

Justifying hydraulic brake work to price-conscious customers

Fluid draws moisture

Believe it or not, brake fluid itself is a major cause of hydraulic system failures. The reason is that brake fluid attracts and holds moisture. Because very few car owners change the brake fluid regularly, the moisture stays in the system and corrodes its metal parts.

Corrosion frequently destroys both master cylinders and caliper pistons and bores. Over a period of time, moisture also creates sludge that causes valves and pistons in the hydraulic system to stick.

Some technicians think that moisture only enters the system when external rubber brake boots or seals are cracked or torn. But the fact is the master cylinder reservoir isn't air tight and even brand new rubber boots slow minute amounts of moisture to migrate into the system.

Change brake fluid

If you check the owners' manuals of late-model vehicles, you'll find that car makers increasingly are recommending brake fluid changes every 24 to 36 months or 24,000 to 36,000 miles. Mike Leeper, a technical trainer for EIS Brake Parts, said that his company recommends changing brake fluid annually.

At Weinhagen Tire Co., a St. Paul, Minn., tire dealership that specialises in brake service, manager Mike Weinhagen said his technicians replace the fluid as part of every brake job. They also flush out the' brake system with clean fluid.

Kevin Lawrence, service manager at Wilme Inc., a large full-service tire dealership in Bridge-view, Ill., said he always recommends brake fluid changes to customers. Mr. Lawrence said that by using a brake fluid tester, he demonstrates the need for fluid changes to doubting customers.