

Wheels: D of Bellbrook writes, “I own a 1991 Buick Park Avenue Ultra with 68,000 miles on it. My mechanic found that the condenser on the air conditioning system has a hole in it. The car design does not provide much protection from rocks or debris striking the unit. The bottom of the unit looks like a mad squirrel took a shotgun to it with several dents impressed into the fins. After reading several articles and researching the internet, I am confused on how to proceed. Should I replace the condenser, have it brazed, or add a sealant for the repair? More confusing is what to do about the refrigerant. Do I stay with R-12 as the original system was designed (which is expensive) or switch over to the replacement refrigerants (which I heard could shorten the life of the compressor)? There are so many different replacement refrigerants for R-12, how do you know which is the best type? Finally, I was planning on crafting a perforated guard at the bottom of the condenser to protect the unit from further damage. Should I be concerned that the air flow to the unit is too restricted?”

Halderman: I recommend that you have the condenser replaced, rather than repaired. I have never had good luck with a repaired condenser. I would also recommend that R-12 be used to avoid possible problems along with a replacement accumulator. If you do change refrigerants, use R-134a. You can fabricate a guard to protect the condenser and I would recommend large mesh screen, rather than screen door screen, so as to not cause an airflow restriction.

