

Wheels: An e-mail from Virginia says, “Returning from a 3400 mile trip, the speedometer on my 2001 Honda Civic registered 80 mph standing still and increased up to 150-175 mph while driving. The dealer replaced the speedometer. The vehicle has a history of speedometer malfunction (the original unit was replaced after a 3000 mile trip when the car was new and the speedometer went “berserk.”) The problem occurs when driving long distances. It seems unlikely that two speedometers have been defective. What do you suggest may be triggering the malfunction?”

Halderman: I think that the problem could be a defective alternator. If a diode in the alternator fails, alternating current is sent to the battery and throughout the electrical system. The speedometer apparently is using this AC voltage, thinking that the frequency is indicating vehicle speed. I saw this once before on a Ford truck. This can be easily checked by measuring the AC voltage at the battery with the engine running and the lights on to provide an electrical load. The maximum AC voltage should be 0.4 volts. If more than this, replacing the alternator will likely fix your problem.

