

Motoring

Braking point

YOU often mention the need to change brake fluid every two years, and this makes me see red. Until about five years ago this was never recommended.

I believe Vauxhall started the craze. Brake fluid manufacturers must be jumping for joy.

Between 1932 and 1972, I've never had to change brake fluid, except when replacing faulty seals or pipes. Oil quality has advanced tremendously, so what have the brake fluid manufacturers been doing?

Also, you say water mist can make the brakes spongy. But there are only three reasons why brakes become spongy: air in the system; problems with the seals or perished flexible pipes.

B.F., Polegate

THERE are three main types of brake fluid: liquid hydraulique minerale, used by Citroën and Rolls-Royce, which is not hygroscopic; silicone fluid, which is used by the US army and a lot of classic car builders, which also is not hygroscopic; and the glycol-based based brake fluid, which is used by everyone else and is mightily hygroscopic.

Modern cars, with disc brakes, vacuum servo-assistance and anti-lock systems, will not tolerate any water in the brake fluid as the high temperatures that are generated in repeated braking applications will boil the water into compressible steam and the brake pedal will go spongy.

Water hygroscopically absorbed into the brake fluid also corrodes the internal valves of ABS units and brake calliper pistons. So while I agree that ordinary brake fluid is a hygroscopic horror, as long as we're stuck with it, it needs to be changed regularly: every year with anti-lock, every two years if not.

Motoring correspondent Andrew English has been using using Automec silicone-based fluid in his own cars for the last two years without problems, although there are some issues of compatibility which need to be addressed before you rush off to change the fluid in your car.

For information, call Automec on 01280 822818.