

Wheels: An e-mail from Romey says, "What are your thoughts on continuously variable transmissions (CVT). Our newspaper, The Dayton Daily News, recently had a listing of the "8 Low Cost Vehicle Options for 2009." The Smart car was the only one listed with a CVT transmission. All the other cars had manual transmissions listed.

What are your thoughts on CVT transmissions relative to initial cost, fuel economy, durability (will they last 200,000 miles), distinct advantages to the CVT, and are there different types?

Do you think this is the wave of the future?"

Halderman: Thanks for writing with a good question. Without a doubt, a CVT transmission offers better fuel economy than a conventional automatic transmission and this is one of the reasons that it is being used by more vehicle manufacturers. It has some advantages and disadvantages just as any transmission design.

Advantages:

1. Very smooth without any jerking because it doesn't actually shift gears like a conventional automatic transmission
2. Allows the vehicle to achieve fuel economy close to that of a manual transmission

Disadvantages:

1. Unknown long term durability. The Ford 500 did offer a CVT, but it was dropped and replaced with a six speed automatic. I read that the warranty cost was about double that of the six speed.
2. Cannot be repaired and instead is now a replacement only assembly, which could be costly.

What do I think about a CVT? I do like the smoothness. I do not like the high engine speed when climbing hills. I prefer a conventional automatic transmission, especially if it is a six or more speed automatic.

