

## **Wheels**

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### **Ford Minivans Investigated for Transmission Failure**

By [CHRISTOPHER JENSEN](#)

The [National Highway Traffic Safety Administration](#) has intensified its investigation into transmission failures on about 205,000 Ford Freestar and Mercury Monterey minivans from the 2004-2005 model years.

The agency began a preliminary evaluation in July, saying it had received 178 complaints from owners about transmission failure. Some cases resulted “in a sudden loss of vehicle propulsion.”

Now the safety agency has advanced that investigation to an engineering analysis. That indicates researchers found reason to be concerned. The agency has 227 complaints of loss of power, including 124 that attributed the problem to “the torque converter shaft splines stripping, causing a sudden loss of power to the drivetrain.”

Ford told the agency it has 2,791 warranty claims over a loss of power and one report of an accident, although there were no injuries.

The automaker also said that “while a torque converter replacement typically can cost well over \$1,000, a torque converter malfunction can sometimes damage other transmission components, requiring a complete transmission replacement, which typically costs \$3,000.”

In a letter to the agency, Ford said it believed transmission failures do “not present an unreasonable risk to safety.” The automaker argued that despite losing power, a vehicle “remains readily controllable and can be safely maneuvered and stopped. Steering and braking are unaffected.”

On the Center for Auto Safety [Web site](#), a North Carolina woman who was driving a 2004 Ford Freestar wrote, “I was traveling down a heavily traveled interstate at rush hour. I started losing power to the vehicle. The gas would accelerate and the engine speed

would move, but the vehicle was just losing speed. I was able to make it to the shoulder of the road without getting rear-ended.”

For more information or to file a safety complaint with N.H.T.S.A, go [here](#).