

Daily Herald

AUTOFOCUS

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SECTION 9

AutoSunday

Traction control
brake system may
be expensive fix

Q. I have a 1997 Oldsmobile van with 95,000 miles on it. Lately when I drive it the ABS and TCS lights go on. Not always — sometimes I drive 30 or 40 miles without the light coming on. Sometimes I just start the van and they go on.

Please explain to me ABS and TCS warnings. Is it OK to drive or will I have trouble with my brakes? I don't drive very far, or every day. I had front brakes with new rotors and back brakes with new pads put on awhile ago. I have only put 33,000 miles on the brakes. Would it be expensive to fix? The car is old but in good shape. Should I spend the money or get rid of it?

A. If you like your van, I certainly would not think about getting rid of it based on this one problem. When those two lights are on there is a problem in the ABS/TCS (anti-lock brakes/traction control system) of the car. When the lights are on, those two functions are disabled and will not work. The system works by sensing wheel speed relative to the other

wheels and pulses the brakes controlled by the ABS module. Your regular brakes, however, will work normally and you will not damage anything by driving the car. However, be careful because you will skid on slippery surfaces and there will be no anti-lock function to help you out.

I recommend you have the car diagnosed by a professional so that you don't waste any money replacing unnecessary parts as there are several possible components that could have failed. This could be all over the map as far as the cost depending on what failed.

Q. I have 2006 Hyundai Sonata with 27,000 miles on it. As the car is almost coming to a complete stop, with brakes applied, there is a groaning (not grinding like metal) sound from the front of the car. Sounds like the car's frame/engine is shifting. The sound it makes is similar to holding down the brake pedal and pressing the gas at the same time. Some passengers have stated it sounds like the ABS wants to activate. I have never had this problem/sound with any other car I have ever owned. The sound only happens when the car is almost coming to a complete stop, no other time.

The car has been taken to the Hyundai dealer and this is the history of their efforts.

February 2008: Diagnosis — Hot spots on front rotors. Fix — Deglazed rotors. Outcome — Front brakes were OK and the sound seemed to go away for awhile.

March 2008: Diagnosis — Found hot spots on front rotors. Fix — Replaced front rotors and cleaned pads. Outcome — Sound seemed to go away.

January 2009: Diagnosis — Found front subframe mounts dirty and improperly seated. Fix — Cleaned and reseated mounts. Outcome — Sound seemed to go away.

About three weeks later, the sound has again returned and is just as bad as it was in the beginning! In my conversations with the dealer, I asked why the front pads were not also changed when the front rotors were changed. They said it was not needed. I mentioned other areas that may have created this problem, like ABS, but that was not considered by them. Now, I have to take the car back to the dealer again for the fourth time. What can I do as the customer to ensure this problem will be corrected? What other mechanical/electrical areas can I suggest to the dealer?

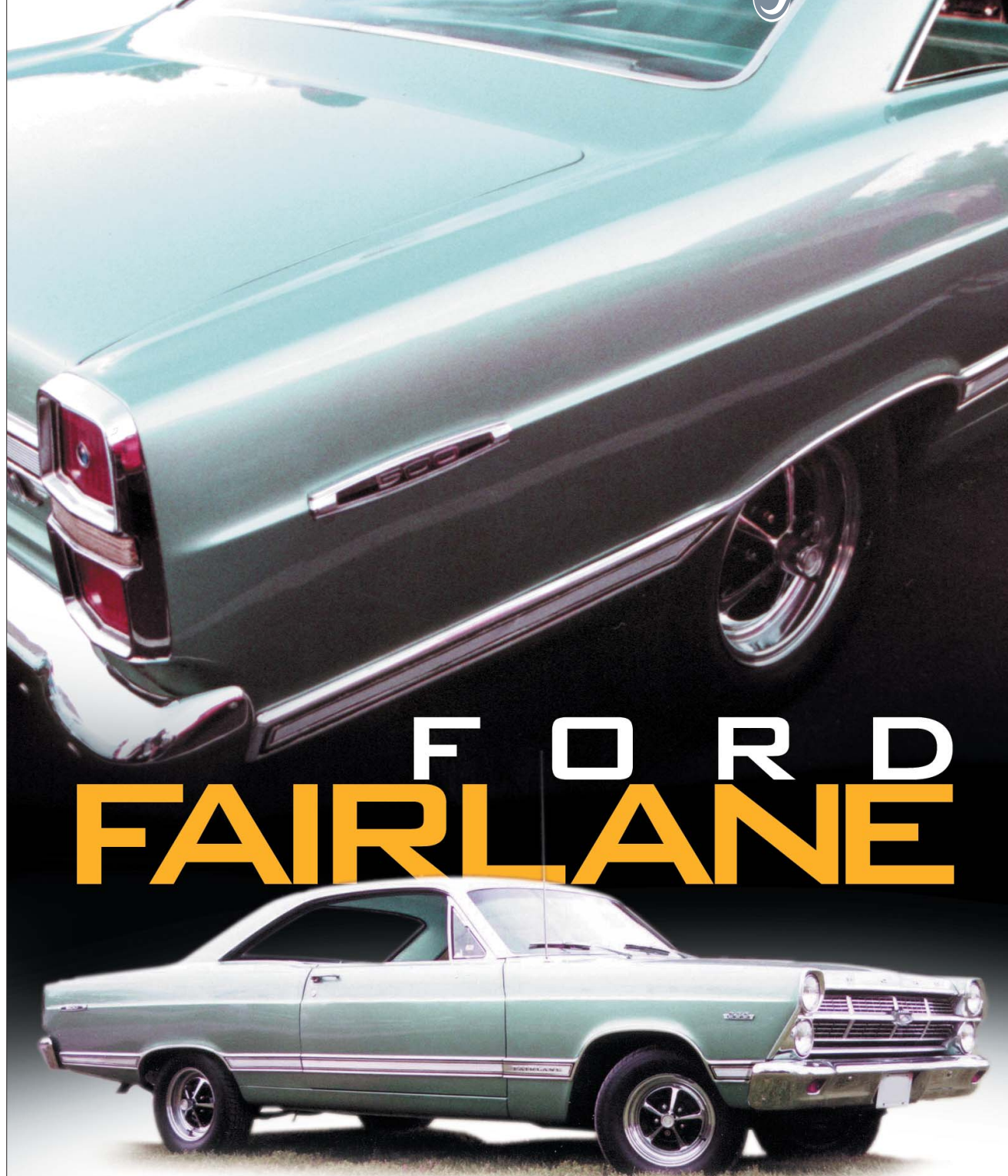
A. I wish I could give you a more definitive answer, but without hearing the noise I'm not sure what you are dealing with. Several of the things you mentioned could make a noise like you described. There could be a failure in the anti-lock system causing it to engage when it shouldn't. This would cause a grinding type sound and the car would not stop correctly. You might have a set of noisy brake pads that are making a metallic sound even though they are not worn out.

Make sure when you take the car in for repairs that you have a technician go for a ride with you until he hears the exact noise you are hearing. You want to be sure that the person working on the car knows the sound so he will know whether or not he got it. Stay after it and you will get to the answer.

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Doug McAllister
Under the hood

In a new era of automotive expression,
this 'mid-size' car offered tons of options

BY JEFF MELNYCHUK

Wheelbase Communications

The 1960s ushered in an era of made-to-order cars, expanded selection and ferocious competition for sales. And the intermediate 1966-'67 Ford Fairlanes were smack in the middle of the fight.

Of course, the trend of offering buyers just about anything they want continues to this day. Unlike in the 1950s, you wouldn't dream of

heading to a dealer today to simply see the new Chevrolet, Chrysler or Ford. You would have to be much more specific. In fact, by comparison, today's combinations and permutations are nearly endless.

However, for much of the previous century, until about 1960, buying a car was pretty much an off-the-rack experience. Starting with a one-size-fits-all chassis, you simply chose the number of doors, selected from a few trim and color options and had perhaps two or three engine choices. Once the bank approved your loan, you were done.

But with the end of the 1950s also came the end of limited selection. The introduction of compact-sized cars such as the Chevrolet Corvair, Plymouth Valiant and Ford Falcon created two tiers of vehicles under the same label. This was quickly followed by intermediate-proportioned cars that were positioned between full-size and compact. Suddenly, the proliferation of models made buying a new car a dizzying, if not daunting proposition.

Selecting an intermediate such as the Ford Fairlane would have appeared to be a good deal for most buyers. The car's bench seat provided room for six passengers, the trunk was capable of swallowing several week's worth of groceries, and the available power, trim and comfort options meant you could select as many features as you could afford. Best of all, the Fairlane's sticker price was hundreds of dollars less than a full-size Ford. No wonder Fairlanes began selling like hot cakes.

The creation of the intermediate also ushered in the birth of the Muscledar era. In 1964, Pontiac stuffed a big V-8 into its mid-



COURTESY OF FORD MOTOR CO.

A Ford Fairlane station wagon rolls down an assembly line in 1963.

sized tempest, turning this otherwise docile kitten into a rip-roaring tiger known as the GTO.

The marketing frenzy that ensued still reverberates to this day in Detroit. Faster than you could say hemispherical combustion chamber, every North-American automaker began to copy this approach, and most intermediates soon had high-performance options of their own. The reality was these cars never sold particularly well (most buyers still opted for much tamer powertrains), but their racy image was perceived to be critical in the quest for sales, profits and market share.

The first of the 1962 and 1964 Ford Fairlane intermediates were judged too small to participate in the burgeoning horsepower wars. Of the five different engine options offered, the most popular were the small-block 221-, 260- and 289-cubic-inch V-8s. Some 1964 models did wind up with monster 427-cubic-inch (7.0-liter) engines stuffed inside their relatively tiny engine bays, but these few were strictly used for drag racing and were not generally available to the public.

The second-generation 1966 Ford Fairlane, along with the nearly-identical Mercury Comet, considerably upped the intermediate stakes. The smooth styling of these cars bordered on the spectacular, arguably outshining not only the full-size Fords, but also competitors including the Chevrolet Malibu, Plymouth Satellite and Pontiac Le Mans. The Fairlane two-door hardtops, with their smoothly flowing rooflines and uncluttered body panels, were particularly handsome.

The other significant change with these intermediates in 1966 had to do with size. The Fairlane that was originally a notch above compact was now only slightly smaller than the big Custom and Galaxie models.

Again, model variety and powertrain selection on the Fairlane ran the gamut, and included two and four doors, coupes and hardtops, wagons and convertibles — and even a car-like pickup called the Ranchero. Buyers could order their Fairlane in barebones form, avoiding such frills as an AM radio, cut-pile carpeting, full wheel covers and whitewall tires, all the while sticking with the base six-cylinder/three-speed manual transmission combo.

At the other end of the scale was the Fairlane 500XL and XL GTs with their full load of features and engines ranging from a 200-horse 289 V-8 all the way up to the ground-shaking 427 that produced up to 425 horsepower.

The classic styling of the 1966 and nearly-identical 1967 Fairlane holds up well to this day, and these cars are much in demand by Ford fanatics. The subsequent Fairlane and Torino products that followed are nowhere near as desirable, although they were popular in their time.

In its all-to-brief life span, the 1966-'67 Fairlane was both tasteful and elegant in design, and as quick as greased lightning when equipped with the appropriate firepower. You could say the Fairlane represented automotive custom tailoring at its finest.

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Electronics
galore
in 2009
Acura TL

BY ANN M. JOB

For The Associated Press

The 2009 Acura TL sedan has so many electronic features, it makes some other luxury cars seem old-fashioned.

The new TL can provide Doppler radar maps on an interior display to show where rain and snow showers are, so there's no need to check weather maps on television. No need to scour travel books to find popular scenic drives, unless you want the details. It can come with a list of scenic routes, by state, and will direct you there via an onboard navigation system.

And if you want to drive in spirited fashion, the normally front-wheel drive TL offers all-wheel drive for the first time in 2009.

It's not any old all-wheel drive, though. The 2009 TL gets Acura's Super-Handling All-Wheel Drive that not only shifts power to both front and rear axles when slippery road conditions require, the system also can apportion power to the left- and right-side wheels, thus ensuring precise, stable cornering.

Slotted between the entry Acura TSX sedan and the full-size Acura RL sedan, the fourth-generation TL is a five-passenger, mid-size car with newly expressive styling, larger dimensions and the most powerful engine in Acura.

You get a 3.7-liter, single overhead cam V-6 with 305 horsepower, which is a tad over the 300 horses that a similar V-6 produces for the 2009 Acura MDX sport utility vehicle.

Starting manufacturer's suggested retail price, including destination charge, is \$35,755 for a front-wheel drive 2009 TL with a base, 280-horsepower V-6 and minus the weather maps and navigation features. Prices zoom to near \$40,000 with the Technology Package — Doppler radar, scenic drives, voice recognition for audio and other controls — and to \$42,995 when the top TL engine is added.

The TL, Acura's best-selling car, looks and is bigger for 2009, with an additional 6 inches of length, nearly 2 more inches of width and a half inch increase in height. But it wasn't the car's size that caught my eye. It was the new styling, with chiseled sides, pointy trunk lid and almost cartoonish front grille.

To be sure, the shiny, silver-colored accents on the door handles, along the roof line and in the headlamps and taillights provide a fine finish. And the light-emitting diode interior lights look cool.

But the exterior styling reminded me of a Cadillac concept car, not a luxury car from Acura, which is Honda's luxury brand.



ASSOCIATED PRESS/Acura

Consumer Reports gives the 2009 Acura TL a "better than average" reliability rating.

At a glance

Price as tested: \$39,445
Engine: 3.5-liter, single overhead cam V-6 with VTEC
City/highway fuel economy: 18/26 miles per gallon
Length: 195.5 inches
Wheelbase: 109.3 inches
Curb weight: 3,715 pounds
Built: Marysville, Ohio