

=== THE MOVING BRAKE TEST - CARS

We all need to do one, sometime, as part of our pre-driving check, whether it be on a guidance session, on an initial test or on a refresher test. However, recent questions have arisen over the enigma, which seems to surround the 'moving brake test'. I shall attempt to clarify!

Firstly, some guidance notes that we have available -

The DVSA Driving Manual advises drivers to, '*make a habit of checking daily that the brakes are working*'. No advice is given on how to actually do this. Simple, clear advice.

Roadcraft (2013), the advanced driving syllabus, our own manual and 'Bible', if you like advised on page 105 to, "*Check the brakes every time you use your vehicle, both before you move off and when the car is moving*". Roadcraft page 258 gives more details about the moving brake test, advising us to, "*Test the footbrake as soon as possible after moving off. Always consider the safety and convenience of other road users before you do a moving test*". Again, relatively clear and simple.

RoADAR's booklet, 'Advanced Car Test Guidelines', states on pages 4 - 5, "*You may be asked to carry out a moving brake test. This brake test only needs to be firm enough to confirm to the Examiner that the brakes are working. It is not an emergency stop!*" Again quite clear, but vague in its application.

The RoADAR Examiners' Marking Manual - Section 1: Use of controls - Preparation (October 2008) states - '*a moving brake check should be sufficient to indicate a serious fault and warrant further investigation. It is not necessary for the brake check to be at a speed that tests the seatbelts*'. No mention of speed or gear.

And finally, the RoADAR Examiners Notes for Guidance (10/08) para 5.52 states - '*Pre driving checks should be given as in Roadcraft. It is suggested that you tell candidates that they are to regard this drive with you as the first journey of the day in that vehicle. You will therefore expect a rolling brake test as early as possible. This will be to test the brake pressure and to indicate if there is a problem that needs further investigation, eg pulling to one side. It will be acceptable, after confirming positive brake pressure, if the moving brake check is combined with early gently brake application on the approach to the first hazard. The test is not intended to test the effectiveness of the inertia reel seat brakes!*'

Clear? In theory, yes. The definition and relevance of all the advice is sensible and practical and should of course be adopted. However, the problems arise when we attempt to practically interpret and apply what is written. It is then when it all becomes somewhat ambiguous. How fast should I be going? Which gear should I be in? Do I actually need to stop? What if I haven't got the space to do one? What if I forget? etc etc.

So, using the above guidance that we have – **Why?** **When?** **Where?** **How?**

Why? Easy! It's done to ensure that the brakes actually work, without any abnormal noises, and stop the car effectively AND to make sure that the braking is even, the car pulls up in a straight line AND to become familiar with the brakes in different vehicles. Whilst some cars do have warning lights if your brakes become faulty none can warn you of the brakes pulling or how much pressure you need to apply.

When? As soon as possible, either when driving the car for the first time that day or as part of the pre-driving check on test, or on a guidance run. It should preferably be undertaken BEFORE going out on the road, if at all possible.

Now let's look at what advice we have available for the **Where?** and **How?**

So – **Where?** No specific advice is given. On this point the Group advises that the car should be travelling in a straight line before the moving brake test is carried out AND that it should be performed preferably BEFORE reaching the public road, in other words in the car park or wherever you meet the Examiner.

The Group does not consider it safe or appropriate to leave the brake test until you are on the public road, unless of course circumstances dictate otherwise. If this is unavoidable then the moving brake test should be carried out with caution and great care, using all round observation. In most cases the brakes will have already been applied sometime in the car park, at least on exiting the car park to enter the road or at the first hazard!

How? Easy, by pressing the brake pedal! If the car stops and pulls up evenly, then the brakes work effectively don't they? Great! But how fast do I need to be going? And in what gear? Using the above guidelines and as advanced drivers, or up and coming advanced drivers, we are required to be resourceful and flexible in our approach to all road situations and to interpret and adapt the guidelines accordingly. Here we go then.

'To test the brake pressure'

Firstly and most importantly, remember to check your mirrors beforehand and during to ensure that it is safe to perform a moving brake check.

Secondly, inform the Examiner that you intend to perform a brake test. This should be done at a relatively low speed, ie under 10 mph, (you don't want to be hurtling down the road at 30 mph in 3rd gear to find out you are unable to stop!), in either 1st or 2nd gear, (in automatics select either 'D' or a lower option). The car

does not have to be travelling fast enough to test the efficiency of the seat belts, nor does the car have to come to a definite stop.

Although Roadcraft is our 'manual' we must remember that it is primarily written as a Police Driver's handbook and we must therefore bear in mind that police officers tend to drive different types of cars, which they need to become familiar with quite quickly. Their cars are all well maintained and regularly serviced, including having their brakes checked, so police drivers may need to familiarise themselves with the efficiency of the brakes in an unfamiliar car.

Thirdly, the brake pedal should be pressed firmly, but not harsh enough to lock the wheels, or come to a stop.

(In manual geared cars dip the clutch towards the end of the test and select, if necessary the appropriate gear – but surely that is obvious!)

And lastly, do not remove your hands from the steering wheel. You should remain in control of your vehicle throughout. However, do not hold the wheel so tightly that you fail to notice any pulling of the car to either side.

'Consider the safety and convenience of other road users'. This depends upon the space available, other road users nearby and weather conditions. For example, if there is another vehicle following you or the road surface is icy a moving brake test may not be appropriate or safe. These situations should be mentioned in the commentary and the test performed at the next available safe opportunity.

Associates who choose to do a commentary should explain to the examiner/tutor the reasons they are performing a moving brake test in order to demonstrate their understanding and necessity for the procedure. If half way through the test you realise you forgot to do a moving brake test at the start, then don't let it bother you or distract you from the remainder of your test. You will have already used your brakes, so to do one later on would be pointless!

The Examiners seem to have varying expectations of the moving brake test, but they, like us, are being guided by the same advice! The application of the advice is down to our interpretation and our judgement and the flexibility and skill of you, the driver. **If you feel you have tested the running efficiency of your brakes satisfactorily and safely, considered other road users and conditions then the test has been accomplished successfully.** The remainder of your test will then, no doubt, flow with ease and flair, being fully aware of the fact that, one, you remembered to do a moving brake test and two, it was performed appropriately and competently according to the guidelines we have available.

RoADAR have been contacted to ask for further clarification but to date no response has been received.

I hope this has helped to diminish the enigma and vagueness of the moving brake test and to instil some level of consistency. I would however, be interested to hear your own views, interpretations, thoughts or questions regarding this matter.

Sue Bannister
Advanced Tutor
Foresters RoADAR Group - Nottingham

March 2020

NOTE – following a Tutors' meeting in April 2022 it was discussed and agreed that the moving brake test for cars should be performed when the vehicle is travelling between 10 and 20 mph.

This will of course exclude the car park where the car drivers meet as it carries a speed limit of 5 mph.