

Wheels: Burt of Kettering writes, “I am writing Straight Talk to ask for your help on what probably is not too serious a problem with my just over one year old 2007 Toyota RAV 4 (four cylinder, 4-wheel drive). For some time now, I have noticed a decided ‘clunk’ when I move the transmission from ‘neutral’ into ‘drive’ first thing on start up in the morning. When I move it from ‘park’ into ‘reverse’ immediately after starting the car, it makes the change very smoothly with no such ‘clunk.’ I realize that at start up the engine is at a relatively high RPM and remains at an RPM higher than 1,000 (somewhere between 2,000 and 1,200 on the tachometer) for a couple of minutes. Exactly what now determines the reduction in rpm on a vehicle such as this, I don't know. It used to be engine temperature, but I guess it might now be on elapsed time or something else. I am not sure. When I brought this to the attention of the service writer at the Toyota dealer, he had no ready response as to what might be causing this problem. He did say he researched it and found no mention of similar problems with this model. His suggestion was that I wait a couple of minutes until the RPM drops to or below 1,000 RPM before moving the transmission from neutral into park. This seems to partially alleviate the problem, but often I still get a very positive ‘feel’ when I make this gear change. Some times my mind is elsewhere when I start the car and begin to drive off and do not wait the recommended couple of minutes before doing so. I am concerned that there may be a problem that over time could cause transmission problems because of what I perceive to be too much ‘play’ between the transmission and drive shaft. This does not happen when I engage the transmission after the car has warmed up. The dealer has told me that if I want the problem diagnosed properly by a service technician, I need to leave the car overnight. I understand his request, but I have been hesitant to leave the car because of difficulties in getting back to pick it up the next day. Am I worrying unduly about a very minor problem on an otherwise very well performing vehicle? I am old (77) and very hard of hearing. So what I perceive is the ‘feel’ when this ‘clunk’ takes place with my foot on the brake. Obviously, at start up, the vehicle is not in four-wheel drive. In fact I have only had the four-wheel drive feature engaged once or twice in the year and a few months I have owned it. Your thoughts and advice would be much appreciated.”

Halderman: The engine moves one way when shifting into drive and the other direction when shifting into reverse. If the dealer thinks it is normal, ask to drive another similar vehicle. There could be an engine mount problem. Try opening the hood and looking at the engine when shifting into and out of gear or have someone else do it when you look.

