The dos and don'ts of brake use

Continued from pg. 6

get your brakes checked. Brakes can last 60,000 kilometres or more— or they can need replacement after 10,000-15,000 kilometres. Don't let this simple maintenance item slide, or the next sound you hear could be the crunch of a collision.

If you like paying for brake jobs, here's how:

1. Race up to stop signs and slam on the brakes.

2. Ride your brakes— use your right foot on the gas and rest your left on the brake pedal while you drive.

3. Stay really close to the car in front so you have to be on your brakes a lot to match every little change in speed.

4. Ignore those warning signs, like chirping brakes or grinding noises. Then a simple pad replacement becomes a full replacement of rotors and linings and costs hundreds more.

Car Care Canada suggests a simple five-point program that could save you hundreds of dollars over the life of your car.

1. Preventive maintenance. Every 10,000 kilometres or so, when you get your tires rotated, have your brakes inspected.

2. Don't neglect your parking brake. Using it regularly will keep the cable from seizing up, and will reduce your need for repairs.

3. Quality materials. Cheap stuff is a false economy that you'll pay more for in more frequent brake jobs and inferior performance.

4. Driving techniques. Keep a buffer space between you and the car in front, and use it to slow down on the engine so you don't have to use the brakes as often.

5. System flush. Once a year, have a full brake inspection, including all lines and hoses, and replace the brake fluid with fresh fluid.

—Automotive Industries Association of Canada

Make sure your car is a good fit

Evaluating car models for suitable fit is so easy it requires little or no practice!

Step One: Sitting in the driver's seat, move the seat back or forward with your foot firmly on the floor under the brake pedal until you have a slight bend in your knee.

Step Two: Adjust the steering wheel tilt control if available (but be sure you can see the dash gauges adequately), and move the adjustable seat back until you can rest the inside of your wrist on top of the steering wheel rim without moving your shoulder forward.

Step Three: Place your thumbs inside the wheel rim at the "9 and 3 o'clock" positions and wrap your fingers around the steering wheel. You should notice that your elbows are bent, that you are sitting fairly upright, but that the position is extremely comfortable.

Can you see over the top of the dash easily? Is there adequate head clearance with the roof lining or the edge of the moonroof opening? Is visibility of the dash obstructed by the steering wheel? Can you reach the pedals with ease and without being too close to the steering wheel?

Unless you can answer "yes," to all of the above questions, the suitability of the car you are evaluating, should be reconsidered.

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