

Wheels: Francis of Lebanon writes, “I drive a 1995 Roadmaster Buick. For the past few months the antilock brake light has been coming on but doesn’t stay on. When it first came on, we asked a mechanic or two about it and they seem to think that since we aren’t experiencing brake problems, that it is simply a computer malfunction and nothing to really worry about. The light stays on more and more. As a matter of fact, it is close to staying on all the time but occasionally goes off. What do you think? Should I be concerned? Also, for most of the time that we have owned this car (bought new) the brakes squeak at times when you apply them. We have been told that this is normal for the type of brakes used today. It is aggravating. Any help will be appreciated.”

Halderman: If the amber antilock brake (ABS) warning lamp comes on or stays on after an engine start, the ABS computer has detected a fault. With most (but not all) ABS units, the antilock part will not operate when the amber warning light is on. The base brakes will work OK but drive carefully under slippery road conditions.

Wheels: What should Francis do?

Halderman: I suggest that the ABS be checked by a qualified service technician. The first step after a thorough visual inspection of the entire braking system is to use a scan tool to retrieve stored diagnostic trouble codes. The most likely fault would be a defective wheel speed sensor. These sensors are located at the wheels and the sensors themselves, tone ring, and the wiring are exposed to dirt, water, and road debris. A scan tool can also be used to look at all of the other sensors and components and can be used to record the operation of the system as the technician is driving the vehicle. Because you stated that the warning light is on most of the time, it should be easy to locate the cause.

