

Technical Tip 178 – Silicone brake fluid

Let's start the new year off with a controversial subject but one of reasonable importance and that is the use of Silicone brake fluid in older vehicles in place of the old type (dot 4). People have such divided views – mainly based on hearsay and not personal experience.

Recently I discussed the use of silicone fluid with a major brake company and their advice was very simple – if your car stands for long periods of time then use silicone. The brake cylinders won't build up that white goo that goes with normal brake fluid.

The bottom line is that normal brake fluid, dot 4, is hygroscopic where silicone, dot 5, is not. Another lesser but important fact is that if silicone is spilled on paint work it won't remove the paint.

I've heard that when using silicone, the brakes become spongy - I've used it on numerous cars and never experienced this problem. I've also heard that the brake washers (seals as the trade call them) swell jamming the brakes on. This is possibly because the seals fitted were old rubber stock and not compatible with dot 5 brake fluid. Washers are cheap so to be on the safe side buy new ones - don't use the ones you have on the shelf. It is also advised, when going over to Silicone to replace all the seals. The cost of silicone fluid is considerably higher than dot 4 but it's a once-off purchase.

There are many ways to clean out old brake fluid. One suggestion is to flush the system out with methylated spirits. Another is to blow a small quantity of silicone fluid through with compressed air.

If you have Facebook, go into "silicone brake fluids" especially the article by Moss Motors. This gives the pros and cons of its use.

