

Publication: Charlotte Sun; Date: May 7, 2012; Section: Charlotte Sun (Local); Page Number: CS10

Peeling paint not Ford's problem

Six years and some 40,000 miles after purchasing her new 2006 Mercury Grand Marquis in Broward County's Pembroke Pines, Stephanie Masula noticed a round patch of paint peeling off the hood. Then she found more bubbling paint on the trunk, roof and sides.

The 67-year-old South Gulf Cove resident called Ford's Customer Relationship Center, and a representative listened to her complaint, assigned her a case number, and then said nothing could be done because the car was out of its new vehicle, three-year or 36,000-mile limited warranty.

"I told her the car is only six years old and should not be peeling," said Stephanie. Speaking



David Morris

to a supervisor and sending pictures to Ford with another appeal failed.

Looking at a \$3,000 paint job, Stephanie asked for my help. I started with an Internet search for "Ford peeling paint."

Did I get an eyeful.

An Ohio television station reported on Ford's refusal to repair 18 2004 and 2006 Ford Crown Victoria police cruisers with paint peeling off large portions of the hood, roof and trunk.

Then YouTube videos. Websites. Message boards. Facebook pages.

Steve Gaiski, a former paint durability consultant to the auto industry, even wrote a book about it: "Making it Right.

Why your car payments are lasting longer than your factory paint job."

Using factual data, Gaiski explained most manufacturers — not just Ford — outsource their painting operations and quality responsibilities in the factory to paint suppliers in a cost-cutting move, often resulting in thin paint or metal contamination.

I discovered technical service bulletins Ford issued in 2004 and again in 2006 dealing with "bubbling or blistering under the paint on aluminum body parts" on most 2000

to 2007 Ford, Lincoln and Mercury models. While TSBS provide service tips and repair procedures, they're not recall notices or admissions of factory defects.

Armed with all this, I appealed directly to Ford to help Stephanie.

"There are no warranties or other coverage currently available where Ford Motor Co. would provide assistance," is all I got from Ford's Francesca Montini. "We are sorry that we cannot meet the customer's expectations in this instance."

Unfortunately, Stephanie's dealer in Pembroke Pines now sells Audis. Yet general manager Joe Sparacino appealed the decision to the area's Ford factory representative.

While also unsuccessful, Sparacino offered \$500 toward repairing the car at its facility on top of a discounted rate.

Stephanie's other option is small claims court. Gaiski said individuals in Illinois, New Jersey, Indiana, California, Michigan and Massachusetts have successfully sued Ford for paint repairs. Gaiski offers a free review of a potential claimant's case as well as materials to present to a dealer or take to court at www.zestar.com.

Stephanie submitted pictures to Gaiski, who confirmed, "The prime coat was not properly applied at the factory. Thin paint thickness is causing the delamination on your vehicle."

Procedural details on

Florida's small claims court procedures are available at www.freshfromflorida.com and searching for small claims court.

Clarence Ditlow, executive director of the nonprofit Center for Auto Safety, said manufacturers should pay for their own mistakes. "Paint can fade but it should never peel or crack," said Ditlow, who urges consumers to file complaints at www.autosafety.org so it can push for warranty extensions or reimbursement programs.

Do you have a consumer issue? Contact David Morris clo the Sun, 23170 Harborview Road, Charlotte Harbor, Fla. 33980, email dmorris@sun-herald.com, or leave a message at 941-206-1114.