Results of 2002 Questionnaire

This year, the annual questionnaire remained basically the same as last year. We did add the form to the web site and picked up some extra responses that way. Also, it seems that the response rate is very good. Even though the number of subscribers continues to decline, we actually had more total responses this year. Most of the questionnaires were filled out in great detail and contained very valuable information. The description of the repair was especially helpful for me to determine if I considered it to be a serious problem. The number of responses by model year is given in Table 1 below.

Table 1. Number of Responses by Model Year

Model Yr	Number	Av. Miles Driven	Av. miles in 2002
’93	57	109,306	11,676
’95	4	117,125	19,667
’97	6	71,075	12,850
’99	6	41,864	9,127
’00	2	24,300	10,250
’01	4	22,738	14,000
’02	10	15,050	14,370

I will remind you that this questionnaire is admittedly modeled after the one done by *Consumer Reports* (CR). The one big problem I have with the CR version is that the responder is asked to check off the trouble spots based on seriousness. It could be considered serious due to cost, inconvenience, safety or whatever. Obviously, this is a moving target. What someone considers serious, I might consider trivial. Also, normal maintenance items really should not be counted. However, a VW tune-up at the dealer can have a very serious cost associated with it. I tried to overcome this limitation by asking for the description of the repair and the cost of the repair. For normal maintenance type items that had a low cost, I did not count it as a "trouble spot".

Reference the Annual Auto Issue of *Consumer Reports* (April, 2003) for complete details on how they compile their data. Although they are now tracking repair records for models that are up to eight years old, the ’93 model year is off the radar screen and we cannot compare our data with that of other makes. Nevertheless, I did make some extrapolations that I think are valid and you can compare how our EVs stack up against other model years. Once again, the EuroVan repair record is not available in the CR study, since so few subscribers to CR own EuroVans.

Keep in mind that as a car ages, it will have more trouble spots. In fact, according to CR, an eight-year-old car will have worse than average reliability on the electrical system, A/C, brakes, and a category termed “power equipment” (power windows, locks, seats and audio).

How did our ’93 EuroVans stack up? About average for the age, but not too shabby! However, keep in mind that I have biased the results by picking what I consider to be serious problems. In addition, if you didn’t repair it, it didn’t get counted. For example, if you have side-seam rust, it did not get counted as a trouble spot. Only when you spend money on it will it be counted. We do know that it is a common problem on some EuroVans, but it is not fair to keep counting such a problem year after year unless you consider it serious enough to repair.

Table 2. Key to Trouble Spots

☺☺	much better than average	2 % or less *
☺	better than average	2 to 5 %
😐	average	5 to 9.3 %
☹	worse than average	9.3 to 14.8 %
☹☹	much worse than average	more than 14.8 %

* % of EVs with “serious” problem

Data in Table 2 adapted from *Consumer Reports*, April 2003

Table 3. Trouble Spots for ’93 EuroVan

Trouble Spot:		Percent	Ave. $
Air Conditioner	☹☹	17.0 %	770
Body Hardware	☹	11.9 %	128
Body Integrity	☺☺	0 %	0
Body Rust	☺	3.4 %	129
Brakes	☹☹	17.0%	333
Clutch	☺	3.4 %	448
Drive Axle	☹	13.6 %	395
Electrical	☹	13.6 %	312
Engine Cooling	☹☹	30.5 %	495
Engine Mechanical	☹	11.9 %	404
Exhaust	☹☹	15.2 %	356
Fuel System	☺	3.4 %	550
Ignition	☹	10.2 %	298
Paint & Trim	☺☺	0 %	0
Steering & Susp.	😐	5.1 %	145
Transmission	☹	10.2 %	301
Tires	😐	8.5 %	492

(Continued on next page)

Results of 2002 Questionnaire *(Cont.)*

This year the Air Conditioner is back on our list of problem items. Closely allied with that problem is Engine Cooling. The Exhaust System also rated much worse than average. I toyed with the idea of not including new mufflers as serious, but ended up including them due to the high cost that is normally associated with this repair. Keep in mind that a car that is ten years old will need new mufflers. Most salt-belt Vans have probably already been through two sets of mufflers, while the warmer climate Vans may still be on the originals. I also included tires as a problem area. Even though tires are really a maintenance item, they do have a high cost.

This year, CR published the problem rates for the different model years. They published a graph showing the problem rate for European, American, and Asian cars by age. The European numbers are shown in Table 4 below, alongside numbers for the EuroVan that I collected. Note that my sample size is small in all model years, except for the ’93 model year, so this is at best a crude comparison. Also, CR only goes back eight years, so the '93 is an extrapolated number. In the CR study, the American and European cars were similar and the Asian cars had much fewer repairs. VW was down at the bottom of the heap with Cadillac.

Table 4. Comparison of EuroVan with Adapted Data from *Consumer Report*s, April 2003

Average Problems per 100 cars

Year	CR Data	EuroVan Data
’93	170	173
’95	140	50
’97	110	0
’99	80	83
’00	64	100*
’01	40	100
’02	20	50

* Only two EuroVans represented

In Table 5 is a breakdown of returned questionnaires for the 59 completed forms on the ’93s. Of course, the more miles driven, the higher the repair costs. The table includes the cost of normal maintenance service and tires. Many did not report a dollar amount for oil changes and some normal maintenance, but this will give you an idea of how expensive the average Van is to maintain. Vans that had no cost of repair were not used to calculate the average cost, so this average is of only the Vans that had repairs.

Table 5. Breakdown of ’93s by Total Miles Driven

Miles Driven	Number	Av. Repair Cost
< 50,000	4	$1,179
50-75,000	7	$858
75-100,000	13	$958
100- 125,000	15	$607
125- 150,000	14	$388
150- 175,000	5	$984
>175,000	1	$2,035

Common Repairs

Unfortunately, there was not sufficient data to publish trouble spot charts for model years other than the ’93. Instead, I will include what was repaired in a discussion of each model year. What kind of repairs are being done? Are there any more trouble spots? How are the new models holding up? These are the questions that many of us have.

1993 EuroVan

The air conditioner went from last year's average to much worse than average. There were five reports of complete compressor failure. I'm not sure if subscribers are ignoring the advice given on these pages or if the compressors are just going bad. The repair typically runs in the $1500 price range. In northern climates, I think I would leave it unrepaired since the repair may cost about as much as the Van is worth. Other smaller repairs were reported involving the A/C pressure switch and the thermoswitch. Both of these require opening the system.

The engine mechanical category is shown as worse than average, but with two exceptions, the repairs dealt with the belts, tensioners, and pulleys. Really, these are maintenance items; however, they are expensive to deal with. One exception was a warped head which was repaired by machining. The temperature sensor in that vehicle was also replaced, so that was probably the cause of the overheating. The other exception was a leaky head gasket with one cylinder showing poor compression. This had not really been repaired yet, but it cost $267 to diagnose.

The exhaust system is expected to be worse than average. My '93 is still on the original system with only one patched pipe. I suspect it will need replacement soon, as I am beginning to hear a little noise from it. Vans driven in the salt belt will need exhaust systems more often. It would appear that the cost of the complete system has come down. The dealer price is over $600. Independent shop prices are running $400 to $500. DIY prices with aftermarket parts are around $250. The best deal appears to be

(Continued on next page)

Results of 2002 Questionnaire *(Cont.)*

free mufflers from Cole Muffler. They run less than $50 for the second replacement. Unless you live in a salt belt, you may never need a third muffler.

A couple of fuel filters were replaced. Both indicated it was for preventive maintenance. The VW dealer charged $114 while an independent shop did the replacement for only $39. One fuel pump went bad on a Van with 223,500 miles. The cost was $900.

The ignition system showed worse than average results this year due to a rash of bad coils. There were four of these reported at a cost of about $400 at the dealer. One subscriber reported doing the job in an auto parts store parking lot for $157.

The drive axle rated worse than average, primarily due to CV joint problems. It pays to keep an eye on the boots as they can be replaced more cheaply if caught in time. This avoids the more costly joint replacement. A boot replacement seems to run $100 for a single boot while a joint replacement may be $250. Both of these jobs were at independent shops.

Electrical problems ranged from two alternators, two starters, two oxygen sensors, various relays, and a few other assorted problems.

Problems with the engine cooling system increased this year. This was not surprising since there are so many things to go wrong with this system. Many of them could fit into other categories, but I tried to ensure that true cooling system components were all lumped in this one category. Four water pumps were replaced. This usually included replacement of the timing belt and associated tensioners. On high mileage Vans, if you are going to replace the timing belt, you might as well have the water pump replaced at the same time. The reason for this recommendation is that the belt must be removed to replace the pump, so the work is equal and the pump does seem to be a trouble spot.

There were at least five reports of cracked or broken coolant flanges. This was on top of seven such reports in 2001. These may be different parts, but I suspect they were all the same and this will be our new number one trouble spot. We will try to have an article on this in a future issue. Series resisters continue to be replaced. There were several reports of leaking hoses to the rear heater. A couple of heater fans were replaced. Notably absent was a single report of a new thermostat. In one of the early issues, I had recommended that you obtain a spare due to the scarcity of the thermostat. I don't recall anyone reporting having to change their thermostat, but I did not go back to the old data to confirm this.

Only eight out of 59 reports (14%) for the ’93 MY Vans reported no repairs in 2002. One would think that these must be low mileage Vans, but the average was 120,000 miles and they were driven an average of 11,000 miles in the last year. The number of Vans with no repairs done is similar to the figure from last year when only 12% had no repairs. But in 2000, 33% reported no repairs. It is understandable that as a vehicle ages, there will be more repairs.

For someone thinking of purchasing a used ’93, or for anyone wanting to hold on to their current ’93, I offer these words: The fewer the miles on your Van, the less repair expenses you can anticipate. High mileage Vans are going to cost more to keep on the road.

Last year, I commented that if you looked at Table 5, you could see that there are several owners that just don’t put many miles on their Vans. These are typically campers that are garaged in the winter and are kept in mint condition. I added, "Wouldn’t you like to get ahold of a ’93 EuroVan with under 50,000 miles!" A month later a subscriber offered his MV Weekender to me. It now has 41,000 miles and it is sitting in my garage except for weekend camping trips.

1995 EuroVan

This year we had four owners of ’95 models who returned questionnaires. The owners of these particular models are putting above average miles on the Vans and are actually experiencing very few problems. One had to replace a fuel pump and had a timing problem. Another had to replace the transmission and some smaller things to the tune of $5,000. Ouch! Only one reported that no repairs were needed.

1997 EuroVan

The 1997 models fared extremely well. There were six owners reporting and four said they had no repairs. Really, the only repair that was recorded was the replacement of a pollen filter, which cost $40. Not too shabby, but remember these Vans are young and have less than 80,000 miles. It is encouraging to see no major problems in them.

1999 EuroVan

We only have six owners of MY 1999 that recorded results. Only two of them said they had no repairs. One reported an EGR valve cleaning for $121; new Michelin tires for $458; a recurrent problem with

(Continued on next page)

Results of 2002 Questionnaire *(Cont.)*

water leaking into the driver's compartment; a new water pump; a front brake job; and replacement of a defective CD player. Whew, that's a lot of problems. Another had leaks around the transmission and head gasket. They were fixed under the drive train warranty.

2000 EuroVan

We had only two owners of the MY 2000 this year. Both reported problems that were apparently covered under warranty. One had to have the air conditioner compressor replaced. The other had a new alternator installed.

2001 EuroVan

Last year we had no reports on this model year, but there were four reports this year. Only one indicated no repairs. One had several minor body problems including peeling side door handles. That is the first time we have heard of this. This same owner recorded some other more significant repairs including replacement of the ignition switch, new brakes all around (at only 28,000 mi.), a leaking heater control valve, and leaking coolant sensor. Another owner reported a transmission problem and the dealer replaced bushings, but it turned out to be an error in pushing the button to engage the different speeds.

2002 EuroVan

This year we had ten owners of the 2002 file reports. Some are old time subscribers and former owners of the 1993 Van. There were the usual sample defects that you find with new cars. The most serious appeared to be a cracked freeze plug that allowed all the coolant to drain out. There was another similar report of coolant loss, but it did not indicate the cause. As on the 2001, there was one report of a peeling door handle. That one has me puzzled; I'm not sure what there is to peel. One reported that a rear stabilizer link on the front suspension had broken. It was replaced under warranty as were most of the items reported. Several owner's reported various problems that are unique to either the Camper model or the Rialta model. Winebego seems to have a quality problem just like VW. Four of the owners reported that no repairs had been performed in the past year. No one reported any problems with the inanition coils. (See article on this page.)

Summary

When I compare my ’93 EuroVan with my ’72 VW Bus and my ’82 Vanagon, there is no question that this is the most reliable of the three models. Owners of the newer EuroVans should continue to keep an eye on the ’93 models to see what can be anticipated. The news looks good and based on the limited reports on the Vans with the VR6 engine, I think these owners can expect relatively trouble-free transportation. As I’ve said many times, anything mechanical will break, but when the repairs are so expensive, one certainly wants to minimize the repairs.

EU

Ignition Coils on '01 and '02

This information is from the VW web site at http://www.vw.com/VwSFB/index# (click on third line under VW Information Center for "Questions and Answers about Ignition Coils".)

In a customer service action, Volkswagen of America is replacing all ignition coils on 2001 and 2002 model year cars equipped with 1.8 liter engines, including the Volkswagen Golf, GTI, Jetta, New Beetle and Passat; 2001 and 2002 model year Jetta and EuroVan models with VR6 engines; and some 2001 and 2002 Passats with W8 engines.

VW is using a staggered approach with customer letters being sent in "waves" beginning this month and continuing through December. These waves will be made up of a combination of customers throughout the United States and Canada with an initial concentration of customers driving vehicles that have experienced the higher failure rates.

This updated customer service action is in addition to the previous one which asked owners to come in only if they experienced a problem. This time all ignition coils will be replaced whether they fail or not.

Model year 2003 is not affected because VW claims to have an accurate VIN range of early production that contains the potentially faulty coils and will notify affected owners. Of course, any currently in production will have the good part.

If an ignition coil fails, the check engine light or MIL will illuminate. The car's performance may, in some cases, become rough and/or the engine will lose some power and the car should be taken to an authorized dealer for repair. The engine and its electronic controls are designed to keep the vehicle running. Some deterioration in performance, however, can be expected. If your VW becomes disabled, the VW Road Side Assistance will tow the car at no charge. This repair is being performed under warranty and VW dealers have been instructed to offer alternative transportation at no charge.

EU