

Question on Notice

Transport and Resources Committee Public Departmental Briefing - 22 March 2021

Inquiry into Vehicle Safety, Standards and Technology, including Engine Immobiliser Technology

Asked on 22 March 2021

The Transport and Resources Committee asked the Department of Transport and Main Roads:

QUESTION: Could the department confirm whether it is permissible for a vehicle owner to turn off their ABS / traction control if there are safety implications for the use of such equipment, for example when the vehicle is used on dirt roads.

ANSWER:

Antilock Braking Systems (ABS) are a critical safety feature offered since the 1990s by most vehicle manufacturers who have long seen the safety benefits that the feature provides. Whilst not specifically mandated, all light vehicles are now manufactured with ABS. ABS has been mandated in heavy vehicles since 2014 and motorcycles (above 125cc) since 2019.

ABS prevent the wheels from locking which reduces the stopping distance of a vehicle. It also assists by preventing the steered wheels from locking, ensuring there is no loss of directional control. Both of these safety benefits help a driver to either avoid a crash altogether or at least reduce the impact of a crash.

For use when driving on sand, gravel roads and off-road driving, the Australian Design Rules for braking include a provision allowing for the ABS to be temporarily switched off in heavy vehicles and motorcycles (where ABS is mandated) under certain conditions and at low speeds.

However, it is recommended that vehicles be driven to suit the road conditions, and in those circumstances, it should rarely if ever be necessary to switch off the ABS.

In contrast, the fitting of traction control to road vehicles is not mandated. It is fitted by vehicle manufacturers as a standard or optional feature to improve driveability of a vehicle, particularly under adverse traction conditions due to inadequate or differential friction between tyres and the road surface.

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The Transport and Resources Committee asked the Department of Transport and Main Roads:

QUESTION: Could the department provide information on testing of heavy vehicle exhaust braking systems during annual inspections.

ANSWER:

Heavy vehicle engine exhaust and compression brakes are collectively called auxiliary braking systems. Auxiliary braking systems also include hydraulic or electromagnetic retarders fitted to the driveline. Their fitment is not mandatory, and their performance is not regulated. This applies to both their effectiveness and their side effects such as noise, particularly from engine compression brakes. However, a well maintained and properly functioning engine compression brake should make no more noise than the regular operation of a heavy vehicle.

Engine exhaust brakes and engine compression brakes make positive contributions to the safe operation of heavy vehicles, particularly on roads with steep descent but may pose some community concerns about noise, particularly from engine compression brakes when used inappropriately.

Heavy vehicle operations are administered by the National Heavy Vehicle Regulator (the NHVR) on behalf of participating jurisdictions, including Queensland. The NHVR specifies requirements for heavy vehicle inspections through the National Heavy Vehicle Inspection Manual (NHVIM).

Heavy vehicle auxiliary braking systems such as engine exhaust or compression brakes are not tested during annual programmed vehicle inspections. However, checks of the exhaust system, including exhaust pipes and silencer, and that brakes are operating effectively and are correctly adjusted do form part of the inspection as specified under the NHVIM. A certificate of inspection (a requirement to operate the vehicle) is not issued to any vehicle found with a faulty muffler, exhaust or braking system.