

VISIT TO CITY MOTORS 28th APRIL 2006

Purpose

To further investigate allegations of inadvertent opening of the engine bonnet whilst the vehicle was in motion, on Renault Clio Phase 2 vehicles (VSD 21615)

Background

Case details originally received on 5th April 2006 from complainant. Complainant alleges that the bonnet of their Clio opened whilst the vehicle was travelling at 65-70 causing extensive damage to the vehicle. No accident ensued.

Vehicle Safety Branch (VSB) took the case forward with Renault on 5th April 2006, a response was received on 25th April 2006, which concluded that the bonnet had not been fully closed prior to the vehicle being driven.

On Tuesday 25th April 2006 BBC Watchdog devoted a section of the programme to this issue, and produced three persons who claimed that the bonnets on their vehicles had opened inadvertently. Also shown was an independent mechanic who was seen to operate the safety catch of the bonnet shown, and not the bonnet release, or main securing mechanism. It was also seen that this person had detached the safety catch operating wires from their guide.

As a make weight the programme claimed that the bonnet securing mechanism had been modified. It should be noted that the vehicle shown, was the current production Clio ie Phase 3 which has a hasp arrangement to accommodate a bonnet design which is far more curved than that of its predecessor.

On Friday 28th April 2006, Mr *****, Head of VSB, received a telephone call from a Watchdog researcher, who stated that they had received 160 calls from members of the public who had experienced this concern.

Methodology

During the visit to **** 3 unprepared vehicles of approximately the same age were examined, and the condition of the bonnet release, safety, and main catches inspected. In all cases photographs were taken. During the inspection, I was assisted by the Workshop Supervisor.

It was noted that, the main bonnet release lever was located on the nearside front kick panel. It was further noted that the lever was recessed, presumably to prevent inadvertent operation, perhaps by foot contact.

The release operating cable passes through the firewall, and runs around the nearside of the engine bay clipped at various points to the underside of the engine bay gutter. The cable runs in a gentle curve and has no sharp bends. The cable terminates at the bonnet catch which is of pressed steel construction, with a spring

loaded latch type mechanism. When the bonnet is closed the latch engages with a striker pin attached to the bonnet. This incorporates a spring which keeps the bonnet and latch mechanism under tension. Situated to the nearside of the main catch, is a safety device which will prevent the bonnet from opening in the event of a failure to close the bonnet properly, or a failure of the main catch.

This device has to be operated before the bonnet can be raised following release of the main catch. The device consists of a steel pressing (hook) operated by rods terminating in a plastic finger grip which protrudes into the area underneath the bonnet front lip. The assembly being mounted to the bonnet on the same pressing as the striker pin. Unlike the depiction on Watchdog, on the 3 vehicles inspected, I could not detach the wire pull rods from the guide using hand force.

It was noted that, the engagement of the latch and striker pin was, in the fully adjusted position, approximately 4mm.

It was further noted that the latch assembly was adjustable, this being afforded by 2 bolts in oversize apertures. The bolts it was noted are Loctited into position.

It was noted that the bonnet catch and release mechanism is a non-serviceable item, but I was informed that lubricant is applied should the condition of the mechanism warrant it.

T513 *** 31650 miles

The vehicle was in generally good condition, and had covered a reasonable small mileage for its age. The bonnet retaining components did not display any corrosion, and were free of lubrication. The mechanism operated freely and the release lever required effort to operate. With the bonnet in the closed position, the vehicle could be lifted against the front suspension by pulling upward with the fingers under the front of the bonnet lip. It was noted that the bonnet could not be made to open.

S855 *** 63471 miles

The vehicle was in average condition, with some corrosion present on the subject components. Again it was noted that the mechanism was free of lubrication.

S498 *** Mileage unable to obtain

The vehicle was in average to poor condition with some corrosion present on the subject components. It was however, noted that the subject mechanism had been lubricated.

The above described operation and pull tests were carried out, with results as above.

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Vehicle Safety Branch