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Archives & Research Center

September 24, 1994

Section: LOCAL

Edition: FINAL

Page: 2B

MAILINGS FUEL COMPLAINTS ABOUT CAR-KIT COMPANY

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Two months after the Florida attorney general sued **Classic Motor Carriages** for deceptive business practices, state and local consumer offices are being flooded with complaints about the Miami car-kit company. This is not the work of procrastinators; rather, Stuart Rado, a self-proclaimed consumer advocate who has sent mailings to more than 3,500 **Classic** customers informing them of the lawsuit and steps to file a complaint. About 2,600 mailings were sent out this month, and more are planned.

So as the state and **Classic** attorneys begin settlement discussions, state officials are wading through stacks of newfound complaints, thanks to Rado, who lives in Miami Beach.

The mailings -- sent in May, June and September and paid for by Rado -- include a newspaper article, a blank affidavit and the addresses of the attorney general's office, the Federal Trade Commission and the Better Business Bureau of South Florida.

"There may be thousands of consumers out there being ripped off," said Rado, who added he has no personal stake in the suit. "I just want to help."

He says he obtained **Classic's** clientele list from the North Dakota attorney general.

Florida officials filed a civil complaint against **Classic** in July, accusing the firm of deceptive trade practices and civil theft. Consumers complained they had paid \$9,000 to \$15,000 for kits that were incomplete or came with defective parts.

The 17-year-old company sells kit packages that can be assembled at home. Kits typically contains a fiberglass body, chassis and parts.

In July, about 50 complaints dating back to 1992 had been filed with the attorney general's office and 51 with the BBB.

Now, the attorney general's office is swamped.

"We are getting at least 20 affidavits a day. I am not sure how many we have altogether and which are valid," said Rhonda Lapin, an assistant attorney general handling the case.

Rosemarie Bonta of the BBB said her office is "inundated." On Sept. 16, 37 complaints came in, for a total of at least 100 new complaints.

While Lapin is not sure what all these complaints will mean to the lawsuit, she is quick to point out that Rado's mailing is atypical of consumer cases.

She added: "He (Rado) may be stirring up people who may not be entitled to relief. On the other hand, these may be more complaints for the case. I just hope he does not hurt our case."

Rado says state authorities never told him he was getting in the way.

He is certainly in **Classic's** way:

"He targeted the company and then, in these clandestine ways, sent these letters out," said **Classic** attorney Andrew Hall. "This hurts our company and the customers. We have to address these customers who are now apprehensive and anxious after reading the mailing."

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