May 24, 2006

2006 JUN -5 AM 7:39

NHTSA, U.S. Department of Transportation
Washington, D.C. 20590

Chevrolet Motor Division – Customer Assistance Center
P.O. Box 7047
Troy, MI 48007-7047

10160509

Home & Park Motorhomes (Roadtrek)
100 Shirley Avenue
Kitchener, Ontario, Canada N2B2E1

Roadtrek International Chapter, Roadtrek News Editor
Mr. Robert Lee
112 Hilltop Drive, Neenah, WI 54956-3516

NOTICE OF SAFETY DEFECT

BLOWOUTS/RUBBER VALVE-STEM CUTS/SHARP EDGES OF WHEEL COVERS

Gentlemen:

We own a 1996 Roadtrek 210 Popular, on a 1995 Chevy 30 Van extended chassis, VIN #1GBGG39K8[redacted] delivered to us new, November 26, 1995, by Irvine RV, Irvine, California. We have accumulated 122,100 miles.

We have used only the recommended, original and new Michelin tires[redacted] mounted on factory steel wheels, and kept at the factory recommended pressures.

I have had tire failure problems at the left rear wheel. (The problem not caused by too much weight at that location, for those who like to look for other excuses.)

(1) On December 20, 2001 I had a catastrophic blow out on the original set of Michelin tires on the left rear wheel while traveling at legal high speed on I-10 west of Phoenix, Arizona, near Tonapoh. At the time, I thought the tire failed, blaming myself for speed, age, heat, and mileage on the tire. The catastrophic explosion tore off the muffler, the tail pipe, and fender/fender skirt, doing $1,000.00 in damages. I was lucky not to have lost control, rolled over, or collided with another vehicle or big rig. I purchased 5 new tires and high pressure rubber valve stems January 9, 2002 at my Michelin dealer in Santa Monica, California, at 70,000 miles. I inspect my tires frequently, and rotate all 5 every 12,000 miles in the factory manual rotation pattern. I do not rotate wheel covers.

Answered 6/13/06

(2) On November 20, 2003 the left rear rubber valve stem exploded after the "low tire" was aired up to the recommend 80psi at the Panther Junction Chevron Station, in Big Bend National Park. The tire went flat instantly. I was grateful the failure occurred on the station tarmac, as there is no other service for hundreds of miles around. One new rubber high pressure valve stem was installed. The alert attendant noted sharp edges on the wheel cover hole where the valve stem sticks through, and he put heavy rubber hose, about one inch long, over each valve stem where they protrude through the wheel covers. The same wheel cover went back on the right rear tire/wheel. This second failure occurred at approximately 90,000 miles, and on my second set of 5 tires/valve stems.

(3) On Sunday, April 31, 2006 after lunch in Chandler, Arizona, upon returning to my Roadtrek 210 Popular, I noticed the left rear tire looked "low." I went across the street to Freeway Chevrolet, 1154 N. 54th Street, Chandler, AZ 85226, where the Service Manager directed attendants to "air up" the tire to get me to a tire dealer, as it appeared I might have a slow leak requiring tire repair, not a service provided by the Chevrolet dealer. As the attendant began adding air, he exclaimed, "here is the problem – the valve stem!" Air began jetting out of the side of the valve stem and the tire went flat. A second attendant examined the wheel cover, and said, "here is the problem – the sharp edges are cutting the stem!" Apparently the rubber hose was adding little protection. He bent and rounded off the sharp edge on the one left rear wheel cover. They installed an automobile (low pressure) rubber valve stem, and graciously sent me on my way without charge. This incident occurred at approximately 121,000 miles.

I now believe all my left rear tire failures, the only tire failures I have had, were caused by the same sharp edges on one of the factory-installed flat-full-wheel covers that came with my Chevy Van. The way the rubber high pressure (not automobile) valve stems failed, suddenly, causing instant deflation, and slowly, allowing for low pressure high-speed tire failure, leads me to believe that the public safety is in jeopardy from possible catastrophic tire failure caused by the rubber valve stems rubbing against, and being cut or damaged somehow by the sharp edges of the holes in the full wheel covers. Since I rotate the tires it is not the one wheel cutting the valves. The only thing constant at the left rear wheel location has been the same wheel cover as the likely cause of the valve stem failures.

On May 22, 2006, while searching for a different style replacement wheel covers, my Chevy dealer parts man, Courtesy Chevrolet, Thousand Oaks, California, could not locate my style of flat full wheel cover in the computer inventory, indicating perhaps the problem is now known, and the wheel cover no longer available.

On May 22, 2006 I replaced all 5 of my rubber Light Truck valve stems with 120psi brass valve stems still having a rubber base. Now I am shopping for 5 new Michelin tires, and hope to find the completely metal brass or stainless steel bolt-in valve stems.

However, it seems local tire dealers prefer the quick to install pop-in valve stems. The tire dealers advise being aware of the metal bolt-in variety. Tire shops contend they are

not necessary for most wheels or situations. Finding metal bolt-in stems is a problem. Some dealers argue metal bolt-in valve stems are more susceptible to leaks at the rubber gasket.

I call my experience of blowouts, rubber valve stem cuts, full wheel cover sharp edges, to your attention for whatever action is deemed appropriate and to whom it may concern among yourselves.

People could be killed and no one knowing the reason why. Of course, from a certain view, that may be the best possible result. I think not. I hope you agree it may be a problem and that you take some action to investigate and correct the situation if it is identifiable as the problem, and to alert other consumers who might need notice.

Photo of the full wheel cover style attached.

Also attached is my letter of June 10, 2002 to Home & Park Motorhomes, manufacturer of the Roadtrek, concerning another Potential Safety Defect, the fuel line and hot wire running together through an access hole to the on board generator, the fuel line and hot wire both rubbed through by road vibration resulting in electrical sparking and potential for fire/explosion.

Yours truly,

[redacted]

(Family Motor Coach Membe[redacted]

Calabasas, California [redacted]

June 10, 2002
Home & Park Motorhomes
100 Shirley Avenue,
Kitchener, Ontario, Canada N2B2E1

POTENTIAL FOR FIRE OR EXPLOSION WARNING AND ALERT

Gentlemen:

We own a 1996 Roadtrek 210 Popular, on a Chervolet chasis, with Onan Microlite remote-start (2.8W) generator, purchased new from Irvine R.V., Irvine, California, November, 1995, and have accumulated 76,000 miles. We have less than 50 hours on our generator, which came new with the vehicle. Recently, after washing and cleaning the vehicle, I opened the Generator access panel, and while dusting the accessible areas with a cloth, I heard a snapping noise from the left or forward corner of the box enclosure. The generator was not running. I pulled the 12 Volt starter cable a few inches out, and rotated it 180 degrees for inspection, and discovered the insulation on the backside of the starter cable gone. Apparently relentless road vibration over the years had worn off the insulation. The 12 Volt hot wire was exposed, and sparking on insulation material, screw heads, or any gound it could find. I was alarmed to see the rubber fuel supply line to the generator ran parallel to the hot wire. The fuel line was also rubbed flat on one side. I replaced the fuel line, and used black-plastic electrician tape to seal the starter cable. We call this to your attention because it seems to us a cause for concern over whether this conditon may exist on other Roadtreks, and might have potential for fires or explosions. Photo enclosed.

Sincerely,

[redacted]
Calabasas, California [redacted]

Copy to:
Roadtrek International Chapter, Roadtrek News Editor:
[redacted]
Neenah, WI [redacted]