Technology Forecast

Push-Button Parking Brakes

Activating a vehicle's parking brake will soon be as easy as pushing a button. With the switch to electrohydraulic and electronic brakes, today's mechanical parking brake systems will no longer be needed.

Braking action will be applied by an electric motor with a gearbox assembly. This device will be turned on and off by a dashboard- or console-mounted button.

With no more cumbersome levers to push or pull, people will be more likely to use their parking brakes—an important safety advantage. Vehicles will be less likely to roll if a transmission fails or if a driver fails to put a vehicle in gear properly—or forgets to do so at all.

An electronically controlled parking brake saves weight and is more efficient than today's mechanical designs. It also is easier for elderly and physically challenged drivers to use. Such people may not have the strength required to engage the parking brake correctly. With push-button operation, the parking brake can be safely applied by everyone. A step beyond the push-button parking brake would be the automatic parking brake. Such a system would use software that would turn the parking brake on and off automatically.

Action Activity

Research the Internet or other sources to find out more about push-button or automatic parking brakes. What other advantages are there for this type of parking brake? Are there disadvantages? What other devices are available for the elderly or physically challenged? Prepare a report summarizing the information you find and the advantages and disadvantages of this technology.