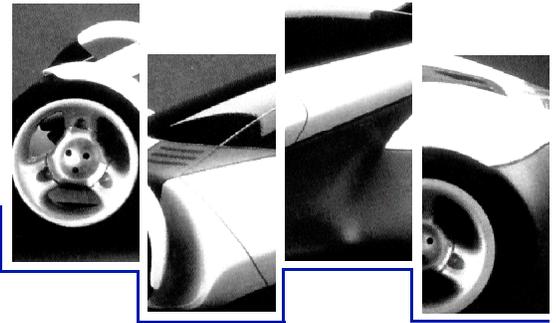


# NHTSA FACTS

S U M M E R 1 9 9 6



## BRAKES: TRAFFIC SAFETY TIPS

Brakes are an important safety item on your car. Brakes come in two types: drum brakes and disc brakes. Most light vehicles on the road today have a combination of drum and disc brakes--disc brakes on the front wheels and drum brakes on the rear. But four-wheel disc brake systems are becoming increasingly popular, as are antilock brake systems.

### Drum Brakes

Drum brakes work when hydraulic pressure in the brake lines forces the brake shoes outward against the rotating brake drum. The friction between the brake shoes and the brake drum slows the rotation of the wheel.

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U.S. Department of Transportation  
National Highway Traffic Safety Administration

### Disc Brakes

Disc brakes also use friction to slow the rotation of the wheel, by squeezing the brake pads against both sides of a flat rotating disc.

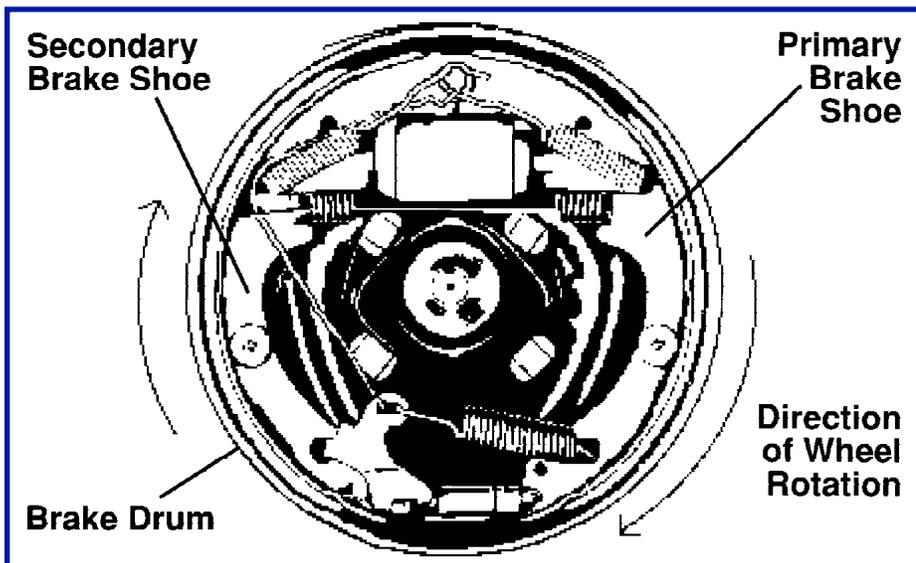
Although disc brakes may cost more, they work better in certain situations. They provide greater stopping power in high-use situations, such as towing a trailer down steep mountain grades. They are light and compact, and are less likely to be affected by heat and water fade.

### Antilock Braking System (ABS)

ABS automatically controls braking pressure to prevent the wheels from locking during braking, allowing drivers to maintain control of their vehicles. Drivers must not pump the brake pedal in cars equipped with ABS as this can defeat its purpose. (You can obtain a copy of the NHTSA Facts on antilock braking systems by calling the Auto Safety Hotline, 1-800-424-9393).

### Government Standards for Brakes

All brake systems must meet government safety standards for stopping distance, possible failure of the brake system, braking in wet situations, and parking brake operation.



▲ A Brake drum system.

# ABOUT BRAKES

## TRAFFIC SAFETY TIPS

### Taking Care of Your Brakes

It is important to check brakes periodically to keep them in good working condition. Brake life depends on brake design and how you drive. You may have worn brakes if:

- ❖ You hear screeching or other strange sounds when braking.
- ❖ The car pulls to one side or the other when braking.
- ❖ The pedal feels *spongy* when braking.

These are signs that the brakes are not working as they were designed to, or have parts that are wearing out. You should have them checked by a good auto mechanic to ensure safe braking.

If the brake light (on your dash) goes on or is on at any time after you take off the parking brake, pull over immediately and check the brake fluid level or get help. This means either that the system is low on brake fluid or that a serious brake failure has occurred, and you have greatly diminished or no braking.

Check the brake fluid periodically in older vehicles and follow the manufacturer's recommendations concerning replacement.

Whenever you leave the car, turn off the ignition, remove the key, and set the parking brake firmly.

Keeping your brakes in good working condition--by having the systems, shoes, pads, and other equipment inspected or replaced periodically--will ensure that your brakes will be there when you need them for safe driving. ■

## IF YOU THINK YOUR VEHICLE HAS A SAFETY PROBLEM, WE WANT TO HEAR FROM YOU

### AUTO SAFETY HOTLINE (800) 424-9393

If you think that your vehicle has a safety problem, you can assist the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) by completing and mailing back the Vehicle Owner's Questionnaire (VOQ) included with this fact sheet, or calling the Auto Safety Hotline.

The toll-free Hotline number, (800) 424-9393, can be reached from anywhere in the United States. If you are calling from the Washington, D.C. metropolitan area, the number is (202) 366-0123. A Spanish-speaking operator is available weekdays from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m., Eastern time. The Hotline is available to the hearing impaired through a teleprinter (TTY) number, (800)

424-9153. In the Washington, D.C. area the TTY number is (202) 366-7800.

If it is determined that a safety defect exists, the manufacturer has to fix the problem at no cost to the owner.

If there are any documents relevant to your case, including copies of repair bills and letters to the manufacturer, attach them to your completed VOQ.

If you are not sure of any information requested in the VOQ, leave the box blank. But we must have the Vehicle Identification Number (VIN) to process your questionnaire. The VIN is a 17-digit number that can be seen

through the front windshield on the driver's side of the dashboard. When reporting a tire problem, the DOT identification (located on the sidewall) is needed.

The VOQ asks if you authorize NHTSA to provide a copy of your report to the manufacturer. If so, check YES on the VOQ and sign and date it. When we send the report to the manufacturer, it often results in a satisfactory solution of individual problems. But NHTSA cannot order corrective action unless the vehicle or item of equipment is determined to have a defect and a safety recall campaign is conducted.



