

Ford Motor Company

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OFFICE
DEFECTS INVESTIGATION

L. W. Camp, Director
Automotive Safety Office
Environmental and Safety Engineering

November 28, 2000

00V-402 (01)

Mr. Kenneth Weinstein
Associate Administrator for
Safety Assurance
National Highway Traffic
Safety Administration
400 Seventh Street, S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20590

Dear Mr. Weinstein:

Pursuant to Part 573 of Title 49 of the Code of Federal Regulations, Defect and Noncompliance Reports, Ford Motor Company submits the following information concerning a safety-related recall action that it is initiating.

This recall action involves replacement of the front stabilizer bar links in certain 1995 through 1997 model year Explorer and Mountaineer vehicles. As the Agency is aware, Ford extended warranty coverage on September 21, 2000 for replacement of the links if they broke. Subsequent testing by Ford confirmed that fracture of the stabilizer bar links does not result in a loss of vehicles control, but found that vehicle handling could be affected at extreme limits. While we have not concluded that the condition presents an unreasonable risk to motor vehicle safety, we have decided to conduct a safety recall in an abundance of caution and to reassure owners of these vehicles of Ford's commitment to their safety and satisfaction.

573.5 (c) (2)

Certain 1995 through 1997 model year Explorer and Mountaineer vehicles built from the beginning of production for the 1995 model year through October 31, 1996.

Because these vehicles are not produced in VIN order, information as to the applicability of this action to specific vehicles can best be obtained by either calling Ford's toll-free line (1-800-392-3673) or contacting a local Ford or Lincoln/Mercury dealer, who can obtain specific information regarding the vehicles from the Ford OASIS computer system.



00V-402 (02)

573.5 (c) (3)

Approximately 810,000 vehicles are affected by this recall.

573.5 (c) (4)

Unknown.

573.5 (c) (5)

Under certain conditions, predominantly in cold weather areas, a front stabilizer bar link stud can fracture from bending fatigue. Bushing load/deflection testing indicates that the stiffness of the bushing urethane material increases as the temperature is lowered, which could increase the bending fatigue load on the stud from the bushing material. Fracture of the front sway bar link is most likely to occur due to high loads during low speed operation when one side of the suspension is in jounce and the other side in rebound (such as when entering or exiting a sloping driveway). Detailed analysis of owner and field report data indicates that owners typically report hearing noises from the front suspension area when operating a vehicle with a fractured link or links or notice increased vehicle lean in a turn or sense a feeling of looseness in the steering. Some owners report vehicle wander or sway, particularly when driving above 50 mph.

573.5 (c) (6)

On September 19, 2000, the Agency advised Ford that it had received several Vehicle Owner Questionnaires (VOQs) related to missing or broken front stabilizer bar links on the subject Explorer vehicles and was opening a Preliminary Evaluation investigation. On September 19 and September 20 Ford personnel conducted a review of warranty, owner and field report sources for reports or claims of missing or broken front stabilizer bar links on 1995 and 1996 model year Explorers. Those reviews confirmed field incidents of stabilizer bar link fracture with the highest rate being in cold weather states on vehicles equipped with 8mm stabilizer bar links (vehicles built from beginning of production for the 1995 model year through October 31, 1996).

Based on the reports of 8mm front stabilizer bar link failures with no reports of significant affect on vehicle control, on September 21 Ford advised its dealers that it had approved Owner Notification Program 00M11, extending warranty coverage for the front stabilizer bar link to 10 years/100,000 miles on Explorer and Mountaineer vehicles built from beginning of production for the 1995 model year through October 31, 1996.

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During the gathering of information necessary to respond to NHTSA inquiry PE00-039, Ford located approximately 262 owner and field reports, including two alleged minor accidents that potentially relate to this condition, involving Explorer and Mountaineer vehicles built from beginning of production for the 1995 model year through October 31, 1996.

573.5 (c) (8)

Owners of record of the affected vehicles will be notified by first class mail on or about the week of December 18, 2000 to return vehicles to dealers for installation of 10mm front left and right stabilizer bar links.

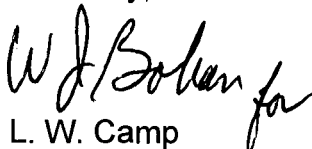
573.5 (c) (9)

Ford does not plan to make a public statement concerning this action. Copies of the notification letters to dealers and owners from Ford Customer Service Division will be forwarded when available.

573.5 (c) (10)

Ford has assigned campaign number 00S47 to this action.

Sincerely,


L. W. Camp