

# Are you feeling (good) vibrations?



BY JEANA BABCOCK

Christmas songs are no longer playing on every radio station and in every store, so what kind of music are you humming now? I recently heard an oldie but goodie and found myself singing along with the chorus: “I’m pickin’

up good vibrations.” Thanks to The Beach Boys’ catchy tune, I found the song popping into my head at odd times throughout the day. It got me thinking about the good feelings and excitement I had over the holidays.

After being stationed in Japan and California for the last two and a half years, our son Jake was finally able to come home for a visit. And the feeling I had to finally envelop him in a long overdue hug certainly gave me “good vibrations” ... or maybe it was just me vibrating because I was sobbing so hard with joy!

Well, those are the great, warm fuzzy and welcome vibrations. But what about other vibrations, namely vehicle ones: do you start singing or have special feelings about those? Have you noticed a vibration sneak up on you over time? Have you addressed it? Do you know what is wrong and how important it might be to have it looked at? Vibrations have many causes—some require easy and inexpensive fixes, while others are more costly and may even be a safety issue that needs attention.

First, if you are not mechanically inclined, the type of vibration or shake you are experiencing needs to be explained to your mechanic. Notate the details of when your car vibrates. Do you feel it in your steering wheel? When accelerating? When braking? At what speed or is it when you are idle? Are there any other conditions of note? The answers to these questions will help your mechanic better pinpoint the cause of your vibration.

## TIRES

The most common reason for your vehicle to shake is related to the tires. There are many tire issues that can contribute to your vehicle’s vibrations but here are the major ones:

**Balance**—An off-balanced wheel can cause

significant shake. This is perhaps one of the most inexpensive fixes to have performed. If you don’t have a tire balancer in your garage, it’s a good idea to enlist the help of the professionals to get your tires properly balanced so you can roll smoothly and safely.

**Separation or warp**—If any of your tires have separated tread or are warped, it’s time to invest in some new ones. There is not cheap fix for this problem—and it’s important to remember that when replacing tires, you must replace, at the minimum, two tires. Even if only one has separated or is warped, replacing both is recommended to best maintain a safe vehicle. In some cases, depending on the integrity of all of your tires, it may be recommended to replace all four.

**Uneven wear**—A tire rotation is recommended as a first step if you notice uneven tire wear. If the vibration persists, the wear may be too great to fix with a rotation alone. Remember that alignment checks twice yearly are a good idea to help prevent uneven wear and also will allow your mechanic to advise you of any suspension issues.

## SUSPENSION

The purpose of the suspension is to maximize the friction between the tires and road surface, to provide stability with good handling and to ensure the comfort of all passengers. When there is a problem with the suspension, vibration most likely will be a symptom. There are several components that can wear over time and when they do, if not addressed in a timely fashion, they can cause unsafe handling and maneuvering of your vehicle.

Included in possible vibration culprits are: shocks/struts, upper strut bearings, ball joints and tie rods. The cost of the repair will vary depending on the part(s) involved. If the affected parts have never been replaced



on your vehicle, it is a good idea to consider replacing both sides, even if only one is affected. Just like with tires, this will allow for better performance and safety.

## BRAKES

Does your vehicle shake when you apply the brakes? This can be related to a caliper that sticks or your rotor could be bent out of shape (warped) due to heavy wear and tear. When you have a warped rotor, the pads which squeeze them can’t get an even grip and it will vibrate.

Do you understand the importance of brakes? Does it seem like I am always talking about brakes in my articles? I don’t think the importance of them is stressed enough. They are a safety issue—to you and to others on the road. When one of my technicians performs a brake evaluation and the brakes are deemed unsafe, it boggles my mind that a customer would ever say “I can’t afford to fix them right now.” I want to jump right over the desk and hug them and say “You can’t afford NOT to fix them!” If you notice any sign of brake problems from noise to vibration to a spongy pedal and so on, it’s important you have them assessed and fixed as soon as possible.

## ENGINE

Your engine is designed to get a specific amount of air, fuel and spark to run smoothly. Sometimes a vibration, shake or shudder may be from the engine compartment and may be due to bad spark plugs, wires, filters (air or fuel) or fuel system issues.

## TRANSMISSION

Upon acceleration you may notice a vibration. In this case, it could be related to low transmission fluid, a clogged transmission filter or even a worn universal or CV joint.

Certainly there are other possible vibration issues I did not cover here. This is why it’s important to notate the specifics of your vibrations so that an experienced mechanic can best find the cause and fix it. Many vibrations can be kept to a minimum with regular maintenance and periodic inspections. But if you start vibrating—and it’s not from the sobbing of squeezing your son—it’s important to find out why as soon as possible in case there is a safety concern. This may also save you money in the long run or at least help you keep a smooth ride.

*Article courtesy of Babcock Auto Care.*