

IMPROPER STEERING ENDANGERS DRIVERS WITH ANTILOCK BRAKES!

Jerking the wheel while using antilock brakes in an emergency can send a car swerving violently out of its lane (left). With conventional brakes (right) the wheels lock up and the car skids into the object ahead of it. Drivers with antilock brakes should practice emergency braking and steering before they have a real emergency.

Improper steering in vehicles equipped with antilock brakes (ABS) can send the vehicle veering dramatically out of control, the AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety has found. "When drivers are about to hit something, they often panic, jam on the brakes, and jerk the wheel," says David K. Willis, president of the AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety. "If the car has antilock brakes it will respond to the extreme steering and run off the road."

The AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety tested cars with and without antilock brakes. At 35 mph, a panic stop combined with a violent jerk of the steering wheel caused an ABS-equipped car to dart across two lane widths, enough to send the vehicle into oncoming traffic or off the roadway. The same action in a car without antilock brakes locked the wheels so the car skidded forward in the lane but hit the obstruction.

"In a study of crash records the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) found that ABS cars had more single-vehicle, run-off-the-road crashes than cars without ABS," Willis says. "The cars without ABS had more crashes with other vehicles, pedestrians, and cyclists."

The Foundation's tests, conducted on August 26, 1997 at the Transportation Research Center in East Liberty, Ohio, apparently confirm the theory that while ABS allows drivers to steer around an obstacle in an emergency, too much steering -- such as from jerking the wheel while braking -- sends the vehicle out of control.

The AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety urges all drivers who have antilock brakes to practice using them before they get into an emergency. "ABS brakes can be a real lifesaver," Willis says. "But they're not like regular brakes. The only way to understand how the brakes work is to practice sudden stops in a safe situation, on both wet and dry pavement," Willis says. Drivers should take their vehicles to a parking lot with no obstructions, bear down on the brakes, and practice steering.

The AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety is a not-for-profit charitable organization funded by donations from AAA and CAA clubs and members. It is devoted to preventing crashes and saving lives through research and education in the field of traffic safety.

AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety

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