebody did chose to use this design method, you better have documentation within your service schedule to inspect and/or replace the sway bar at a set mileage and/or age. I do not see in my service schedule a set mileage and/or age to replace the sway bar as a preventative maintenance procedure either. An integral component such as the sway bar should not be designed in such a matter where it's very possible to fail and compromise occupant safety. Had our vehicle been on a turn when the sway bar snapped, the results could have produced injuries, if not fatal.
4. *"Service Director at Studebaker Buick Pontiac GMC reported the sway bar was rusty."*
I do not understand the conclusion the Service Director is suggesting. When you observe the pictures of the failure, notice it is a clean break. The Service Director asked the Master Technician if he saw any rust on the bar, and he replied there was some surface rust on the right side of the sway bar towards the end link, probably from where the left side broke the bar and it was free to move. Are the sway bars prone to rust issues? If so, why would you design an integral component such as the sway bar that may fail if there is any presence of rust? There is not a hint of rust anywhere on the vehicle, should I assume that if this theory is true that all of the salt states should be reporting this problem too?

I acknowledge that the vehicle is now (6) years old with 101,000 miles, and may experience problems on a more frequent basis. If the water pump, alternator, fuel pump, tie rods, or cv axles had failed, I would simply fix the problem and move on. What I find very frustrating is the lack of acknowledgement from Pontiac that this could be a potential safety risk, and the lack of effort to help resolve the problem. Instead, I've encountered a Service Director that's more interested in offering excuses rather than trying to help or find answers to the questions I've asked. When I asked the Service Director at Studebaker Buick Pontiac GMC for their findings in writing, she refused to comply. When I asked Pontiac Customer Service for an email address, I was told they do not distribute any. When I asked for the contact information of the GM area representative, I was told that I couldn't have it. I feel that I have tried to work with Pontiac in good faith to resolve this issue, and was left with nobody else at GM to speak with except you. Is this how the customer service department is supposed to function?

In an era where vehicles often exceed 200k miles, I do not believe it is reasonable to settle for a vehicle that needs major structural/suspension components replaced at 101k miles. I would like to continue purchasing GM products, but this experience has made us skeptical. I place my family's safety in the hands of the vehicle's design every time we drive this car, and

I'm disappointed with this problem we've experienced. However, I am more disappointed with how our concern has been handled. After reviewing the documentation and pictures of the problem, is this how you feel the problem should have been handled?

I would be greatly interested in any feedback you can provide. Just to let you know, I have filed a complaint with the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration regarding this issue, as I believe they need to be aware of the situation in case it impacts any other consumers. I am also prepared to file an Indiana Small Claims suit for the repair costs against General Motors, unless an agreement can be reached before 12/31. I will retain the faulty sway bar for future use with the NHTSA and small claims court.

As mentioned before, your response will be greatly considered as we are preparing to purchase another vehicle within the next (6) months. We've enjoyed driving GM vehicles for over (15) years now, and would be interested in continuing our support. I would hope that you are not willing to lose a customer over a \$225 repair to fix what should not have occurred in the first place.

Regards,

A large black rectangular redaction box covers the signature and name of the sender.

Cc: National Highway Traffic Safety Administration

12/2/05 Meeting Notes @ Studebaker Buick Pontiac GMC

Attendees: [redacted] (vehicle owner), [redacted] of Studebaker Service Dept.
Subject Vehicle: 1999 Pontiac Grand Prix GTP vin# 1G2WR5214 [redacted]

On 12/1/05 5:00pm while driving home from work, [redacted] noticed an unusual sound for the first time while turning right into his driveway from the subject vehicle. Later that evening, [redacted] looked under the vehicle to find what appears to be a broken front sway bar, and captured pictures of the break.

On 12/2/05 4:00pm [redacted] took his vehicle to Studebaker Buick Pontiac GMC to have the front sway bar inspected (as Pontiac Customer Service recommended). Mr. Abney was greeting by [redacted] and [redacted]. [redacted] explained that the vehicle appears to have a broken front sway bar, and was advised by Pontiac Customer Service to have the vehicle inspected by a Pontiac dealer. Mr. Abney presented a picture of the broken sway bar to [redacted] and [redacted] Cox, with notes of the vehicle vin # and current mileage (101,000 miles). [redacted] immediately responded that Pontiac would not cover this claim with the current mileage. She cited an example of a recent transmission failure on a newer car with less miles which was not covered by GM, and they had a far better case given the age and mileage. [redacted] asked if Studebaker has seen this identical problem before on other vehicles, which [redacted] confirmed so during his previous job. The vehicle was then put on the lift for inspection.

The Master Technician (Ray Gray) confirmed the front sway bar was broken on the left side. He also indicated some surface rust on the right side of the bar where it appears to be stressed. Mr. [redacted] inspected the right side of the bar with [redacted] and noted it was still intact. When [redacted] asked [redacted] if he's seen this problem before, he confirmed that he's replaced 4 or 5 of them, all broke on the left side just like the suspect vehicle. [redacted] said he's never seen a sway bar break on any car, and [redacted] replied, "The new vehicles use tube type sway bars... where the tubing meets the mounting spot is the problem. They break because they're not solid anymore."

[redacted] told [redacted] that he needed the following items in writing:

- What is the problem with the vehicle.
- What caused the problem with this vehicle.
- What is the fix for the vehicle.

[redacted] replied that [redacted] would not receive anything in writing from her regarding the issue, except an estimate (a \$225 figure on a notepad). She said it is unknown what caused the problem on this vehicle, and wouldn't guess either. She then proceeded to lookup the history of the vehicle on the computer, and asked the following questions:

- Did you buy the car new?
- Where did you buy the car?
- Did you hit any bumps lately?

Mr. Abney replied with the following answers:

- Yes, I bought the vehicle new
- Urbana, Ohio
- No

[redacted] then replied that my testimony was 'here-say' and how would she know whether or not I hit a bump and caused this problem. [redacted] did not reply to [redacted] statement, as he believed she was asking entrapping questions to sidetrack the root issue - a design flaw on the front sway bar. [redacted] maintains his vehicles and drives responsibly. If a bump were hit, [redacted] would have told [redacted] this.

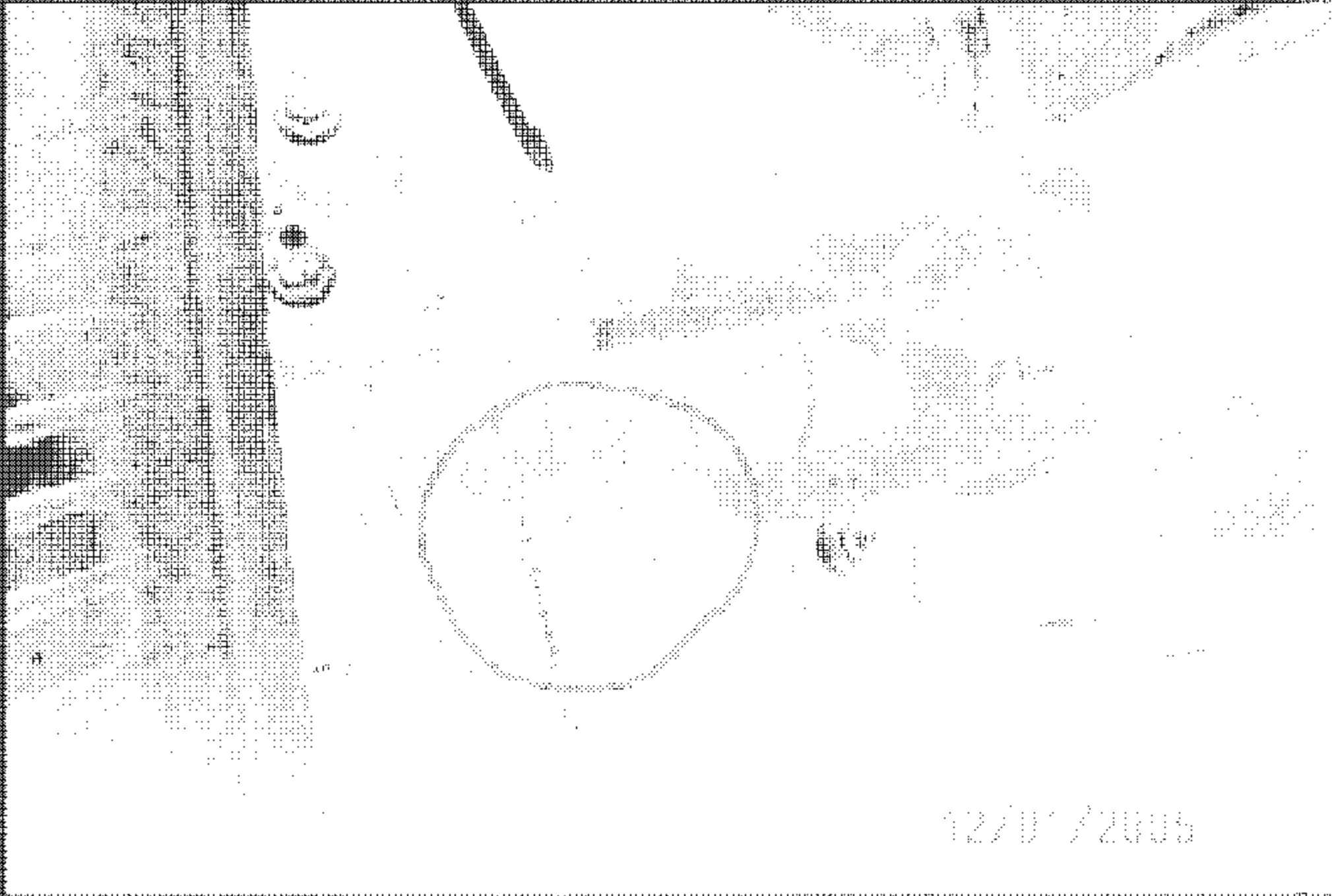
[redacted] supplied [redacted] with a note pad for an estimate that states:

Replace Stabilizer Bar
\$225.00
Parts & Labor

On 12/2/05 4:35pm [redacted] departed Studebaker Pontiac Buick GMC.



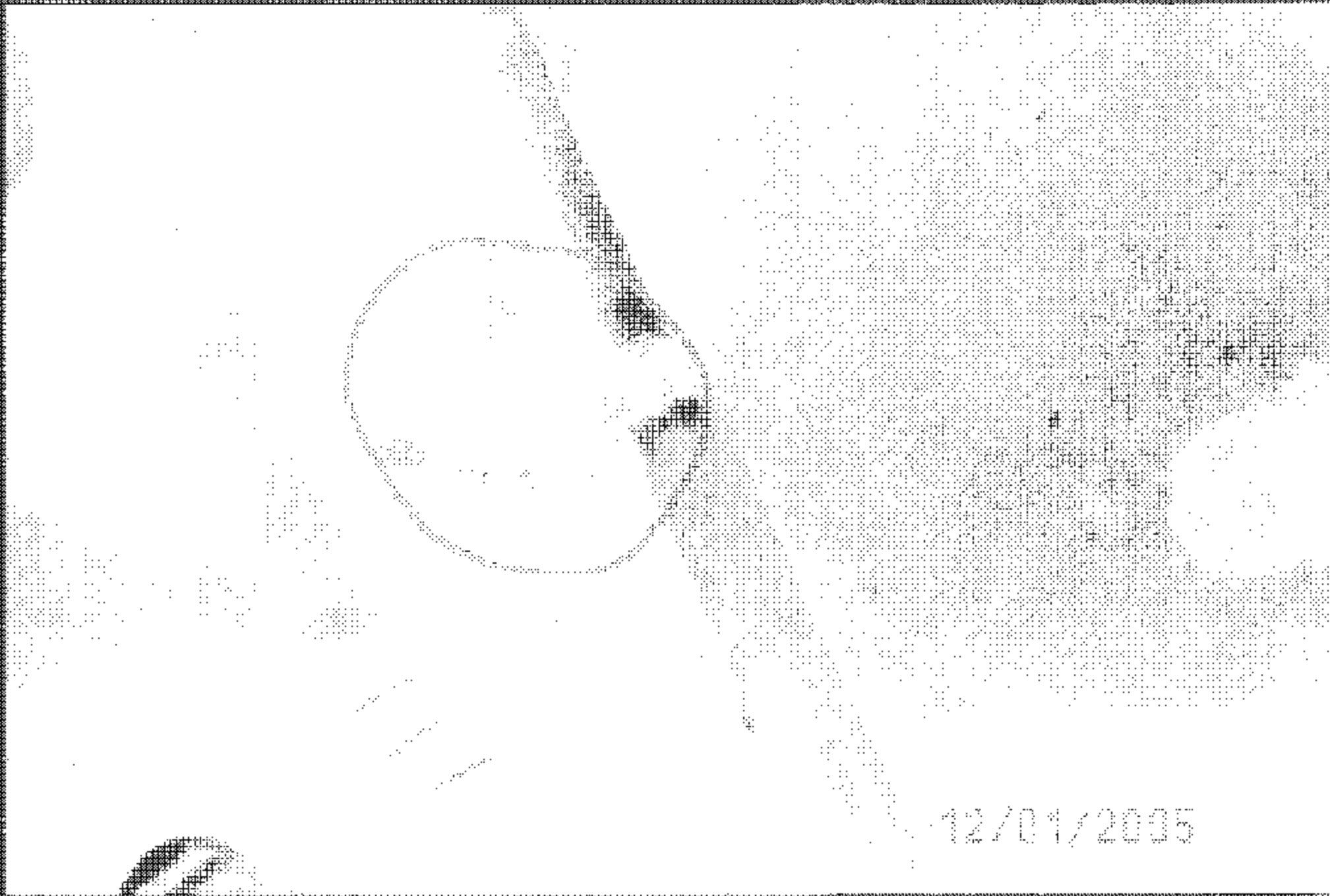
5002/1072



12/11/2005



12/01/2005



12/01/2005



12/01/2005