

December 6, 2006

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[REDACTED]
Diamondhead, MS [REDACTED]

NHTSA
OFFICE OF DEFECTS INVESTIGATION
NVS-216 400 SEVENTH STREET SW
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Gentlemen:

On or about June 20, 1996, I was driving my wife's car, a 1999 Mercedes-Benz E-300 turbo-diesel from Temple, Texas to our home in Diamondhead.

Suddenly without warning the right front wheel leaped into the air with a loud bang. I guessed that the right front tire had blown out. I was traveling at the posted limit of 70 MPH on Interstate 75. I lost control of the car momentarily and then moved slowly off of the right of way. The car "stumbled" several times before coming to a stop.

I exited the car and went to the front where I expected to find a blow-out and saw that the tires were intact. Surprised, I walked back up the shoulder to see if I had struck some foreign object that I didn't see. There was nothing there.

As I walked back to the car and to my shock, surprise, and disgust, I saw what appeared to be the underside of the front-end of the car dropped to the ground. Since I had a recent knee operation, I couldn't kneel to look underneath. I opened the hood and saw nothing unusual. I then sat on the grass and tried to see what had happened. A huge piece of fiber-board or plastic was hanging from under the car. I tried to pull the thing out and was unable to do so.

In desperation I drove the car to the next exit, some three hundred yards away and drove into the parking area of a gas station where I could find a telephone. I called Mercedes-Benz at their New Jersey 24 hour service for aid. They called a mechanic from Shreveport, Louisiana who arrived in about one hour. With an aluminum cutting-shears he cut the offending portion of the fiber board away, and told me that it was safe to drive my car home. I stuffed this filthy board into the car to show a mechanic later.

Since I had had a major service performed on this vehicle within the previous week or so, I assumed that the mechanics at Bert Allen Mercedes in Gulfport, Mississippi had failed to properly reinstall this item. (On the Mercedes 300 turbo-diesel it is called an anti-noise capsule.) Although I tried to have the repair done elsewhere, other MB shops refused to do it although the car was covered by the MB "STAR" plan. I was told that this item is the same thing as a fan belt or a windshield wiper. It was my responsibility!

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I asked several dealerships how I was supposed to know when to change it, or how I could check on the condition of this vital part. They agreed that I couldn't check on it myself since the car had to be on a lift. They further stated that nowhere in maintenance school was this ever discussed. It was not in the owner's manual either. The item was never examined for replacement on a mileage basis or a time basis. It was just my responsibility to buy a new one when the old one fell off!!! The danger is excessive!!

Ten days ago the same same item fell off of my Mercedes E430 on Interstate 10. (On this Model, an E 430, it is called a "cooling pan"). This time I was passing another car. A chunk of the material was ripped off by the front right tire and thrown on the windshield of a car that I was passing.

The driver swerved and then pulled up beside me blowing his horn and was extremely upset. I motioned that I had to pull over and when I did, he pulled over behind me and exited his car swearing and shouting that he nearly lost control of his car. He beat on the window which I left closed. Unsuccessfully getting to me, he returned to his car and followed me to my home where I drove very slowly. Fortunately he then left.

I have spoken to several Mercedes-Benz parts people and they told me that it was a very common occurrence to have this item fall off of cars. They told me again that it was my responsibility to maintain this part. When I asked them how I could see it, they said that I could not unless the car were on a hoist. Once again, they told me that it was not covered by any warrantee nor was it inspected during minor and major service. They only knew about it when it fell off!!

If ever there was reason for a **recall** it should be this dangerous parting of a major item from a car onto the roadway - let the owner beware! I would gladly replace it at a given mileage or a specified time, but NOT at 70 MPH on the highway. The danger is far too real.

Vehicle #1 is a Mercedes- Benz E 300 turbo-diesel, serial # WDBJF25H6XA [REDACTED]
PART# 210025,

Vehicle #2 is a Mercedes- Benz E 430, SERIAL # WDBJF70F0W [REDACTED]
PART # 2105200822

Now it is two out of two!

May I have the honor of a reply?

Respectfully,

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]