

Chrysler's over-the-air update fiasco is limited to the Northeast, but customers are still waiting for a fix



Last weekend, an over-the-air update was deployed to vehicles that run the newest version of Fiat Chrysler of America's Uconnect software system. And on Monday, *Jalopnik* discovered that the update sent some customers' infotainment screens spiraling into an endless loop of reboots. While it was previously unclear how widespread the problem was, *The Verge* has learned that it is localized to the Northeast region of the US and Canada, after obtaining a notice that was sent out by the Uconnect team to FCA dealerships.

The notice also spells out that seven specific "sales codes" are affected, meaning that cars kitted out with a very specific entertainment trim – Uconnect 4C NAV with an 8.4-inch screen – have been impacted by whatever went wrong. It's still not clear what caused the glitch, but the notice also states that the problem has to do with SiriusXM Travel Link, a detail that the Uconnect support account shared publicly overnight.

The cars affected all have the same specific version of Uconnect – and they're basically all brand new models

The Uconnect team is attempting to disable Travel Link within the next 48 hours, and advises dealerships not to swap out any radios in affected cars should customers try to bring them in for service, according to the notice. At least one person *The Verge* spoke with says his 2018 Jeep Grand Cherokee Limited has returned to normal, so it's possible a fix is already rolling out. But far more customers are still suffering with a busted infotainment system.

That the problem is localized to the Northeast suggests that there could be an issue with SiriusXM's satellite coverage of the area, which would mean that Uconnect (and FCA) are simply trying to wait it out before reenabling Travel Link. Representatives for SiriusXM did not respond to multiple requests for comment. FCA merely reissued essentially the same statement that was already posted to Twitter by the Uconnect support account.

Over-the-air updates are a relatively new way for the auto industry to add features to cars, while also patching security vulnerabilities. It's an idea that dealerships aren't particularly happy with, because it takes away some of their power over the customer (software updates have previously required car owners to go into dealerships so they can be installed). But the trend is only going to continue thanks to the market pressure created by Tesla, which sells over-the-air updates as a futuristic feature that allows users to update their cars like they would an iPhone.

That means there are inevitably going to be bumps along the way as traditional automakers play catch-up. But what makes matters worse in this situation is that the affected vehicles are all 2017 or 2018 models, which means many of the customers are dealing with this problem in a vehicle that they bought or leased weeks – sometimes even days – ago.

In three cases, customers who spoke to *The Verge* had purchased or leased their affected cars in late 2017. But the rest of the customers *The Verge* contacted – nearly a dozen from Connecticut, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, New Jersey, and New York – had all taken delivery of their vehicles within the last four or five weeks.

And because Uconnect's customer support is separate from FCA's, as well as the support departments of its sub-brands, all of these customers have described experiencing a frustrating runaround. They also have been turned away by the

dealerships that just sold or leased them the vehicles.

Bryan Blade Kurtz, who lives in Long Island, New York, picked up his 2018 Jeep Grand Cherokee Limited two weeks ago. When he left work on Friday and turned it on, he noticed the screen was resetting itself “every 30 to 45 seconds.” Kurtz already had an appointment scheduled with his dealer for a separate issue he encountered on his new Jeep, but when he arrived, he was told there was nothing that could be done.

“To my delight, when I get there, they say it’s a Uconnect problem, and we have no idea when it’s going to get fixed,” Kurtz told *The Verge* over the phone. “I was angry, but calm, and I said, ‘You mean my 2-week old Jeep I spent over forty thousand dollars on – you don’t know when I’m going to have a screen to listen to my stuff on? Because without that I consider myself having no Jeep.’”

When Kurtz saw the first tweet sent out by Uconnect’s support account acknowledging the issue on Monday, he tried reaching out to Uconnect directly. But he was met with the same sort of vague response that every other affected customer *The Verge* spoke to received: A fix is in the works, information will be posted as soon as it’s available, and Uconnect is sorry for the inconvenience.

Kurtz has resorted to carrying his son’s Bluetooth speaker, which is shaped like a poop emoji, with him in his Jeep

In the meantime, his Jeep’s problem has only gotten worse – the infotainment system won’t boot up at all now, he says. Kurtz says he has resorted to carrying his son’s Bluetooth speaker, which is shaped like a poop emoji, with him in his Jeep to listen to music and make hands-free calls. Another perturbation? The heated seats are stuck on.

Pointing the finger at SiriusXM’s Travel Link feature has only complicated the customer service experience, according to Joe Sapienza. He says a Uconnect representative hung up on him

after holding for 30 minutes the first time he called to complain that the screen in his 2018 Jeep Compass Latitude was rebooting.

Sapienza, who also lives in Long Island, says he contacted his dealer, who told him to talk to Chrysler. Chrysler, he says, told him to talk to Uconnect. When he reached back out to Uconnect, he says he was transferred to SiriusXM's customer service – where he was promptly given the phone number for Uconnect's customer service hotline. "My phone-tag game has tremendously improved via this snafu," Sapienza wrote in a direct message to *The Verge*.

Adam Roy, from Warwick, Rhode Island, says he bought his 2018 Jeep Grand Cherokee on Saturday. The screen started rebooting later that night. He says he was told by his dealership that there was nothing they could do, and that this was "Uconnect's issue." In the meantime, the reboots have sped up. They now happen about every 25 seconds, Roy says.

Roy and Kurtz said their dealerships were getting a lot of other complaints from customers while they were on site. A service representative for Merrick Dodge on Long Island said the dealership has fielded "over 1,000" complaints over the phone in the last few days, as well as a few in-person visits, but that they are only able to tell customers that a fix is on the way. Meanwhile, service representatives from FCA dealerships in Virginia, western Pennsylvania, and Delaware said they had not received complaints, and one was not even aware of the issue.

Another recent FCA customer, Melissa Armenia, says she was told earlier this week by her dealership in Long Island that an update "might" become available in the next 24 to 48 hours. She, too, was told to talk to Uconnect. But she had already been down that road, having exchanged messages and phone calls with Uconnect to no avail. Like others, she says she had been told her case was being assigned a manager and that she'd be

hearing back from Uconnect. That was Monday, and she still hasn't received any followup.

One FCA dealership in Long Island has received "over 1,000" complaint calls

In the meantime, her 2018 Jeep Compass' system has been on the fritz since Sunday night, when she had to make a two-hour drive home from New Jersey with no radio. "It may seem like such a petty problem to have no radio, but this system controls the heat, navigation, and rear view camera" too, she says in a direct message.

Matt Douglas, a former software product manager at Adobe and Bose, and the founder of Evite competitor Punchbowl, says this is a problem that's typical of bigger, older companies like FCA. "In this day and age, when software breaks, the right thing is to communicate early and often," he says. "Operating like it's the 1970s, where you're keeping information internal, and you don't share everything you possibly know, and enable your employees to share everything they possibly know – it doesn't work."

FCA and Uconnect, he says, have "poured gasoline on the fire by being quiet, by saying nothing."

If you're thinking Douglas is just a techie CEO looking to take a shot at a lumbering automaker for potentially making a software mistake, you might be right. But Douglas also has skin in the game – he's an affected customer, too. Douglas and his wife recently bought a 2018 Chrysler Pacifica to shuttle their two kids around in. They picked it up last Friday. "You can imagine the hilarity since then," he says.

It might fall on deaf ears right now, but there is a silver lining amid all this frustration, according to Justin Cappos, a professor at NYU's Tandon School of Engineering. "As your infotainment unit, and your vehicle, gets more and more full featured, there is greater and greater risk that an attacker

is going to be able to do things to your car,” Cappos says. “But software updates are a really healthy and important thing to have happen, even when they’re a little painful. Yes, it’s unfortunate, but it’s much better than having a hacker control your car.”

<https://www.theverge.com/2018/2/14/17013016/fiat-chrysler-ota-update-problem-jEEP>