

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
Wilton, CT [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

February 14, 2024

The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration

1200 New Jersey Avenue SE, West Building, Washington, D.C. 20590

Re: Honda Pilot Safety Issue

Dear Highway Traffic Safety Administrators:

I thought I should call to your attention the almost instantaneous and complete failure of my 2009 Honda Pilot at highway speeds. My enclosed letter explains the failure event and the circumstances surrounding it.

The vehicle had 155,000 miles on it and was maintained exclusively by Honda dealerships' Service Departments with regular service, the most recent of which occurred barely a month before this event. The usual multi-point check was done by the Connecticut dealership on that occasion, and all issues raised by it (none major) were addressed at that time. Honda has had possession of the vehicle since it was flat-bedded to Honda of Westport (Connecticut) from the scene of the event on the day of the event, and Honda of Westport still retains possession of it. Honda has been unable to provide me with any explanation as to what caused this failure.

I'm concerned about the failure because I see multiple other Pilots of this vintage on the roads around here and know also that design features tend to carry across model years and so can persist even to current models of the vehicle. Thus, in my view this is a serious safety issue the cause and correction for which should, in my strong opinion, be fully investigated.

Sincerely,
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

Enclosure: My January 30, 2024 letter to the copy recipients of this letter who are listed below

Ccs: Mr. Mr. Mamadou Diallo, Senior Vice President, Automotive Sales
Mr. Eric Heitkamp, Chief Engineer, Automotive Safety
American Honda Motor Company, Inc., 1919 Torrance Boulevard, Torrance, CA 90501-2746

Catherine McEvilly, Esq. Senior Vice President & General Counsel, Honda North America
Service Manager, Honda of Westport, 186 Linwood Ave., Fairfield, CT 06824
Service Manager, Berlin City Honda, 255 Maine Mall Rd., South Portland, ME 04106

RR

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
Wilton, CT [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

January 30, 2024

Mr. Mamadou Diallo, Senior Vice President, Automotive Sales

Mr. Eric Heitkamp, Chief Engineer, Automotive Safety

American Honda Motor Company, Inc., 1919 Torrance Boulevard, Torrance, CA 90501-2746

Dear Messrs. Diallo and Heitkamp:

I am the owner of two Honda vehicles, a 2014 Odyssey and a 2009 Pilot. I bought them because of Honda's reputation for manufacturing excellence and because of how well Honda has conducted itself as an ethically responsible auto manufacturer at a time when other manufacturers were hiding such things as deadly ignition switch failures and fraudulently manipulating their emissions-testing results.

I write because our 2009 Honda Pilot had a catastrophic failure within a period not exceeding three minutes under highway conditions on [REDACTED] in eastern Connecticut on the morning of January 20, 2024. The car had 155,000 miles on it and was in very good condition as reported by Honda of Westport's multi-point inspection surveys conducted as recently as December 16, 2023. The car had proceeded from our home in Wilton, CT to that point, a distance of approximately 85 miles, most of those miles on highways at highway speeds.

I know that it is very natural to say that failure of a vehicle that is 15 years old with 155,000 miles on it should not be the subject of any further discussion, and in fact Honda of Westport has taken that position. However, I think that an explanation of the circumstances here is such that your own headquarters engineering teams might well want to examine this vehicle to determine what, in fact, happened to it with a view to seeing whether the kind of catastrophic failure that occurred might in fact be something that could happen in models of that era (a number of which I see still on the roads around here) and perhaps also to later, or even current, models -- and to act accordingly with respect to addressing the issue.

Here are the specific facts as to what happened to my wife driving our 2009 Pilot within that period not exceeding three minutes:

1. The heater appeared to stop working on that very cold day with windchills in the teens. My wife tried to adjust the heater controls but to no effect.
2. The check engine light came on, and as we had learned from a previous experience with piston-ring failure on this same vehicle, that means to stop as soon as possible. At that point she was approaching [REDACTED] in North Stonington, Connecticut. So she immediately took that exit ramp.

3. Just before she entered the exit ramp, essentially every light on her dashboard went on and the vehicle completely shut down close to the bottom of the ramp. My wife coasted the vehicle down the short remaining part of the exit ramp to its end point. There, some customers who saw her situation in the Citgo gas station/convenience store that adjoins the end of the ramp kindly came over to push her car onto the grounds of the Citgo. One of the men who had pushed the vehicle, upon opening the vehicle's hood and looking inside (but not touching anything), said that he thought it might have been a coolant system failure. However, he was not a mechanic as far as we know.
4. We called AAA, and my wife waited for ninety minutes for a flatbed tow truck to arrive to haul the car to Honda of Westport. We had called ahead to alert Honda of Westport that it would be delivered, and in fact it was delivered after hours, offloaded from the flatbed tow truck on Saturday, early in the evening. It was examined by Honda of Westport on Monday, January 22nd.

As we understand what Honda of Westport has reported to us, the technician(s) who examined the car were unable to determine the cause of the failure but did report finding a crack in the radiator and also determined that the engine had three pistons that were operating with proper compression but three other pistons that had zero compression. The car remains at Honda of Westport where it has stayed since the time it was delivered there by flatbed tow truck.

Had this failure occurred on a heavily traveled road at highway speeds, such a complete and catastrophic vehicle failure could, of course, have created a very dangerous situation. To have a vehicle completely "crap out" within a matter of several minutes is frankly incredible in my experience with car ownership over a number of years and with a practice of running all of my cars over the years (including Oldsmobiles, Chryslers, and Jeeps) to 200,000 or more miles before retiring them; I pride myself on seeing to their careful maintenance by professionals such as your own technicians.

In short, this experience was really unexpected from a Honda vehicle, and I thought, first of all, that you would want to know about it, and second of all, that as I previously mentioned, you would want your own expert headquarters technicians to inspect this vehicle to figure out what in the world had happened to cause such a catastrophic failure of it.

The vehicle's last service occurred at Honda of Westport on December 16, 2023, barely a month before this event. The usual multi-point inspection was performed. No issues were flagged. On review of the finished work, the Honda of Westport service personnel determined that the engine oil had been overfilled on the oil change done that day by Honda of Westport; so another oil change was done and checked to be sure it was filled properly that time. Following that, everything was said to be in good shape. Throughout the time of our ownership of this vehicle, it has been maintained exclusively by Honda of Westport for most of the year and Berlin City Honda in Portland, Maine when we're in Maine (as we are for two months of the summer) if any issue arises there. No other mechanics have done any work on the vehicle.

It was Berlin City Honda that, several years ago, diagnosed the piston-ring failure (after the car was flatbedded 80 miles there right after the check engine light came on), and Berlin City Honda did the \$4,250 of work required to remedy that situation, for which you kindly authorized my reimbursement. That's something I very much appreciate, and I trust your sense of fairness in circumstances such as these. I also know the reputation for excellence of Honda vehicles and know that it is well-deserved.

The service record for this vehicle's second-to-last service on October 6, 2023 shows among other things that Honda of Westport performed a coolant flush service using a coolant kit with coolant and parts. The cost was \$250; so this work was not a trivial exercise. As usual, the records also show on that visit the usual multi-point inspection was performed and no issues were identified that were not addressed at that time.

I'm copying the Service Managers of both Honda of Westport and Berlin City Honda. It is my hope that some suitable arrangement can be made to make me whole for what happened here. The car at this point is probably worth around \$4,000 (if it were not suffering from the problems it suffers from right now) -- based upon information from Carfax. Honda of Westport has advised me that the engine is completely shot and that they have identified a Pilot engine with 140,000 miles on it; they report that they can obtain it and install it in my vehicle for around \$8,000. However, it makes little sense from my perspective to do that in a car with a value that is only half that amount.

What I ask that you all do is the following: (a) take possession of this vehicle, (b) figure out what went wrong with it, and (c) provide me at your cost with another 2009 (or roughly that era) Pilot with mileage in the 155,000-mile (or less) range that I can have instead of it.

I'm not asking for anything more than that, and I don't think I should in fairness have to suffer anything less than that.

Sincerely,

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

Cc: Catherine McEvilly, Esq. Senior Vice President & General Counsel, Honda North America
Service Manager, Honda of Westport, 186 Linwood Ave., Fairfield, CT 06824
Service Manager, Berlin City Honda, 255 Maine Mall Rd., South Portland, ME 04106

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
Wilton, CT [REDACTED]

WESTCHESTER NY 105

14 FEB 2024 PM02:01

*The National Highway Traffic Safety
Administration
1200 New Jersey Avenue SE
West Building
Washington, D.C. 20590*

20590-

