



U.S. Department  
of Transportation  
**National Highway  
Traffic Safety  
Administration**

400 Seventh Street, S.W.  
Washington, D.C. 20590

**CERTIFIED MAIL**  
**RETURN RECEIPT REQUESTED**

SEP 2 2003

Mr. John Maddox  
Product Compliance  
Volkswagen of America, Inc.  
3800 Hamlin Road  
Auburn Hills, MI 48326

NVS-jfa  
EA03-013

Dear Mr. Maddox:

This letter is to advise you that the Office of Defects Investigation (ODI) has completed Preliminary Evaluation (PE03-015) concerning allegations of separation of the blades of the engine's electronic cooling fan in Eurovan and Winnebago Rialta vehicles built on a Eurovan chassis. Based on our analysis of the information received, ODI has upgraded this matter into an Engineering Analysis (EA), which has been assigned identification number EA03-013. As part of the investigation, this letter requests clarification of certain data submitted under PE03-015, as well as updated and additional information.

ODI does not agree with Volkswagen's assessment that the alleged defect is a rare event. This is evidenced by two model years, 1999 and 2000, that are over-represented in the report data. Nor does ODI agree with Volkswagen's assessment that fuel hoses are not in the vicinity of the cooling fan rotors. The video provided by Volkswagen clearly shows fuel lines directly behind the driver's side fan. There are over 20 reports where separated blades have damaged other components within the engine compartment.

As a fan begins to fail, the vehicle may start making noise. The operator may investigate the noise created by a failed fan blade and look into the engine compartment. The risk is increased because the fan is controlled thermostatically and can be energized even with the ignition turned off and the engine not running. An unwary consumer, or technician, could be struck by a separated blade, or piece of a blade, should the fan be energized during this inspection.

Unless otherwise stated in the text, the following definitions apply to these information requests:

- **Subject vehicles:** all 1996 through 2003 Volkswagen Eurovan and Winnebago Rialta vehicles built on a Eurovan chassis manufactured for sale or lease in the United States.



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- **Subject component:** all Siemens electronic cooling fans manufactured for the subject vehicles.
- **VW:** Volkswagen AG, Volkswagen of America, Inc., all of their past and present officers and employees, whether assigned to their principal offices or any of their field or other locations, including all of their divisions, subsidiaries (whether or not incorporated) and affiliated enterprises and all of their headquarters, regional, zone and other offices and their employees, and all agents, contractors, consultants, attorneys and law firms and other persons engaged directly or indirectly (e.g., employee of a consultant) by or under the control of VW (including all business units and persons previously referred to), who are or, in or after 1994, were involved in any way with any of the following related to the alleged defect in the subject vehicles:
  - a. Design, engineering, analysis, modification or production (e.g. quality control);
  - b. Testing, assessment or evaluation;
  - c. Consideration, or recognition of potential or actual defects, reporting, record-keeping and information management, (e.g., complaints, field reports, warranty information, part sales), analysis, claims, or lawsuits; or
  - d. Communication to, from or intended for zone representatives, fleets, dealers, or other field locations, including but not limited to people who have the capacity to obtain information from dealers.
- **Alleged defect:** separation of the blades from the engine's electronic cooling fan.
- **Document:** "Document(s)" is used in the broadest sense of the word and shall mean all original written, printed, typed, recorded, or graphic matter whatsoever, however produced or reproduced, of every kind, nature, and description, and all non-identical copies of both sides thereof, including, but not limited to, papers, letters, memoranda, correspondence, communications, electronic mail (e-mail) messages (existing in hard copy and/or in electronic storage), faxes, mailgrams, telegrams, cables, telex messages, notes, annotations, working papers, drafts, minutes, records, audio and video recordings, data, databases, other information bases, summaries, charts, tables, graphics, other visual displays, photographs, statements, interviews, opinions, reports, newspaper articles, studies, analyses, evaluations, interpretations, contracts, agreements, jottings, agendas, bulletins, notices, announcements, instructions, blueprints, drawings, as-builts, changes, manuals, publications, work schedules, journals, statistical data, desk, portable and computer calendars, appointment books, diaries, travel reports, lists, tabulations, computer printouts, data processing program libraries, data processing inputs and outputs, microfilms, microfiches, statements for services, resolutions, financial statements, governmental records, business records, personnel records, work orders, pleadings, discovery in any form, affidavits, motions, responses to discovery, all transcripts, administrative filings and all mechanical, magnetic, photographic and electronic records or recordings of any kind, including any storage media associated with computers, including, but not limited to, information on hard drives, floppy disks, backup tapes, and zip drives, electronic communications, including but not limited to, the Internet and shall

include any drafts or revisions pertaining to any of the foregoing, all other things similar to any of the foregoing, however denominated by VW, any other data compilations from which information can be obtained, translated if necessary, into a usable form and any other documents. For purposes of this request, any document which contains any note, comment, addition, deletion, insertion, annotation, or otherwise comprises a non-identical copy of another document shall be treated as a separate document subject to production. In all cases where original and any non-identical copies are not available, "document(s)" also means any identical copies of the original and all non-identical copies thereof. Any document, record, graph, chart, film or photograph originally produced in color must be provided in color. Furnish all documents whether verified by the manufacturer or not. If a document is not in the English language, provide both the original document and an English translation of the document.

- **Other terms:** To the extent that they are used in these information requests, the terms "claim," "consumer complaint," "dealer field report," "field report," "fire," "fleet," "good will," "make," "model," "model year," "notice," "property damage," "property damage claim," "rollover," "type," "warranty," "warranty adjustment," and "warranty claim," whether used in singular or in plural form, have the same meaning as found in 49 CFR 579.4.

In order for my staff to evaluate the alleged defect, certain information is required. Pursuant to 49 U.S.C. § 30166, please provide numbered responses to the following information requests. Insofar as VW has previously provided a document to ODI, VW may produce it again or identify the document, the document submission to ODI in which it was included and the precise location in that submission where the document is located. When documents are produced, the documents shall be produced in an identified, organized manner that corresponds with the organization of this information request letter (including all individual requests and subparts). When documents are produced and the documents would not, standing alone, be self-explanatory, the production of documents shall be supplemented and accompanied by explanation.

Please repeat the applicable request verbatim above each response. After VW's response to each request, identify the source of the information and indicate the last date the information was gathered.

1. State, by model and model year, the number of subject vehicles VW has manufactured for sale or lease in the United States that were not provided under PE03-015. Separately, for each subject vehicle manufactured to date by VW, state the following:
  - a. Vehicle identification number (VIN);
  - b. Make;
  - c. Model;
  - d. Model Year;
  - e. Date of manufacture;
  - f. Date warranty coverage commenced; and

- g. The State in the United States where the vehicle was originally sold or leased (or delivered for sale or lease).

Provide the table in Microsoft Access 2000, or a compatible format, entitled "PRODUCTION DATA." See Enclosure 1, Data Collection Disc, for a pre-formatted table which provides further details regarding this submission.

2. State the number of each of the following, received by VW, or of which VW are otherwise aware, which relate to, or may relate to, the alleged defect in the subject vehicles that were not provided under PE03-015:
  - a. Consumer complaints, including those from fleet operators;
  - b. Field reports, including dealer field reports;
  - c. Reports involving a crash, injury, or fatality, based on claims against the manufacturer involving a death or injury, notices received by the manufacturer alleging or proving that a death or injury was caused by a possible defect in a subject vehicle, property damage claims, consumer complaints, or field reports;
  - d. Reports involving a fire, based on claims against the manufacturer involving a death or injury, notices received by the manufacturer alleging or proving that a death or injury was caused by a possible defect in a subject vehicle, property damage claims, consumer complaints, or field reports;
  - e. Property damage claims; and
  - f. Third-party arbitration proceedings where VW is or was a party to the arbitration; and
  - g. Lawsuits, both pending and closed, in which VW is or was a defendant or codefendant.

For subparts "a" through "e," state the total number of each item (e.g., consumer complaints, field reports, etc.) separately. Multiple incidents involving the same vehicle are to be counted separately. Multiple reports of the same incident are also to be counted separately (i.e., a consumer complaint and a field report involving the same incident in which a crash occurred are to be counted as a crash report, a field report and a consumer complaint).

In addition, for items "c" through "g," provide a summary description of the alleged problem and causal and contributing factors and VW's assessment of the problem, with a summary of the significant underlying facts and evidence. For items f and g, identify the parties to the action, as well as the caption, court, docket number, and date on which the complaint or other document initiating the action was filed.

3. Separately, for each item (complaint, report, claim, notice, or matter) within the scope of your response to Request No. 2, state the following information:
  - a. VW's file number or other identifier used;
  - b. The category of the item, as identified in Request No. 2 (i.e., consumer complaint, field report, etc.);
  - c. Vehicle owner or fleet name (and fleet contact person), address, and telephone number;
  - d. Vehicle's VIN;
  - e. Vehicle's make, model and model year;

- f. Vehicle's mileage at time of incident;
- g. Incident date;
- h. The state in which the incident occurred;
- i. Report or claim date;
- j. Whether a crash is alleged;
- k. Whether a fire is alleged;
- l. Whether property damage is alleged;
- m. Number of alleged injuries, if any; and
- n. Number of alleged fatalities, if any.

Provide this information in Microsoft Access 2000, or a compatible format, entitled "REQUEST NUMBER TWO DATA." See Enclosure 1, Data Collection Disc, for a pre-formatted table which provides further details regarding this submission.

4. Produce copies of all documents related to each item within the scope of Request No. 2. Organize the documents separately by category (i.e., consumer complaints, field reports, etc.) and describe the method VW used for organizing the documents.
5. State, by model and model year, a total count for all of the following categories of claims, collectively, that have been paid by VW to date that relate to, or may relate to, the alleged defect in the subject vehicles: warranty claims; extended warranty claims; claims for good will services that were provided; field, zone, or similar adjustments and reimbursements; and warranty claims or repairs made in accordance with a procedure specified in a technical service bulletin or customer satisfaction campaign that were not provided under PE03-015. Separately, for each such claim, state the following information:
  - a. VW's claim number;
  - b. Vehicle owner or fleet name (and fleet contact person) and telephone number;
  - c. VIN;
  - d. Repair date;
  - e. Vehicle mileage at time of repair;
  - f. Repairing dealer's or facility's name, telephone number, city and state or ZIP code;
  - g. Labor operation number;
  - h. Problem code;
  - i. Replacement part number(s) and description(s);
  - j. Concern stated by customer; and
  - k. Comment, if any, by dealer/technician relating to claim and/or repair.

Provide this information in Microsoft Access 2000, or a compatible format, entitled "WARRANTY DATA." See Enclosure 1, Data Collection Disc, for a pre-formatted table which provides further details regarding this submission.

6. Produce copies of all service, warranty, and other documents that relate to, or may relate to, the alleged defect in the subject vehicles, that VW has issued to any dealers, regional or zone offices, field offices, fleet purchasers, or other entities. This includes, but is not limited to, bulletins, advisories, informational documents, training documents, or other documents or

communications, with the exception of standard shop manuals. Also include the latest draft copy of any communication that VW is planning to issue within the next 120 days.

7. VW's response to question number eight, (assessments, analyses, tests, etc.) of ODI's May 1, 2003 letter indicates VW conducted three separate actions. For Action II: Analysis of 1 Broken Fan, provide all information relative to the following:
  - a. VW's response stated: "The results show the cause of the broken fan blade is a direct result of a forced rupture of the fan hood." Explain in detail what VW means by forced rupture of the fan hood.
  - b. Identify all factors that VW considered in it's analysis that the cause of the broken blade was a "direct result of a forced rupture of the fan hood."
  - c. All documents relating to the Action II analysis.
  
8. VW's response to question number eight, ( assessments, analyses, tests, etc.) of ODI's May 1, 2003 letter indicates VW conducted three separate actions. For Action III: Running Analysis, expected to be completed by week 27 of 2003, provide all information relative to the following:
  - a. The results of the analysis.
  - b. Copies of the reports for the vehicles identified by VIN numbers WV3AB47062H032660 and VW3AB47042H031121.
  - c. All documents relating to the Action III analysis.
  
9. ODI notes that the 1999 and 2000 model year Winnebago Rialta makes up just 25 percent of the subject vehicle population but account for 95 percent of the reports. And, the 1999 and 2000 model year Eurovan makes up just 14 percent of the 1993 through 2003 Eurovan population but account for 67 percent of the reports. What is VW's assessment of the high number of reported fan blade failures for the 1999 and 2000 model years? What is VW's assessment as to the over involvement in the Winnebago Rialta vehicles? What is VW's assessment of the sudden rise in reports beginning in the 1999 model year and the dramatic drop in reports after the 2000 model year?

This letter is being sent to VW pursuant to 49 U.S.C. § 30166, which authorizes NHTSA to conduct any investigation that may be necessary to enforce Chapter 301 of Title 49 and to request reports and the production of things. It constitutes a new request for information. VW's failure to respond promptly and fully to this letter could subject VW to civil penalties pursuant to 49 U.S.C. § 30165 or lead to an action for injunctive relief pursuant to 49 U.S.C. § 30163. (Other remedies and sanctions are available as well.) Please note that maximum civil penalties under 49 U.S.C. § 30165 have increased as a result of the recent enactment of the Transportation Recall Enhancement, Accountability, and Documentation (TREAD) Act, Public Law No. 106-414 (signed November 1, 2000). Section 5(a) of the TREAD Act, codified at 49 U.S.C. § 30165(b), provides for civil penalties of up to \$5,000 per day, with a maximum of \$15 million for a related series of violations, for failing or refusing to perform an act required under 49 U.S.C. § 30166. This includes failing to respond to ODI information requests.

If VW cannot respond to any specific request or subpart(s) thereof, please state the reason why it is unable to do so. If on the basis of attorney-client, attorney work product, or other privilege, VW does not submit one or more requested documents or items of information in response to this information request, VW must provide a privilege log identifying each document or item withheld, and stating the date, subject or title, the name and position of the person(s) from, and the person(s) to whom it was sent, and the name and position of any other recipient (to include all carbon copies or blind carbon copies), the nature of that information or material, and the basis for the claim of privilege and why that privilege applies.

VW's response to this letter, in duplicate, together with a copy of any confidentiality request, must be submitted to this office by October 15, 2003. Please refer to EA03-013 in VW's response to this letter. If VW finds that it is unable to provide all of the information requested within the time allotted, VW must request an extension from Mr. Thomas Z. Cooper at (202) 366-5218 no later than five business days before the response due date. If VW is unable to provide all of the information requested by the original deadline, it must submit a partial response by the original deadline with whatever information VW then has available, even if an extension has been granted.

If VW claims that any of the information or documents provided in response to this information request constitute confidential commercial material within the meaning of 5 U.S.C. § 552(b)(4), or are protected from disclosure pursuant to 18 U.S.C. § 1905, VW must submit supporting information together with the materials that are the subject of the confidentiality request, in accordance with 49 CFR Part 512, as amended (68 Fed. Reg. 44209 et seq; July 28, 2003), to the Office of Chief Counsel (NCC-113), National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, Room 5219, 400 Seventh Street, S.W., Washington, D.C. 20590. VW is required to submit two copies of the documents containing allegedly confidential information (except only one copy of blueprints) and one copy of the documents from which information claimed to be confidential has been deleted.

If you have any technical questions concerning this matter, please call Mr. John Abbott of my staff at (202) 366-5221.

Sincerely,



Kathleen C. DeMeter, Director  
Office of Defects Investigation  
Enforcement

Enclosure 1, one CD ROM titled Data Collection Disc