



Making a Clean Brake

By Tony Lux

When you were a kid, you were probably taught that “Cleanliness is next to godliness.” Later on brake jobs, you certainly learned it was true, because a little badly placed foreign material could ruin your hard work. After all, a brake pad smudged with grease from a dirty finger could cause a brake to pull, drag or make noise.

But considering the location of brake parts, it’s also easy to believe that “Cleanliness is next to impossible.” Most braking systems are under vehicles driven on all kinds of surfaces in all kinds of weather. Even worse, fluids and lubricants that make automotive systems work, like brake fluid, often get on your hands or gloves while you’re working with parts that need to be clean.

So since the last thing you want is a comeback, take a few extra moments to avoid contaminating your work. Take a tip from the doctors on “ER”: use low-cost, disposable latex gloves when working with brake parts. Save time by putting on two pairs (photo 1) before you start the dirty part of the job. Then, when it’s time to handle contamination-sensitive items like new brake pads and shoes, just peel off your dirty outer gloves and use the clean inner set.

You still should use all chemicals sparingly, being sure none gets on a pad’s working surface. Sometimes, materials that help with the job also can cause trouble if they wind up in the wrong place. For example, ingredients in liquid noise suppressers can alter the friction characteristics of brake pads.

Other Cleaning Chores

Residue-free cleaning spray is a great way to deal with smudges on drums and rotors, and it’s useful if foreign material gets on pads and shoes, but it’s not the only cleaning agent you need.

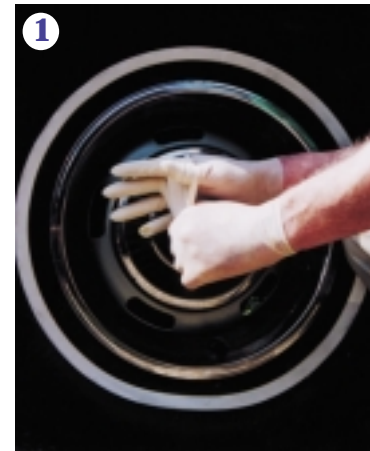
The best solution for cleaning rotors or drums that have been resurfaced is a solution of hot water and detergent (photo 2). The detergent action helps float away microscopic bits of metal left after machining and/or sanding of rotor or drum surfaces. Avoid fancy detergents that might include oily “secret ingredients.” The ordinary, inexpensive brands work fine.

Use paper towels to dry the drums and rotors you wash (photo 3). Rags or cloth shop towels may contain oily residue, even after they’ve been washed. It’s not a chance worth taking.

Hardware items and drum-brake backing-plate ledges need lubrication, and careful application is only half the story: Use special-purpose lubricant made specifically for braking-system parts. The wrong lube can liquefy at temperatures brake parts routinely encounter. When that happens, the lube may flow onto friction surfaces, dirtying (and damaging) your work after the fact.

Cleanliness is definitely vital in assuring quality brake-servicing results. With a few precautions and a little bit of care, it doesn’t have to be next to impossible. **UD**

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Never re-install a resurfaced rotor or drum before washing it with hot water and detergent. Rinse thoroughly and use paper towels to dry. This helps ensure that microscopic bits of metal left over from resurfacing won’t embed themselves in the pads and shoes, altering their stopping performance.

