

**TEXAS DEPARTMENT OF MOTOR VEHICLES
CASE NO. 20-0005455 CAF**

MICHAEL WEISENBAUGH,	§	BEFORE THE OFFICE
Complainant	§	
	§	
v.	§	OF
	§	
FOREST RIVER, INC.	§	
Respondent	§	ADMINISTRATIVE HEARINGS

DECISION AND ORDER

Michael Weisenbaugh (Complainant) filed a complaint with the Texas Department of Motor Vehicles (Department) seeking relief pursuant to Texas Occupations Code §§ 2301.601-2301.613 (Lemon Law) for alleged warrantable defects in his recreational vehicle (RV) manufactured by Forest River, Inc. (Respondent). A preponderance of the evidence does not show that the subject vehicle has a currently existing warrantable defect. Consequently, the Complainant’s vehicle does not qualify for repurchase/replacement or warranty repair.

I. Procedural History, Notice and Jurisdiction

Matters of notice of hearing¹ and jurisdiction were not contested and are discussed only in the Findings of Fact and Conclusions of Law. The hearing in this case convened on June 17, 2020, by telephone, before Hearings Examiner Andrew Kang, and the record closed on the same day. The Complainant, represented himself. Sarah Weisenbaugh, the Complainant’s spouse, also appeared for the Complainant. Michael Locke, Owner Relations Manager, represented the Respondent.

¹ TEX. GOV’T CODE § 2001.051.

II. Discussion

A. Applicable Law

1. Repurchase/Replacement Relief Requirements

A vehicle qualifies for repurchase or replacement if the respondent cannot “conform a motor vehicle to an applicable express warranty by repairing or correcting a defect or condition that creates a serious safety hazard or substantially impairs the use or market value of the motor vehicle after a reasonable number of attempts.”² In other words, (1) the vehicle must have a defect covered by an applicable warranty (warrantable defect); (2) the defect must either (a) create a serious safety hazard or (b) substantially impair the use or market value of the vehicle; and (3) the defect must currently exist after a “reasonable number of attempts” at repair.³ In addition, the Lemon Law imposes other requirements for repurchase/replacement relief, including (1) a written notice of the defect to the respondent, (2) an opportunity to cure by the respondent, and (3) a deadline for filing a Lemon Law complaint.

a. Serious Safety Hazard

The Lemon Law defines “serious safety hazard” as a life-threatening malfunction or nonconformity that: (1) substantially impedes a person’s ability to control or operate a vehicle for ordinary use or intended purposes, or (2) creates a substantial risk of fire or explosion.⁴

b. Substantial Impairment of Use or Value

i. Impairment of Use

In determining substantial impairment of use, the Department considers “whether a defect or nonconformity hampers the intended normal operation of the vehicle.” For instance, “while a vehicle with a non-functioning air conditioner would be available for use and transporting passengers, its intended normal use would be substantially impaired.”⁵

² TEX. OCC. CODE § 2301.604(a).

³ TEX. OCC. CODE § 2301.604(a).

⁴ TEX. OCC. CODE § 2301.601(4).

⁵ *Dutchmen Manufacturing, Inc. v. Texas Department of Transportation, Motor Vehicle Division*, 383 S.W.3d 217, 228 (Tex. App.—Austin 2012).

ii. Impairment of Value

The Department applies a reasonable purchaser standard for determining whether a defect substantially impairs the value of a vehicle. The reasonable purchaser standard “does not require an owner to present an expert witness or any technical or market-based evidence to show decreased value.” Instead, under this standard, “factfinders should put themselves in the position of a reasonable prospective purchaser of the subject vehicle and determine (based on the evidence presented) if the current condition of the vehicle would deter them from buying the vehicle or substantially negatively affect how much they would be willing to pay for the vehicle.”⁶

c. Reasonable Number of Repair Attempts

Generally, a rebuttable presumption is established that the vehicle had a reasonable number of repair attempts if:

[T]he same nonconformity continues to exist after being subject to repair four or more times by the manufacturer, converter, or distributor or an authorized agent or franchised dealer of a manufacturer, converter, or distributor and the attempts were made before the earlier of: (A) the date the express warranty expires; or (B) 24 months or 24,000 miles, whichever occurs first, following the date of original delivery of the motor vehicle to the owner.⁷

Alternatively, for serious safety hazards, a rebuttable presumption is established that the vehicle had a reasonable number of repair attempts if:

[T]he same nonconformity creates a serious safety hazard and continues to exist after causing the vehicle to have been subject to repair two or more times by the manufacturer, converter, or distributor or an authorized agent or franchised dealer of a manufacturer, converter, or distributor and the attempts were made before the earlier of: (A) the date the express warranty expires; or (B) 24 months or 24,000 miles, whichever occurs first, following the date of original delivery of the motor vehicle to the owner.⁸

⁶ *Dutchmen Manufacturing, Inc. v. Texas Department of Transportation, Motor Vehicle Division*, 383 S.W.3d 217, 228 (Tex. App.—Austin 2012) (“We find that this interpretation of the standard required for demonstrating substantial impairment is reasonable and consistent with the statute’s plain language which requires a showing of loss in market value. . . . [T]he Division’s interpretation that expert testimony or technical or market-based evidence is not required to show diminished value or use is consistent with the statute’s goal of mitigating manufacturers’ economic advantages in warranty-related disputes.”).

⁷ TEX. OCC. CODE § 2301.605(a)(1)(A) and (B).

⁸ TEX. OCC. CODE § 2301.605(a)(2).

Additionally, for vehicles out of service at least 30 days, a rebuttable presumption may be established that the vehicle had a reasonable number of repair attempts if:

[A] nonconformity still exists that substantially impairs the vehicle's use or market value, the vehicle is out of service for repair for a cumulative total of 30 or more days, and the attempts were made before the earlier of: (A) the date the express warranty expires; or (B) 24 months or 24,000 miles, whichever occurs first, following the date of original delivery of the motor vehicle to the owner.⁹

The 30 days described above does not include any period when the owner has a comparable loaner vehicle provided while the dealer repairs the subject vehicle.¹⁰

The existence of a statutory rebuttable presumption does not preclude otherwise finding a reasonable number of attempts to repair the vehicle based on different circumstances and fewer attempts.¹¹ Furthermore, the Department adopted a decision indicating that if a consumer presents the vehicle to a dealer for repair and the dealer fails to repair the vehicle, then that visit would constitute a repair attempt unless the consumer was at fault for the failure to repair the vehicle.¹²

d. Other Requirements

Even if a vehicle satisfies the preceding requirements for repurchase/replacement relief, the Lemon Law prohibits repurchase or replacement unless: (1) the owner or someone on behalf of the owner, or the Department has provided written notice of the alleged defect or nonconformity to the respondent;¹³ (2) the respondent was given an opportunity to cure the defect or nonconformity;¹⁴ and (3) the Lemon Law complaint was filed within six months after the earliest

⁹ TEX. OCC. CODE § 2301.605(a)(3).

¹⁰ TEX. OCC. CODE § 2301.605(c).

¹¹ *Ford Motor Company v. Texas Department of Transportation*, 936 S.W.2d 427, 432 (Tex. App.—Austin 1996, no writ) (“[T]he existence of statutory presumptions does not forbid the agency from finding that different circumstances or fewer attempts meet the requisite ‘reasonable number of attempts.’”).

¹² *DaimlerChrysler Corporation v. Williams*, No. 03-99-00822-CV (Tex. App.—Austin, June 22, 2000, no writ) (not designated for publication) (Repair attempts include “those occasions when the fault for failing to repair the vehicle rests with the dealership.” Conversely, “those occasions when failure to repair the vehicle was the fault of the consumer would not be considered a repair attempt under the statute.”).

¹³ TEX. OCC. CODE § 2301.606(c)(1). 43 TEX. ADMIN. CODE § 215.204 provides that “[u]pon receipt of a complaint for lemon law or warranty performance relief, the department will provide notification of the complaint to the appropriate manufacturer, converter, or distributor.” The Department’s notice of the complaint to the Respondent may satisfy the requirement to provide notice of the defect or nonconformity to the Respondent.

¹⁴ A respondent may delegate its opportunity to cure to a dealer. A repair visit to a dealer satisfies the opportunity to cure requirement when the respondent allows a dealer to attempt repair after written notice to the

of: the warranty's expiration date or the dates on which 24 months or 24,000 miles had passed since the date of original delivery of the motor vehicle to an owner.¹⁵

2. Warranty Repair Relief

Even if repurchase or replacement relief does not apply, a vehicle may still qualify for warranty repair if the vehicle has a “defect . . . that is covered by a manufacturer's, converter's, or distributor's . . . warranty agreement applicable to the vehicle” and the vehicle owner notified the manufacturer, converter, distributor, or its authorized agent of the defect before the warranty's expiration.¹⁶ The manufacturer, converter, or distributor has an obligation to “make repairs necessary to conform a new motor vehicle to an applicable . . . express warranty.”¹⁷

3. Burden of Proof

The law places the burden of proof on the Complainant.¹⁸ The Complainant must prove all facts required for relief by a preponderance of the evidence. That is, the Complainant must present sufficient evidence to show that every required fact more likely than not exists.¹⁹ Accordingly, the Complainant cannot prevail where the existence of any required fact appears equally likely or unlikely.

4. The Complaint Identifies the Issues in this Proceeding

The complaint identifies the issues to be addressed in this proceeding.²⁰ The complaint must state “sufficient facts to enable the department and the party complained against to know the

respondent. *Dutchmen Manufacturing, Inc. v. Texas Department of Transportation, Motor Vehicle Division*, 383 S.W.3d 217, 221 and 226 (Tex. App.—Austin 2012); Texas Department of Transportation, *Kennemer v. Dutchman Manufacturing, Inc.*, MVD Cause No. 09-0091 CAF (Motor Vehicle Division Sept. 25, 2009) (Final Order Granting Chapter 2301, Subchapter M Relief). An opportunity to cure does not require an actual repair attempt but only a valid opportunity. *Id* at 2.

¹⁵ TEX. OCC. CODE § 2301.606(d)(2).

¹⁶ TEX. OCC. CODE § 2301.204; 43 TEX. ADMIN. CODE § 215.202(b)(3).

¹⁷ TEX. OCC. CODE § 2301.603(a).

¹⁸ 43 TEX. ADMIN. CODE § 215.66(d).

¹⁹ *E.g.*, *Southwestern Bell Telephone Company v. Garza*, 164 S.W.3d 607, 621 (Tex. 2005).

²⁰ “In a contested case, each party is entitled to an opportunity . . . for hearing after reasonable notice of not less than 10 days.” TEX. GOV'T CODE §§ 2001.051; “Notice of a hearing in a contested case must include . . . a short, plain statement of the factual matters asserted.” TEX. GOV'T CODE § 2001.052. *See* TEX. OCC. CODE § 2301.204(b) (“The complaint must be made in writing to the applicable dealer, manufacturer, converter, or distributor and must specify each defect in the vehicle that is covered by the warranty.”); TEX. OCC. CODE § 2301.204(d) (“A hearing may

nature of the complaint and the specific problems or circumstances forming the basis of the claim for relief under the lemon law.”²¹ However, the parties may expressly or impliedly consent to hearing issues not included in the pleadings.²² Implied consent occurs when a party introduces evidence on an unpleaded issue without objection.²³

5. Incidental Expenses

When repurchase or replacement is ordered, the Lemon Law provides for reimbursing the Complainant for reasonable incidental expenses resulting from the vehicle’s loss of use because of the defect.²⁴ Reimbursable expenses include, but are not limited to: (1) alternate transportation; (2) towing; (3) telephone calls or mail charges directly attributable to contacting the manufacturer, distributor, converter, or dealer regarding the vehicle; (4) meals and lodging necessitated by the vehicle’s failure during out-of-town trips; (5) loss or damage to personal property; (6) attorney fees, if the complainant retains counsel after notification that the respondent is represented by counsel; and (7) items or accessories added to the vehicle at or after purchase, less a reasonable allowance for use. The expenses must be reasonable and verifiable (for example, through receipts or similar written documents).²⁵ However, the Department’s rules expressly exclude compensation for “any interest, finance charge, or insurance premiums.”²⁶

B. Summary of Complainant’s Evidence and Arguments

On June 19, 2019, the Complainant, purchased a new 2019 Coachmen Leprechaun 280BH from Holiday World of League City, an authorized dealer of the Respondent, in League City, Texas. The vehicle had 1,362 miles on the odometer at the time of purchase. The vehicle’s limited warranty provides coverage for one year or 12,000 miles, whichever occurs first.

be scheduled on any complaint made under this section that is not privately resolved between the owner and the dealer, manufacturer, converter, or distributor.”).

²¹ 43 TEX. ADMIN. CODE § 215.202(a)(3).

²² 43 TEX. ADMIN. CODE § 215.42; TEX. R. CIV. P. 67.

²³ See *Gadd v. Lynch*, 258 S.W.2d 168, 169 (Tex. Civ. App.—San Antonio 1953, writ ref’d).

²⁴ TEX. OCC. CODE § 2301.604.

²⁵ 43 TEX. ADMIN. CODE § 215.209(a).

²⁶ 43 TEX. ADMIN. CODE § 215.208(b)(1).

On November 29, 2019, the Complainant provided a written notice of defect to the Respondent. On November 29, 2019, the Complainant filed a complaint with the Department alleging that the large (main) slideout would not extend; water leaked at the second (bedroom) slideout, causing water damage. In part, the Complainant took the vehicle to a dealer for repair of the alleged issues as follows:

Date	Miles	Issue
August 6, 2019		Main slideout not working, water leak
March 11, 2020	7,369	Front slideout motor would not engage
March 16, 2020		Front slideout not working; water came off the slideout into the interior; the rear slideout had water at the bottom
March 26, 2020	7,542	
March 20, 2020		Slideout not functioning; water leaking from slideout
May 6, 2020	7,604	when driving; water pooling in rear slideout

The Complainant testified that, to his knowledge, the water leaks were fixed, but he had not had an opportunity to assess the repairs. He described the main slideout issue as reoccurring and failing in various ways: jams going and jams going out. However, the smaller, bedroom slideout functioned correctly. The Complainant explained that the main (large) slideout malfunctioned every time when trying to operate it. The RV was out of the Complainant's possession for 165 days during the August 6, 2019, repair visit, and 51 days during the second repair visit. He last noticed the slideout malfunctioning on March 14, 2020. The Complainant explained that the manufacturer builds a box on the chassis and uses third-party components to build the slideouts, which needed shimming and squaring, essentially fine-tuning, after multiple repair visits, which was a manufacturing issue. On cross-examination, the Complainant stated that he last used the RV on March 14, 2020, and received the RV back from the dealer in May and the RV has remained in storage since then. The Complainant stated that his wife was a teacher and he was on active duty in the Coast Guard and expected his eighth reassignment this summer. He explained that they during the transfer, he and his family will live in the RV for a week or two and camp along the way. Also, they travel to visit Mrs. Weisenbaugh's family in Washington. The RV also provides a safe haven for emergency evacuations during hurricanes, while the Complainant must stay nearby if activated. The Complainant had scheduled a trip to Washington well in advance and the departure date was inflexible because of work obligations and reservations. The Complainant and family spent 33 days in Washington, with the RV not working properly. They could not stay at a hotel because of limited availability. They returned to Texas without vacationing on the way back so they could prepare for hurricane season.

C. Summary of Respondent's Evidence and Arguments

Mr. Locke testified that the dealer only submitted one claim for a slideout, specifically the main slideout. Further, that claim was not for a warrantable issue but the repair was done as a courtesy. On cross-examination, Mr. Locke elaborated that the dealer submitted several work orders, but only one work order relating to the slideout, as claims against the warranty.

D. Analysis

As an initial matter, to qualify for any relief, whether warranty repair or repurchase/replacement, the law requires the subject vehicle to have a defect covered by the Respondent's warranty (warrantable defect) that continues to exist after repairs.²⁷ The Lemon Law does not require that a manufacturer provide any particular warranty coverage nor does the Lemon Law impose any specific standards for vehicle characteristics. The Lemon Law only requires the manufacturer to conform its vehicles to whatever coverage the warranty provides. In part, the warranty generally states that:

Forest River Inc., . . . (Warrantor) warrants to the ORIGINAL CONSUMER PURCHASER ONLY, when purchased from an authorized Forest River Inc. dealer, for a period of one (1) year or twelve thousand (12000) miles, whichever occurs first from the date of purchase (Warranty Period), that the body structure of this recreational vehicle shall be free of substantial defects in materials and workmanship attributable to Warrantor.

According to these terms, the warranty only applies to defects in materials or workmanship (manufacturing defects) in the body structure.²⁸ A defectively manufactured vehicle has a flaw because of some error in making it at the factory, such as incorrect assembly or the use of substandard parts. Manufacturing defects exist when the vehicle leaves the manufacturing plant. Unlike manufacturing defects, issues that do not arise from manufacturing, such as design

²⁷ TEX. OCC. CODE §§ 2301.603(a), 2301.604(a); TEX. OCC. CODE § 2301.204.

²⁸ Courts have affirmed that warranty language covering “defects in material or workmanship” do not cover design issues. *E.g.*, *Whitt v. Mazda Motor of America*, 5th Dist. Stark No. 2010CA00343, 211-Ohio-3097, ¶¶ 18-21 (“The manufacturer’s express warranty in the case sub judice provides: ‘Mazda warrants that your new Mazda Vehicle is free from defects in material or workmanship’ The trial court found the warranty did not cover claims of design defects. . . . The problems about which Appellants complained did not fall within the applicable expressed warranty.”); *see GT & MC, Inc. v. Texas City Refining, Inc.*, 822 S.W.2d 252, 257 (Tex. App.—Houston [1st Dist.] 1991, writ denied) (“the language in the contract of May 12, 1980, expressly limited TCR’s recovery only for defects in materials or workmanship to damages for repair or replacement value. No mention was made in the guarantee of remedies for design defects.”).

characteristics or improper dealer repairs are not warrantable defects. Because the warranty only covers manufacturing defects, any non-manufacturing problems do not qualify for relief. The warranty also identifies various exclusions from coverage:

Warrantor expressly disclaims any responsibility for damage to the unit where damage is due to condensation, normal wear and tear or exposure to elements. Warrantor makes no warranty with regard to, but not limited to, the chassis including without limitation, any mechanical parts or systems of the chassis, axles, tires, tubes, batteries and gauges, optional generators, routine maintenance, equipment and appliances, or audio and/or video equipment. Their respective manufacturers and suppliers may warrant some of these items. Warranty information with respect to these items is available from your dealer.

In the present case, the record does not show that a defect covered by warranty continues to exist.

A review of the work orders indicates that after replacement of the Schwintek slideout system motor, the Schwintek slideout system malfunctioned due to a short in the Schwintek harness wire between the motor and the controller. In sum, the slideout malfunction arose from a defect in the Schwintek equipment, which the warranty excludes from coverage. Moreover, as specified in the discussion of applicable law, to qualify for any relief, the alleged defect must continue to exist, even after repairs. However, the record does not include any evidence of a malfunction occurring after the last repair. The Complainant testified that he last noticed the slideout malfunction on March 14, 2020, which occurred before the March 20, 2020, repair attempt.

III. Findings of Fact

1. On June 19, 2019, the Complainant, purchased a new 2019 Coachmen Leprechaun 280BH from Holiday World of League City, an authorized dealer of the Respondent, in League City, Texas. The vehicle had 1,362 miles on the odometer at the time of purchase.
2. The Respondent warrants that the body structure of the recreational vehicle shall be free of substantial defects in materials and workmanship attributable to Respondent for one year or 12,000 miles, whichever occurs first from the date of purchase. The Respondent makes no warranty with regard to, but not limited to, the chassis including without limitation, any mechanical parts or systems of the chassis, axles, tires, tubes, batteries and gauges, optional

generators, routine maintenance, equipment and appliances, or audio and/or video equipment.

3. The Complainant took the vehicle to a dealer for repair as shown below:

Date	Miles	Issue
August 6, 2019		Main slideout not working, water leak
March 11, 2020	7,369	Front slideout motor would not engage
March 16, 2020		Front slideout not working; water came off the slideout into the interior; the rear slideout had water at the bottom
March 26, 2020	7,542	
March 20, 2020		Slideout not functioning; water leaking from slideout when driving; water pooling in rear slideout
May 6, 2020	7,604	

4. On November 29, 2019, the Complainant provided a written notice of defect to the Respondent.
5. On November 29, 2019, the Complainant filed a complaint with the Department alleging that the main slideout would not extend; water leaked at the bedroom slideout, causing water damage.
6. On March 2, 2020, the Department's Office of Administrative Hearings issued a notice of hearing directed to all parties, giving them not less than 10 days' notice of hearing and their rights under the applicable rules and statutes. The notice stated the time, place and nature of the hearing; the legal authority and jurisdiction under which the hearing was to be held; particular sections of the statutes and rules involved; and the factual matters asserted.
7. The hearing in this case convened on June 17, 2020, by telephone, before Hearings Examiner Andrew Kang, and the record closed on the same day. The Complainant, represented himself. Sarah Weisenbaugh, the Complainant's spouse, also appeared for the Complainant. Michael Locke, Owner Relations Manager, represented the Respondent.
8. The vehicle's odometer displayed 7,678 miles at the time of the hearing.
9. The vehicle's warranty was in effect at the time of the hearing.
10. The water leaks appeared to be resolved.
11. The bedroom slideout functioned correctly.

12. After the dealer replaced the Schwintek slideout motor during the March 11, 2020, repair visit, the Schwintek slideout system continued to malfunction due to a short in the Schwintek harness wire between the motor and the controller.
13. The dealership installed a new cable to the motor from the controller during the March 20, 2020, repair visit.
14. The Complainant last noticed the slideout malfunction on March 14, 2020.

IV. Conclusions of Law

1. The Texas Department of Motor Vehicles has jurisdiction over this matter. TEX. OCC. CODE §§ 2301.601-2301.613 and 2301.204.
2. A hearings examiner of the Department's Office of Administrative Hearings has jurisdiction over all matters related to conducting a hearing in this proceeding, including the preparation of a decision with findings of fact and conclusions of law, and the issuance of a final order. TEX. OCC. CODE § 2301.704.
3. The Complainant filed a sufficient complaint with the Department. 43 TEX. ADMIN. CODE § 215.202.
4. The parties received proper notice of the hearing. TEX. GOV'T CODE §§ 2001.051, 2001.052. 43 TEX. ADMIN. CODE § 215.206(2).
5. The Complainant bears the burden of proof in this matter. 43 TEX. ADMIN. CODE § 206.66(d).
6. The Complainant's vehicle does not qualify for replacement or repurchase. The Complainant did not prove that the vehicle has a defect covered by the Respondent's warranty. TEX. OCC. CODE §§ 2301.603 and 2301.604(a).
7. The Complainant's vehicle does not qualify for warranty repair. The Complainant did not prove that the vehicle has a defect covered by the Respondent's warranty. TEX. OCC. CODE §§ 2301.204 and 2301.603.
8. The Respondent remains responsible to address and repair or correct any defects that are covered by the Respondent's warranty. TEX. OCC. CODE § 2301.603.

V. Order

Based on the foregoing Findings of Fact and Conclusions of Law, it is **ORDERED** that the Complainant's petition for relief pursuant to Texas Occupations Code §§ 2301.601-2301.613 is **DISMISSED**.

SIGNED August 18, 2020



ANDREW KANG
HEARINGS EXAMINER
OFFICE OF ADMINISTRATIVE HEARINGS
TEXAS DEPARTMENT OF MOTOR VEHICLES