

R-R 20hp 4-Wheel Brakes

By Andrew Sington

OK - so you have 4-wheel brakes, but do they work as they should? I appreciate that the servo has been set at the factory and whilst Sir Henry's minions only sent the chassis out when perfect, the servo was deemed a beastie and not to be disturbed. Braking distances today are far less than they were all those years ago, and it is possible that the performance is now less than acceptable.

Fear not - there are certain SIMPLE adjustments you can make that should bring them to the best level of performance before you need to re-line the servo unit. Of course we have to accept that you have good brake shoes all round and have set the adjusters at each wheel so that they are just shy of applying the brakes before any pressure is put on them by either the footbrake or the hand brake (not too tight at the front, otherwise turning the steering to full lock will bring the brakes on).

Action 1 - and this is easy. The cables to the front brakes will probably have stretched. To 'take up the slack', simply remove the shackles at the end of the cables from their connectors on the front axle and - using a small spanner - twist the cable so as to shorten it - and refit holding the twisted cable in place. Try to get a balance between the cable tensions to assist in more even braking.

Action 2 - still quite easy. Get access to the brake servo on the left of the gearbox under the front floorboards. If you need to press the footbrake more than half an inch to activate the servo, the servo plate needs tightening up. At the extreme left of the servo is a large nut that can be tightened clockwise and in doing so will 'click' over resistances. If you tighten a couple of clicks, you can take the car on the road, and when moving forward or reversing, the braking side of the servo should NOT be activated (ie moved) until the foot pedal is depressed. Keep tightening this nut until this does occur, then back-off two clicks. You can do this equally well by jacking up one rear wheel (remember to put a block in front of the other wheel) and then running the engine in gear.

If you cannot get the desired effect, you have other problems - notably either your brake shoes are in need of replacing or the friction pads on the servo need looking at.

If you haven't checked inside the brake drums for some years, it is possible that a build-up of dust inside the drum can lead to poor braking. The only solution is to remove the drums and brush out the dust, taking care if you are unlucky enough to have antiquated (now illegal) asbestos-based pads still fitted. Asbestos dust can be deadly! Best to have them professionally replaced with modern pads.

The same applies to oil contamination of the pads, which is a very rare occurrence with our cars. The old asbestos pads could sometimes be cleaned by soaking in solvent, but modern pads can't. They must be replaced.

Happy and safe motoring!