

NHTSA  
US Department of Transportation  
Washington DC, 20590

CL-10199125-1323

Thursday, July 19, 2007

To Whom It May Concern:

2007 AUG -2 AM 7:14

RE: Seat Belt Safety Defect

We recently purchased a 2000 Mercedes Benz S430, with no warranty, from our mechanic. My husband picked up the car on a Thursday July 12<sup>th</sup> during the day. When I got home from work that evening the 4 of us went for a short drive, in our newly purchased car, and out to dinner. We are raising two of our grandchildren and have been doing this for the past 4 ½ years. They are now 7 & 5 years old.

When we were getting back into the car after eating and our grandson told us he could not pull his seat belt down because it was too tight. He began yanking on the seat belt to try and pull it down in order to buckle him self in like he has been doing for over a year now. On further inspection we discovered that the left rear seat belt had locked up where our 5 year old grandson was sitting.

The next day, Friday, my husband took our car back to the mechanic and they tried to fix the seat belt but were unsuccessful.

Saturday we took a short car trip. Our older grandchild was seated in the center rear of the car and the younger one was seated in the right rear of the car as they were the only two working seat belts in the rear of the car now.

We had to make a stop along the way and we all got out of the car. When we returned to the car our grandson again said he was unable to pull his seat belt down and buckle it so he began to yanking on the seat belt like he had done before. We again discovered that now the right rear seat belt had done the same thing and was locked and useless. Now there were 4 of us in a car that only had 3 working seat belts.

Later on my husband and our mechanic, while working on the car trying to get the seat belts to unlock and calling Mercedes Customer Service in New Jersey and the local Mercedes Benz dealer for help, they discovered that when the seat belts are in the locked position and you repeatedly pull on the seat belt it will lock that belt permanently.

By pulling the seat belt, after the inertia wheel locked, the inertia wheel was locked permanently and neither my husband nor our mechanic was able to disengage the locking mechanism of the seat belts.

All this to say that in 2 days our 5 year old grandson disabled two legally required safety devices in a Mercedes Benz S430.

Mercedes claims this is a new safety feature in the cars made in 2000 and after to lock the seat belt tight against a person when the car goes into a roll over.

My husband contacted Mercedes Customer Service in New Jersey and was directed to Tech Services. Tech Services told him to contact the local Mercedes dealer in our area and they could assist in unlocking the two seat belt mechanisms.

The local Mercedes dealership advised us that this seat belt mechanism, once locked, was locked permanently and must be replaced.

My concern is that a 5 year old child was able to disable a legally required safety device and apparently there is no way to reset this device in this case which was not an accident. This to me is not a safety feature but actually a safety defect.

[REDACTED]  
Snoqualmic, WA [REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]

cc: Client Assistance Center Mercedes/Benz USA Inc.  
cc: Consumer Reports, Auto Test Division Senior Director, David Champion  
cc: Seattle Times, Auto Section Feature, Seattle Washington  
cc: Post Intelligence, Auto Section Feature, Seattle Washington

mc  
8/21/07  
cc