

Ford Escape Flat Towing Problems

Timeline

November 19, 2009: Date I purchased car. Mileage: 13,866. I loved it at this point!

February 19, 2010: First time towed from Austin to Baton Rouge (400 miles). Upon arrival, after unhooking and driving car just a few miles and parking, smoke poured from underneath car. Took it to Robinson Brothers Ford, who told me there was a recall relating to the transmission. [See blog post about this](http://www.maliasmiles.com/blog/the-saga-continues%e2%80%a6/) at <http://www.maliasmiles.com/blog/the-saga-continues%e2%80%a6/>

Service: "Found trans leak at left axle shaft. Replace axle bushing, seal & axle assembly. Refill trans fluid and road test. Drain fluid again and refill per TSB 10-1-5 and road test to verify repair."

It was then that I found out the transmission had been replaced in April 2009 during its prior ownership. As far as I know, though, it had not been towed since there had been no base plate or other evidence that it had been towed.

May, 2010: Received letter from Ford with a booklet "Recreational (Flat) Towing and Transmission Fluid Level Supplement." Letter states, "The recreational vehicle four wheel down towing instructions in your Owner's Guide are incorrect." The main difference I could see was that the booklet gave instructions about proper fill level for transmission fluid.

April 12, 2011: I left Austin heading for Columbia, SC. I compiled all instructions with pictures for easy reference and made sure transmission fluid level was within range recommended. Although I had continuing problems with the battery dying, I didn't notice any problems with transmission.

April 29, 2011: (Mileage = 20,500)

While driving car at 45-50 mph, I heard grinding noise and steering wheel started shimmying. I went to Lugoff, SC dealer. Bob (service tech) drove around with me but noise did not recreate. But to be on the safe side, he wanted to put it up on the rack to see what he could see from underneath.

After reviewing Owner's Guide and supplement, he acknowledged that it looked like I had done everything correctly, confirmed that transmission fluid level was correct, but that he could see "early signs of transmission failure." He said the left axle is loose where the axle goes into the transmission and that failure may be prevented by replacing left transmission axle bushing and seal.

I had him check the car's service record to see this was exactly what was done in February in Baton Rouge. He agrees this is cause for concern that it would fail again in a little over a year. My concern is that the parts needed are still on national back order and they could not tell me how long it would be before they would receive it, even though they submitted it as an emergency.

I then called Ford Customer Relations (800-392-3673) and spoke to a woman named Connor. I outlined the history and told her what the Lugoff dealer said and that I wanted Ford's help with getting the part because I needed to leave SC on May 18. I figured since this was the second time this same issue arose that the least they could do was expedite arrival of the necessary part.

After putting me on hold, she came back and said "Ford recommends you working with the dealer at this time. I have documented your concern and sent it over to the dealership in Lugoff. They should contact you within 4 business days. They said if they replace the part, the vehicle will be safe."

I asked her if she had actually listened to anything I said before she put me on hold and came back with her "canned" response. I had already been to the dealer, this was the second time I had been told the same issue needed to be fixed and that I wanted some sort of assurance that this car was actually safe

to be flat towed as Ford represented. She replied, "If it was a towing issue and there's not a fix for it yet, Ford is aware of it - they do send these concerns to the engineers." Gee, thanks a lot, Connor - that really makes me feel a lot better - NOT!!!

I then called Paul Stewart at Lugoff Ford again. The axle kit has been put on emergency order status by his parts department. It may be here Monday or it may be 3 weeks - no way of telling and nothing else he can do. He said obviously they're having a nationwide issue with this because of parts being on back order already. He said engineers were probably working on a redesigned axle or bearing, but that could take a couple of years, and in the meantime Ford would take care of repairs. I expressed my concern about that, especially once warranty is expired and he said even then since it had been an ongoing issue, it would be covered under "good will warranty."

Sorry, but this does not feel like "good will" to me - feels more like the royal runaround!

May 16, 2011:

Well, at this point I feel pretty much abandoned by Ford. They aren't even sending their canned "we really care about our customers" messages anymore. It doesn't help to know I'm only one of at least 2,600 people waiting for parts and fixes. It doesn't help to know that even when this fix is done, it will probably fail again as it did last year and as I keep hearing from other people in the same boat.

Stacy is the parts and service director at Lugoff Ford. Nothing about this is her fault and I appreciate her caring attitude and for keeping me informed. She finally said this afternoon, "I'm at a loss for words - I can't imagine what you're thinking..."

Well, let me tell you... among other things that I shouldn't print on a public blog, what I'm thinking is that the people at the Customer Relationship Center who responded to my email via Ford's website are more robotic than human. I've tried to open a dialogue with this department, but you never get the same person twice by email. Their "canned" expressions of concern never answer my direct questions except to say that "inquiries of a technical nature are best referred to our dealerships because they have factory trained technicians and comprehensive service information that can address your concern."

Really? Then we're in big trouble now because it was a certified service technician who inspected it, and then came back and presented me with two printed pages from an unknown manual and informed me that Ford does not authorize that car to be flat towed! When I showed him the official owner's manual for my car, along with the 2010 subsequent bulletin with updated information on how to flat tow the car, he backed down from that position. But it did not raise my confidence in Ford to realize that even their "factory trained technicians" are not properly informed about the products they sell and service. But they're our best option according to Ford?

And I also think the guys at Twitter @FordCustService should have followed through besides simply passing me along to a "Customer Care Specialist." MK's last tweet to me said "The engineer will be calling you Wednesday or Thursday. Please let me know if you haven't heard from him by Friday." When I talked to Kathy on Friday, I reiterated this request. Today's Monday - no call from engineer (or anyone else except Stacy).

So I've found some of the people I've had contact with from Ford have either been incompetent or uncaring. For the most part, though, if my only problem was the friendliness of the Ford people, I'd have no problem whatsoever. But the real problem is the Ford product not delivering what it said it would - a car that could be safely flat towed! It's inconceivable to me that Ford disregards the RV market in this way. I could not find one official statement from Ford about this fiasco - only more and more accounts from other RVers whose cars are smoking down the highway with burnt transmissions!

May 17, 2011:

The part is in! In regard to the question I've been asking about how assured I can be that this will actually fix the problem since the same parts were replaced last year, Stacy said out that the parts have been redesigned since then, so hopefully Ford has finally figured this out for good.

I can't say I won't still be a bit worried about this car and I'll have them check the transmission every time I have the oil changed for a while. But I'm getting on with my life and my travel plans in hopes this particular episode is behind me.

May 19, 2011:

I picked up my repaired Escape yesterday afternoon and today towed it 150 miles. I admit I looked over more than usual at drivers as they passed me to see if they were signaling that my car was on fire or something. Stories like that I read on the forums were what really scared me. But I had no problems at all, no burning smells, no weird noises, just full cooperation from the dinghy finally. I just pray that lasts.

August 1, 2011:

Front left axle fell off! See blog post at <http://www.maliasmiles.com/blog/ford-escape-worse/>