

U.S. Department
of TransportationNational Highway
Traffic Safety
Administration

DOT Auto Safety Hotline

Vehicle Owner's Questionnaire (VOQ)

NATIONWIDE 1-888-DASH-2-DOT

1-888-327-4236

www.nhtsa.dot.gov/hotline

FOR AGENCY USE ONLY 231

Date Received

22-FEB-2000

 Od_or _____
 Rt_dt _____
 od_rt _____
 up_ltr _____

Reference No.

857358

 Do you authorize NHTSA to provide a copy of report to the manufacturer of your vehicle? ☐ YES ☐ NO
 In the absence of an authorization, NHTSA WILL NOT provide your name and address to the vehicle manufacturer.

Signature of Owner _____ Date ____/____/____

VEHICLE INFORMATION

Vehicle Ident. No. (VIN) _____ (located at front of windshield on driver's side)	Vehicle Make SATURN	Vehicle Model EV1	Vehicle Year 1997	Current Odometer Reading
--	-------------------------------	-----------------------------	-----------------------------	--------------------------

Purchase Date	Dealer's Name _____	Engine Size (CID/CC/L) _____	☐ Turbo ☐ Diesel ☐ Gas ☐ Fuel Injection
☐ New ☒ Used	City _____ State _____ Zip Code _____	No Cylinders _____	

Transmission Type ☐ Manual ☐ Automatic	Antilock Brakes ☐ Yes ☒ No	Restraint System ☐ 3-Point Belt ☐ Motorbell ☐ Driverside Airbag ☐ 2-Point Belt ☐ Passengerside Airbag	Cruise Control ☐ Yes ☒ No	Drive Train ☐ Front ☐ Rear ☐ 4-Wheel	Vehicle Type ☐ Car ☐ Sport Ult ☐ Van ☐ Truck ☐ Minivan ☐ Motorcycle ☐ Other _____	Body Style ☐ 2-Door ☐ 4-Door ☐ Stationwagon ☐ Pick Up Truck ☐ Other _____
--	---	---	--	--	--	---

FAILED COMPONENT(S)/PART(S) INFORMATION

Component 08100000	Part Name(s) ELECTRICAL SYSTEM: BATTERY	Location ☐ Left ☐ Right ☐ Front ☐ Rear	Failed Part(s) ☐ Original ☐ Replacement
No of Failures	Date(s) of Failure(s) _____ Mileage at Failure(s) _____ Vehicle Speed at Failure(s) _____	Failed Part(s) Available? ☐ Yes ☐ No	NHTSA Previously Contacted? ☐ Yes ☐ No

APPLICATION INCIDENT INFORMATION

(Please describe in detail the incident(s), Failure(s), Crash(es), and injury(ies) on the back of this form)

Crash ☐ Yes ☒ No	Fire ☒ Yes ☐ No	Number of Persons Injured	Number of Fatalities	Estimated Property Damage	Reported to Police ☐ Yes ☒ No
--	---	---------------------------	----------------------	---------------------------	---

NARRATIVE DESCRIPTION OF FAILURE(S), INCIDENT(S), INJURY(IES)

WHILE CHARGING UP ELECTRICAL BATTERY VEHICLE CAUGHT ON FIRE. PLEASE PROVIDE FURTHER INFORMATION. *AK

CONTINUED ON BACK (REVERSE)

The Privacy Act of 1974-Public Law 93-579 This information is requested pursuant to authority vested in the National Highway Traffic Safety Act and subsequent amendments. You are under no obligation to respond to this questionnaire. Your response may be used to assist the NHTSA in determining whether a manufacturer should take appropriate action to correct a safety defect. If the NHTSA proceeds with administrative enforcement or litigation against a manufacturer, your response, or a statistical summary thereof, may be used in support of the agency's action.

 DOT Auto Safety Hotline Vehicle Owner's Questionnaire (VOQ) U.S. Department of Transportation National Highway Traffic Safety Administration NATIONALWIDE 1-888-DASH-2-DOT 1-888-327-4236 www.nhtsa.dot.gov/hotline		FOR AGENCY USE ONLY 231 Date Received NO MAR 21 22-FEB-2000 OFFICE OF DEFECTS INVESTIGATION Od_or _____ Od_R 56 _____ up_itr _____ Reference No. 857358	
OWNER INFORMATION (Type or Print) 591988		Work Number _____ Home Number _____	
Do you authorize NHTSA to provide a copy of report to the manufacturer of your vehicle? ☐ YES ☐ NO In the absence of an authorization, NHTSA WILL NOT provide your name and address to the vehicle manufacturer.			
Signature of Owner _____ Date ____/____/____			
VEHICLE INFORMATION			
Vehicle Ident. No. (VIN.) (Located at bottom of windshield on driver's side)		Vehicle Make SATURN	Vehicle Model EV1
		Vehicle Year 1997	Current Odometer Reading
Purchase Date ☐ New ☒ Used	Dealer's Name _____ City _____ State _____ Zip Code _____		Engine Size (CID/CC/L) _____ No Cylinders _____ ☐ Turbo ☐ Diesel ☐ Gas ☐ Fuel Injection
Transmission Type ☐ Manual ☐ Automatic	Antilock Brakes ☐ Yes ☒ No	Restraint System ☐ 3-Point Belt ☐ Driverside Airbag ☐ Passengerside Airbag ☐ Motorbelt ☐ 2-Point Belt	Cruise Control ☐ Yes ☒ No
Drive Train ☐ Front ☐ Rear ☐ 4-Wheel		Vehicle Type ☐ Car ☐ Van ☐ Minivan ☐ Other _____	Body Style ☐ Sport Ut ☐ Truck ☐ Motorcycle ☐ 2-Door ☐ 4-Door ☐ Stationwagon ☐ Pick Up Truck ☐ Other _____
FAILED COMPONENT(S)/PART(S) INFORMATION			
Component 08100000	Part Name(s) ELECTRICAL SYSTEM: BATTERY	Location ☐ Left ☐ Front ☐ Right ☐ Rear	Failed Part(s) ☐ Original ☐ Replacement
No of Failures	Date(s) of Failure(s) _____ Mileage at Failure(s) _____ Vehicle Speed at Failure(s) _____	Failed Part(s) Available? ☐ Yes ☐ No	NHTSA Previously Contacted? ☐ Yes ☐ No
APPLICATION INCIDENT INFORMATION			
(Please describe in detail the incident(s), Failure(s), Crash(es), and Injury(ies) on the back of this form)			
Crash ☐ Yes ☒ No	Fire ☒ Yes ☐ No	Number of Persons Injured	Number of Fatalities
		Estimated Property Damage	Reported to Police ☐ Yes ☒ No
NARRATIVE DESCRIPTION OF FAILURE(S), INCIDENT(S), INJURY(IES)			
WHILE CHARGING UP ELECTRICAL BATTERY VEHICLE CAUGHT ON FIRE. PLEASE PROVIDE FURTHER INFORMATION. *AK			
CONTINUE ON BACK IF NEEDED			
The Privacy Act of 1974-Public Law 93-579 This information is requested pursuant to authority vested in the National Highway Traffic Safety Act and subsequent amendments. You are under no obligation to respond this questionnaire. Your response may be used to assist the NHTSA in determining whether a manufacturer should take appropriate action to correct a safety defect. If the NHTSA proceeds with administrative enforcement or litigation against a manufacturer, your response, or a statistical summary thereof, may be used in support of the agency's action.			

Events of Thursday, February 17, 2000.

We had reserved a cabin in Idyllwild for the weekend of the 19th with some friends of ours. We hadn't finished grocery shopping so I asked Ruth about my taking the EV1 that day and I would run to Costco at lunch to pick up the final food items. Costco has a charger for the car, and we try to drive the EV1 as many as miles as possible, so I thought it made sense for me to take the EV that day. Ruth usually drives it to work as her commute is about 10 miles and mine is only 3.5.

When I got into the car that morning it had 56 miles showing for the predicted range. I drove the car to work and at lunchtime drove to Costco. It was a cloudy day but I don't remember it raining at any time. I plugged the car in at Costco and went shopping. I suppose I was in the store about 40 min. When I came out the predicted range showed 54 miles. I drove the car home and unloaded the groceries, went back to work, and came home at the end of the day. I remembering calling Ruth and telling her it was 5:31 and I was coming home.

I arrived home about 5:45PM and parked the General Motors EV1 in the garage. The predicted range showed 44 miles. Since I was planning to go out again that evening I plugged in the car. Usually I plug the car in at night, right before going to bed! To plug in the car I turned the timer override switch to ON, took the charge coupling paddle out of the Edison charging unit, and plugged it into the cars charge coupling port. I heard the charger startup in the normal fashion - both the car's fan and the charger's fan started to run. I then went into the house, pressing the main garage door close button while leaving the garage. I don't remember if I closed the side garage door fully or not. I have a tendency to leave it slightly ajar.

Then next time I was at the garage was when I saw the car on fire.

After eating supper we were watching 'The West Wing', which we had taped from the previous evening. Ruth mentioned that she was going to open the kitchen windows to air out the house. Our kitchen is being remodeled so we prepared our meal (microwaved chicken pot pies) in the dining room. Someone that day had done some finishing work on the newly installed dry wall in the kitchen and it smelled chalky - like spackel. I hadn't been in the kitchen since walking through it when I came home from work. Then next thing I heard was Ruth yelling "Ron, there's a fire in the garage!"

I ran out to the garage while Ruth ran back into the living room. I could see smoke coming out of the side garage door and I heard this constant buzzing noise, similar to what our toaster makes when it gets stuck in the down position while toasting bagels. I opened the door and smoke belled out, I'd say from about waist high. The garage was filled with thick black smoke. There wasn't any light on in the garage and all I could see was a fire at the front end of the EV1. It looked about 3 ft high and burning from the floor. The fire was concentrated like a nicely built campfire, about 2 feet in diameter. I'm thinking there's a pool of melted plastic burning on the floor.

I wasn't going into the garage because all the smoke. It looked bad. I yelled "Call 911!" Ruth came back with the fire extinguisher just while I was yelling out and she went back into the house. I pulled the pin on the fire extinguisher. There wasn't any resistance and nothing came out. I shut the side garage door and looked at the fire extinguishing wondering "Why the hell can't I get this thing to work?!" It looked to me that the lever action on the fire extinguisher was disengaged, the handle would move freely all the way in without anything happening. I dropped the fire extinguisher and ran back into the house, yelling frantically to Ruth if she had called 911. She was standing in the hall way, using a phone that we had recently moved off the kitchen wall to the hall bed room desk. She got off the phone and said the firemen were coming. We were to get out of the house! She was grabbing some personal items and taking them out to the front sidewalk. I grab some stuff of mine and put it out there too.

I thought about using a garden hose when I couldn't get the fire extinguisher to work. I had to keep the fire from leaving the garage and burning the house. If only I could suppress it until the firemen arrived. My garden hose was in the garage. I thought our neighbor might have one. I ran out of the house and into the drive way. Ruth was yelling "I've got to move the car". Our Honda was parked in front of the garage, on the right hand side.

I saw Harlan, our neighbor, standing in his driveway by his car. I ran up to him and asked "Can I use your hose. Our garage is on fire!" While this was happening I heard car wheels screeching ~ Ruth was pulling the Honda away from the garage and parking it next to Harlan's drive.

Harlan showed me where his garden hose was attached at the back of the garage. I unscrewed it and ran with it back to the faucet at the side of the house. While I'm running back I see flame through the glass at the on the side of the garage opposite the side garage door. I attached the hose and turned it on. "I can't let the fire spread to the house!" is pounding in my head. I took the hose and sprayed water on the roof covering the breezy way between the house and the garage. I could see that I wasn't reaching the upper half of the roof so, after a little while, I abandoned my efforts and ran with the hose to the side door. On the way I heard a loud POP from inside the garage. Over the course of the next 15 or so minutes I heard two more similar pops. I thought the batteries were exploding. I opened the side door, which I had closed earlier when I first saw the fire, and got blasted with smoke and hot air. "Stupid" I thought to myself, but I realized that I was fortunately not burned. I dropped to my knees, peering underneath the smoke. I could see that much more of the garage was on fire by the EV1 than when I first looked in. I started spraying the water, covering up the end of the hose to develop more pressure. The water's going in but I'm thinking it's not reaching the fire! I sprayed back and forth wondering if it's doing much good - the oxygen I'm letting in is letting the fire burn more than the water is putting it out. Harlan yells out "Bring the hose to the side window." I'm thinking I should shut the door but what if it's hot. I sprayed water on the door, trying to get some on the inside, sprayed some on the outside, and on the doorknob. I grabbed the doorknob and shut the door. I ran around to the opposite side of the garage with the hose to the window. I could see that some of the glass has already been broken out from the fire and started spraying the water in. More of the window broke away while I was there. I think it was because of the cold water hitting the hot glass. I'd say I was at the window 10 minutes. I could see my mountain bike hanging from the rafters in front of the EV1. The tires on the bike were melting and burning. At some point Harlan says that he has a fire extinguisher and that I should move out of the way so he could douse the garage with it. I don't want to take the hose off the fire but finally move back after further coaxing. "Where are the fire trucks?" I frantically inquired. He used the fire extinguisher through the window and when he was done I couldn't see any more flames from my angle. I got right back in there with the hose, spraying water through the window. From my angle, I suppose I was mostly getting water on the things in front of the garage, in front of the EV1. It seemed like the fire was suppressed for about 3 minutes from the fire extinguisher but then started burning even worse than before. I hear Ruth yell that the fire truck was coming. Almost the entire window was broken away at this point.

I could hear the firemen pull up and a fireman behind me said that I should step back to let him in there. I turned around and couldn't see that he had a hose so I kept on spraying the water in the garage. He told me to get away from the window and I finally did. Then the firemen started putting out the fire. At some point I saw the neighbors tree branches which overhung the garage roof on window side of the garage catch fire but it was put out quickly.

After the fire was extinguished I went into the garage. The fire investigator was still there, looking at the front of the car. A fireman was on the driver's side, by the remains of the front left tire. He said, "I think I see smoke." We looked again and a few seconds later we all saw some wisps of smoke coming from the front left corner of the inverter electrical box that sat just under the burned away hood. The fireman left, I think to get something, and I left the garage too.

All the utilities that came through the garage were damaged so the house was basically uninhabitable. There was no water, electricity, gas, phone, cable working. Because a number of strangers came up to us while the firemen were fighting the fire we were nervous about leaving the house that night. At about 11PM we went to bed with extra blankets.

The next day we called the EV1 Customer Service number from our cell phone and called our friends to tell them what happened and that we couldn't go to the cabin with them.

The car that day had been working great - nothing unusual at all. Ever since the battery pack was replaced during the last major repairs over Thanksgiving, the projected range had been a respectable 55 to 57 in the morning. As I recall, I took it in for service in November because the 'Service Soon' light had come on occasionally and the range wasn't as good as it had been.

I took the car in for minor service since then. When I had taken the car in the last week of November the service rep noticed that the front windshield was cracked at the base. On Dec. 15th I took the car in again to Saturn of Kearny Mesa to get the front windshield replaced. I told the service rep that it was too bad it wasn't time for my 25000 mile service because I'd have to bring the car back again then. He said that they could go ahead and do the 25000 mile service. The car had 22904 on the car at that time (based on the service record.) Saturn of Kearny Mesa has done all the service on the EV1 since we got it from them April 11th, 1997.

Our three year lease on the EV1 was up on April 10th, 2000. We had talked to Jackie Stanton, the EV1 marketing rep, and told her we were interested in renewing our lease for another two years. Of course, things have changed. Ruth isn't comfortable with a car that can catch on fire. We keep thinking that we might have died if I had plugged it in at night, before going to bed, like we normally do.

This is a complete and accurate account of these events as I can best recall them.



Ruth's statement

On Thursday February 17, 2000 I got home from work at about 5pm. Ron got home around 5:45. We had some dinner and were watching TV. A little before 7 I decided to open a window in the kitchen because it still smelled from the spackling that the kitchen remodelers had done that day. I opened the kitchen window and heard a high-pitched noise. It sounded like a car alarm or a smoke alarm but seemed to be coming from our garage. Then I noticed lots of smoke coming from the garage. I think the smoke was coming from around the door and also from the far side of the garage.

I yelled, "Ron there's a fire!" and went to get our fire extinguisher. I met Ron in the kitchen (he was returning from the garage) and handed him the extinguisher and he told me to call 911. I called 911 and gave them our information and they told me to get everyone out of the house. I went into the bedroom and got our box of important papers and took it outside. Then I noticed that our Honda was parked in front of the garage. I went back inside and got my keys and told Ron that I was moving the Honda. When I went to the car there were flames coming from the side of the garage where the window had been and there was lots of smoke coming from the garage door. Our neighbor came out and I told him there was a fire. I heard (I think) 3 popping/exploding noises from the garage they were spaced apart and didn't happen all at the same time or one right after the other.

Then I went into the street to look for the fire truck. There was a very large amount of black smoke that was going east from our house down La Morada. I saw Ron using the hose to put water on the roof between the garage and the house. I heard the fire sirens but then they stopped. They started up again and I saw the flashing lights but they stopped again several blocks down the street. I started running down the middle of the street. The truck started up again and I waved and pointed to our house. When I got back to the house the firemen were getting set up. I told them that there was an electric car in the garage (I wanted them to be aware in case the batteries exploded or something.) The policeman moved us back to the sidewalk.

+++++

I usually drive the car to work every day. The only unusual things about the car I had noticed were

- 1) Sometimes when the heater was running, I heard a "pop" noise from the left front area of the car. I would turn the heater off immediately. No warning or engine lights ever came on. I could turn the heater on later and it would work fine. The problem was not consistent - it did not occur daily. It usually happened while I was sitting in traffic waiting to get on the freeway - I don't remember it ever happening while at driving speeds.
- 2) One time when I came home and turned the car off, it sort of re-started itself. I could hear the fan/engine noise although the car was not on. Ron resolved the problem. Again, no warning or engine lights ever came on.

Otherwise, the car was probably working the best it ever had. I was consistently getting a range of between 55 and 60 even though it has been a little cold lately. It ran fine and showed no hint of any problems.