Amber Air Bag Warning Lamp

        The amber "air bag warning lamp" is used to notify the driver that a fault has been detected in the air bag circuit. The amber air bag lamp will often flash or remain on for a few seconds when you first start the engine as a bulb test and as a self-test.

Wheels: What should the drive do if the air bag warning lamp comes on?

Halderman: If the air bag warning lamp comes on during driving, continue driving as normal but be aware that the air bag(s) may not function in the event of a collision. Whether the air bag(s) will deploy depends on the make, model, year of the vehicle, plus the nature of the fault that caused the warning lamp to be turned on by the air bag controller or vehicle computer. The air bag circuits are very complex and involve several crash sensors, a coil assembly under the steering wheel as well as the inflator module, which contains the propellant and the air bag itself.
        The air bag controller or vehicle computer applies a low voltage signal through the components to check for proper connections. If a fault is detected in any part of the circuit, the amber air bag warning lamp will be turned on.

Wheels: How will a service technician determine the fault?

Halderman: The diagnostic trouble codes (DTCs) of an air bag system are read through the use of a scan tool. The code will help pinpoint the location of the fault to a small part of the air bag circuit.

Wheels: Some vehicle owners state that the side air bag warning lamp on the dash will come on or flash at times and then go out. Does this mean that a fault has been detected that requires that a service technician check the system?

Halderman: The side air bag warning lamp will light if the passenger or driver is out of position. In other words, if the passenger is leaning against the door, the side air bags are disabled during this time to avoid having the air bag possibly causing harm if inflated during a side collision. Simply having the passenger sit upright in the seat will usually cause the side air bag warning lamp to go out and restore the system to full operation and ready to deploy in the event of a crash.