



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

# ODI RESUME

Investigation: RQ 03-002  
 Prompted By: CONSUMER COMPLAINTS, RECALL 98V-322  
 Date Opened: 01/03/2003  
 Principal Investigator: DAVID LANGJAHR  
 Subject: BALL JOINT SEPARATION

Manufacturer: FORD MOTOR COMPANY  
 Products: MY 1995-97 CROWN VICTORIA, TOWN CAR, GRAND MARQUIS  
 Population: 850000

Problem Description: OWNERS ALLEGE THAT A LOWER CONTROL ARM BALL JOINT BROKE WHILE DRIVING, RESULTING IN SUSPENSION COLLAPSE. THIS BREAKAGE COULD RESULT IN LOSS OF VEHICLE CONTROL.

## FAILURE REPORT SUMMARY

	ODI	Manufacturer	Total
Complaints:	24	0	24
Crashes/Fires:	0	0	0
Injury Incidents:	0	0	0
# Injuries:	0	0	0
Fatality Incidents:	0	0	0
# Fatalities:	0	0	0
Other*:	0	0	0

\*Description Of Other:

Action: AN RQ (RECALL QUERY) HAS BEEN OPENED

Engineer: *D. Langjahr* Div. Chief: *D. Langjahr* Office Dir.: *[Signature]*  
 Date: 1-3-03 Date: 3/17/2003 Date: 1-3-03

Summary: SEE ATTACHED REPORT

*UP  
2-6-03*

**SUMMARY REPORT**

On December 15, 1998, Ford submitted a Defect Information Report to ODI describing a lower control arm ball joint defect condition affecting approximately 175,000 model year (MY) 1990-99 Ford Crown Victoria and Lincoln Town Car vehicles built or serviced with lower control arm ball joints containing one-piece bearings (subject components) and used in certain severe duty cycle applications (NHTSA Recall No. 98V-322, Ford Recall 98S37). The recall principally involved certain MY 1996-99 Crown Victoria police, fleet and natural gas vehicles and Town Car limousine vehicles built from March 1996 through December 1998 with the subject components, as well as, certain MY 1990-96 Crown Victoria and Town Car vehicles that were used in similar applications and identified in warranty records as having been serviced with the subject components.

According to Ford, in the recalled vehicles, "the high bearing loading resulting from unique suspension components, high vehicle weight, severe duty cycles, or a combination of the above may cause the one piece polyacetol bearing within the lower control arm ball joint to thin slowly during use and eventually crack due to loading that marginally exceeds the bearing's capability. Sufficient thinning/cracking of the bearing can result in separation of the ball and cap of the joint." Ford also stated in its defect report that, "If this occurs while the vehicle is moving, reduced steering control could potentially occur possibly resulting in a collision."

On August 13, 1998, ODI opened a Preliminary Evaluation (PE98-045) of ball joint failures in MY 1996 Ford Crown Victoria police cruisers. The investigation was closed on December 18, 1998, following Ford's Defect Information Report to ODI, with 45 complaints and no crashes for the entire population of recalled vehicles. The closing resume for PE98-045 states that, "At this time, failures are occurring at a low rate on civilian vehicles that utilize identical ball joints. Civilian vehicles that use the same ball joints include the 1994-1999 Mustang and the 1995-1999 Town Car, Grand Marquis, and Crown Victoria."

To date, ODI has received 24 complaints alleging ball joint separation or fracture in MY 1995-97 Ford Crown Victoria, Lincoln Town Car, and Mercury Grand Marquis vehicles that were not included in Recall 98V-322, but were built with the same lower control arm ball joint as the recalled vehicles. A recall query has been opened to assess the adequacy of the vehicle scope for Recall 98V-322.

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