

ETAM Chief Observer's "Observations"

Tip sheet Number 5



The Rolling Brake Test

I mentioned in an earlier tips lesson the rolling brake test. This is something that is really useful especially if you are driving a car that you have not driven before.

By doing a rolling brake test soon after setting off you won't then find yourself surprised if you need to use the brakes fairly quickly before having found out what they feel like. Cars can vary in how their brakes perform, some need a fairly firm foot whilst others, and one I can call to mind here a Volvo 360 GLT of 1986 vintage, need only a light touch to bring the car to a halt. I found that the Volvo I mentioned, whilst having excellent brakes, required little more than your toes on the pedal to bring it to a halt. So if you find out how they feel before you actually have to use them then that is obviously a bonus.

So how do you go about conducting a brake test, firstly it needs to be done safely so ensure that no other traffic is going to be confused or impeded by what you are doing, ideally there being no other vehicles nearby. With that safely sorted now to think about how we will perform the brake test. I like to talk about 'lemon shaped braking'! Seems daft doesn't it? Lemon shaped! Now think of a lemon and its shape looked at side on and before you have cut a bit off for your gin and tonic. There is a small pointy bit at each end and a large fat bit in the middle and this is how it relates to your use of the brakes. When you place your foot on the brake do it gently (Like the small pointy bit of the lemon) this brings the brake pads into contact with the brake disc. Now gently but firmly place more pressure on the brake pedal to get the brakes to do their job, having now felt and locked into your memory the actual pressure you need to slow and if necessary stop the vehicle gently release the pressure on the pedal (the pointy bit at the other end of the lemon) until you are able to take your foot off the pedal. So braking is a gentle pressure at first, firm it up in the middle section and then taper it off towards the end.

I used to demonstrate this to my students at Hendon driving school on our private road there, I would accelerate up to about 60 mph and then brake

abruptly, having ensured everyone was belted up of course and the car would lurch to a stop with its passengers being thrown forward and then rocking back as the car stopped. Then I would do the same but using three stage or lemon shaped braking, the car would stop quickly but the effect on the passengers was totally different, whilst they were aware that the car was slowing it was done very smoothly without any discomfort to those inside.

Now I am certainly not suggesting that you do a brake test at 60 mph, about 10 to 20 mph is more than sufficient for you to experience for the first time how the brakes on the car you are driving for the first time are behaving, plus there is nothing wrong with checking out the brakes on your own car every so often to ensure that they are behaving as they should. It doesn't take long to do this, in fact in the time you have taken to read this you could have done about half a dozen satisfactory tests.

Now just another point, if you are driving a car you have never driven before and because of the traffic situation you are unable to complete a brake test then I suggest you brake early for the first hazard that needs you to slow down. This way other traffic won't be surprised by your slowing down.

So there you have it, lemon shaped braking but leave the real lemons for that gin and tonic you are going to enjoy when the driving is done!

Happy motoring,

Dennis