

Are Your ABS Brakes Going to Help You?

Do you know why insurance companies are reporting that there about as many accidents involving cars with anti-lock brakes (ABS) as there are accidents involving cars without anti-lock brakes?

- a. Anti-lock brakes are not as good as everyone says.
- b. The insurance companies are just trying to raise our premiums.
- c. Very few people use ABS properly.
- d. It's a government conspiracy to take more control of our lives.

If you answered "c", congratulations. The sad truth is that very few people are taught the proper use of anti-lock brakes...

Contrary to popular belief, ABS are not miracle brakes. They cannot overcome the laws of physics and they will **NOT** stop you quicker than conventional brakes. Anti-lock brakes were developed to allow the driver to maintain some STEERING CONTROL IN AN EXTREME SITUATION. You not only have to brake, but you have to steer around whatever it is that caused you to brake.

Most of us learned how to avoid accidents before ABS was developed. We were taught to "pump the brakes" to keep the wheels from locking up. If the rear wheels lock up, the rear of the vehicle slides around. This is called "fishtailing". If the front wheels lock up, the vehicle skids in the direction it was heading, and turning the steering wheel has no effect on the vehicle's direction - it feels like steering one of those arcade driving games before you put the money in the slot. Anti-lock brakes, by pumping each wheel's brake individually and much more rapidly than a person can, give you the ability to steer.

If you have anti-lock brakes - check with your local dealer if you're not sure - and encounter a situation that calls for hard braking, **DO NOT PUMP THE BRAKES.**

Apply constant hard pressure to them. A computer in the vehicle will sense when an individual wheel has locked up and release the brake pressure to that wheel. This may cause a loud grating sound and a rapid pulsation of the brake pedal. At this point, many drivers assume there is something wrong and either pump or lift off the brake pedal, thereby defeating the anti-lock brakes. Please don't forget to steer, but be cautious of over-steer. Some drivers who remember to steer yank on the steering wheel so hard that the vehicle ends up in another lane or off the road completely, where they run into a whole new set of challenges.

If you have or buy a vehicle equipped with ABS, re-educate yourself and lose your old braking habits. Go to a large, vacant, unobstructed parking lot on a wet day and practice hard brake application until you are comfortable with the reactions of the vehicle. Brake AS HARD AS YOU CAN, trying to push your foot through the floor - just like Fred Flintstone. Expect that the first time or two you try this, you will lift up off the brake when the "chattering" starts and before you come to a stop. Everyone does. Just try it again and again until you can brake hard to a stop. Most people will make at least three or four attempts before they can do it correctly. Then try it again with some steering input. Then try it again and again until you are comfortable with how it feels. The more you practice this, the better chance you have of doing it naturally when faced with a hard-braking situation. This will all take only a few minutes—and may save you down the road.

One last note... the anti-lock brake system is designed to be activated only in a panic- or hard-braking situation. DO NOT brake like this every time you apply the brakes, or no one will want to ride with you.

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