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6 November, 2001

[REDACTED]
Dunlap, IL [REDACTED]

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Attention Personnel Responsible For Seat Belt Design and Engine Oil Drain Plugs:
Copy to NHTSA, 400 7th St., No 520, Washington, DC 20590

Reference GMC 2000, 2001 Trucks; 2000, 2001 Impalas; Possibly All Vehicles w/4.3L V-6 Engines

I have two nuisance problems with the above vehicles. First, we own a 2000 GMC Sonoma Pickup with the bucket seats. In the winter time with a coat on, it is difficult to fasten the driver's seat belt. The steel end of the belt is bent too much toward the driver's hip, requiring the driver to push the belt toward the center of the vehicle so the other end of the belt can be inserted into the buckle. This is awkward and cumbersome to do. I am sure that people with wide hips and some extra weight have a more severe problem. (I am 6ft. and weigh only 178 lb.)

The local GMC dealer refused to install a new belt because he said the replacement would be identical to the factory original. So, I tried to bend the belt toward the center of the truck, but I was not surprised to learn quickly that this end is spring steel. Alas! I bet that some larger people never bother to go to this much effort to even fasten this belt. I am aware that no alterations should ever be made to safety equipment. It seems to me the factory fix would be simple. Just have your seat belt supplier put less bend in this belt. It can be bent another one or two inches and not interfere with the center storage compartment.

I recently rented an Impala and noticed the same problem with the driver's belt. This was a shorter belt as the car had the full width front seat with steering column shift.

The second problem is not safety related, but is another source of aggravation and unnecessary expense. The engine oil drain plug on the GMC Sonoma with the 4.3L engine has too small a hexagonal head. The socket or wrench slips on the plug head and damages the plug. So, I had to drive to the local GMC dealer to have the plug removed. I later purchased a new plug from a quick oil change business. Now, I am forced to buy a 6-sided box end wrench, which is difficult to find, to assure it does not slip on the hex head of the 15 mm plug. (This is the size of the hex head.)

I suggest you change to a plug with a larger hex head-about 20 mm. This reduces the possibility of the wrench or socket slipping on the hex head, and makes it easier for those of us who like to do our own routine service. The older Buicks and Chevies used plugs with large heads in inch sizes. I assume they are available in metric size.

Sincerely,
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