

# Consumers Can Avoid Problems by Watching for Warning Signs

When it comes to your car's safety, brakes top the list of systems that need monitoring. However, many people are unaware of the signs that indicate a car's brakes may need maintenance or repair.

For routine maintenance, it's important to check the vehicle's braking system at least once a year. A thorough inspection should include brake lining wear, brake fluid level, rotor thickness, condition of hoses and brake lines, brake and dash warning lights, as well as taking the car for a test drive to detect other potential brake system problems.

Check out this brake system diagram to better understand how the braking system works.

It is important to be alert and recognize the danger signs of brake problems. Other warning signs include an illuminated brake warning light, brake grabbing, low pedal feel, vibration, hard pedal feel and squealing.

"Sometimes it's only a few miles between a soft brake pedal and a pedal that goes clear to the floor," said Stephen Powell, NAPA/ASE Technician of the Year and owner of Thoroughbred Transmissions & Auto-Care, Inc. in Laurel, Md. "But consumers easily can protect themselves from brake failure by watching and listening for a few simple clues."

Powell says noise is one of the leading indica-

tors that something is awry with brakes. "Any out of the ordinary sound is often a sign that brakes have worn to the point they should be checked," he said. "Watch especially for a grinding noise, and if your brakes typically throw off brake dust on your wheels, look for a sudden increase or decrease in dust." He added that finding small metal flakes on the wheels is also a sign that brakes should be checked.

Another leading indicator is the feel of the brake pedal, Powell said. If the car pulls left or right when braking, or if the front end shakes, those are both signs of excessive brake wear. If the brake pedal begins to feel spongy, it could be a sign that air has entered the brake system or fluid is low.

"A mushy brake pedal, along with a decrease in brake fluid, could also indicate brake wear," Powell added. "Check the brake fluid reservoir to make sure it's topped off. If not, then brake fluid is likely remaining at the wheel to fill the space caused by wear."

Many cars now have ABS (Automatic Braking System) that initiates a rapid-fire pumping sequence to the brakes to keep the car straight during sudden or hard braking. "If the ABS light illuminates on your instrument panel, then it's likely that the wheel sensors have detected excessive build-up of met-

al particles from the brake system," Powell said. "Most cars are designed to shut down the ABS when excessive particle build-up occurs." Powell added that a shut-down ABS does not prevent you from stopping, just that the ABS feature isn't working.

### Other tips:

Wheels should be pulled and brakes checked once a year by an ASE-Certified technician. "It's not uncommon to replace brakes after 12,000-15,000 miles," Powell explained. An inspection typically includes the rotors, calipers, drums, pads, pistons and brake lines.

Brake systems should be flushed and brake fluid replaced every two years. "Brake fluid absorbs moisture in the system and becomes acidic after two years or 30,000 miles," Powell said.

Check your owner's manual or ask your ASE-Certified technician to see what kind of brakes your car has and how they are adjusted. For example, most drum brakes are self-adjusting by backing up or engaging the emergency brake.

Regardless of care, brakes should most likely be replaced every 20,000-30,000 miles. "Of course, how and where someone drives will greatly influence when brakes should be replaced," Powell emphasized.

# Everyone Can Share the Road Safely

A pedestrian is killed almost every 2 hours and injured every 8 minutes on the country's roadways, according to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA). Similarly, each year hundreds of bicyclists die and thousands are injured in traffic accidents. Drivers must realize that they are sharing the road and drive with open eyes and ears. And pedestrians and bicyclists must do their part to follow traffic safety rules to prevent injuries.

### Pedestrians

Safety tips exclusive to pedestrians:

- \* Always use sidewalks and crosswalks when available. If no sidewalk is present, walk AGAINST the direction of traffic.

- \* Use traffic signals as your guide. However, make sure all traffic has stopped before crossing the road or stepping off of the sidewalk.

- \* Keep control of pets when walking them on a leash, so you're not pulled out into traffic.

- \* Use caution at bus stops. Many injuries occur from pedestrians running to catch a bus or stepping out into traffic after exiting a bus. Remember, there will be another bus behind the one you're chasing and safety is more important.

- \* Wear brightly colored or reflective clothing if walking at night.

- \* Do not cross highways or interstates on foot; you risk serious injury.



Common sense, courtesy and some safety smarts ensure that everyone can share the road.

### Bicyclists

Safety tips exclusive to bicyclists:

- \* Bicyclists must follow the same traffic rules as automobile drivers. Stop for red lights and stop signs, signal lane changes or turns, and drive on the correct side of the road.

- \* Watch out for parked cars. Oftentimes drivers exit their vehicles and do not check for oncoming traffic or cyclists. You can be hit by a swinging car door.

- \* Make yourself as noticeable as possible. This could include using a light or horn on the bike to signal your presence to drivers.

- \* Always wear a helmet and other applicable safety equipment.

- \* Maintain your bike so that it is safe to ride.

- \* Do not carry others on your bike (such as a friend or a child) if it is not designed to do so. Riding on the handlebars or behind the cyclist can be dangerous.

- \* Avoid the use of earbuds or headphones while cycling. You want all of your senses to be available to avoid accidents.

- \* Cycle out of the way of drivers' blind spots so you'll be more visible.

- \* Do not ride your bike on the sidewalk where you could injure pedestrians.

### Drivers

Safety tips exclusive to drivers:

- \* Be aware that you could be sharing the road with pedestrians, cyclists or motorcycle riders.

- \* Use caution when making turns or at busy intersections -- pedestrians could be crossing.

- \* Always yield right of way to pedestrians.

- \* Pay attention to the road and limit distractions inside of the car. This includes keeping the radio tuned low so that you can hear sounds outside of the car.

- \* Use caution when entering or exiting your parked vehicle.

- \* Use caution in and around bus stops or other points of mass transit.

- \* Regularly check the side of the road for pedestrians, especially in areas where there are no sidewalks.

With drivers, pedestrians and bicyclists working in concert, accidents can be reduced.

# For Safer Teen Drivers, Read This Before Handing Over The Keys

Moms are the ones who usually cart kids around from school to scouts to baseball. More often than not, these women take responsibility for the repair and maintenance of their vehicles. But what happens when the kids grow out of the backseat and into the driver's seat? Who's looking after their vehicles?

Automotive preventive maintenance and repair knowledge is like algebra, says the Car Care Council. We're not born knowing it, it has to be learned. Teach your young drivers the basics about their cars before they get the keys. If you don't know much about automotive maintenance/repair, do yourself a favor and learn it along with your kids. Here are a few tips:

Explain that all cars, new and old, need regular attention. Make sure your teenager knows and follows the maintenance schedule for his/her car. In addition to making a car safe to drive, preventive maintenance can save thousands of dollars during a lifetime of driving.

Don't overlook the owner's manual. This is full of information about the car that your young driver may never know unless he/she is familiar with this automotive

bible.

Make it fun. There are myriad sites on the Internet that are fascinating for young and old drivers, alike. Some have Q & A sections. Let your teen send his/her tough questions to the professionals.

It's probably been a while since they went on a field trip. Take them with you to the repair facility, the tire store, the body shop and wherever you have automotive work performed. Get them accustomed to the automotive world-its people, places, jargon and prices.

There are hundreds of books available on this subject. Many are written specifically for non-technical audiences; some are even humorous. Buy a few and make them

required reading for the licensing process.

Make a plan. What happens if the car breaks down, he/she has a wreck, or the car gets stolen? What if no adults are home to receive the panic call? Whether you want your teenager to call your family repair facility or Aunt Sadie, give them some instruction and put important phone numbers in the glove compartment.

For many parents, driving age is the final frontier. Certainly it is an important rite of passage for teenagers. Don't let your child pass into this stage of his/her life without being prepared. Take the time and the necessary materials to make your young driver feel competent and secure.

# Reduce Blind Spots and Accident Risk

Many drivers have experienced the scenario on the road where they've attempted to change lanes believing the coast is clear, only to catch sight of a vehicle in the lane adjacent to them at the last minute. The car seemingly comes out of nowhere, but it probably was just in the driver's blind spot.

Accidents due to blind spots can be reduced and avoided if drivers take the time to properly adjust their mirrors prior to setting off.

Here's how to adjust your mirrors for optimal view to avoid blind spots. This is the method recommended by the BMW Performance Center in South Carolina, which is used by many driving schools. By adjusting the mirrors this way you avoid unnecessary overlap between the side mirrors and the rearview mirror to minimize blind spots.

- \* Adjust the rearview mirror so you can see the center of the rear window.

- \* Lean your head over until it almost touches the driver's window, and then position the side mirror on the vehicle's left side so you can just see the rear quarter panel (the rear of the car) in the mirror. Note this will have it positioned farther out than you probably had it before. You shouldn't be able to see the side of your car.

- \* Lean your head to just between the two front seats, at your normal height, and position the right side mirror so you can just see the rear quarter panel of the passenger side in the mirror.

- \* Be observant while driving after adjusting the mirrors in this fashion. Watch how a car passing you begins in the center of your rearview mirror. As it

approaches you, it moves to the side of your rearview mirror, and at the same time appears in your side mirror. This indicates there is no rear blind spot, because there is the correct overlap between the mirrors. Also now your side mirrors do a much better job of covering the blind spot on the side of your vehicle.

Even after adjusting the mirrors to reduce blind spots, it is still recommended to give a glance over your shoulders to clear the lane as a precaution. A motorcycle or bicyclist may still be small enough to fit in a tiny blind spot, and it's worth the extra check.

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