THE PREVENTIVE MAINTENANCE SERIES

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Elusive Noises In The Front of an FC

A quick double "snap" type of noise could be heard coming from the right front of an FC when hitting the brakes quickly. Dry or worn backing plate pads plus out of adjustment shoes can make this noise, but not this time. Wheel bearing adjustment and inspection of front end bushings and the shock mounts yielded no solution either. The next step was to grease all of the ball joints and check for major wear. The ball joints were all within specs but the test drive after the above work only produced a single "snap" noise instead of the original double noise. Sitting still, the single noise could be duplicated simply by bouncing the front end. I called on an able assistant to bounce the front end while I felt all of the possible movement points. Without a doubt the noise was coming from the right upper ball joint. I put my floor jack under the lower A arm and jacked the arm up and then down while I pumped grease in the fitting. Then I greased it while the steering wheel was turned back and forth. That solved the problem. Ball joints apparently can establish a wear pattern when deprived of grease sometime in their 50+ year lifetime that is hard to get grease into when the front end is off of the ground; best to grease them both loaded and unloaded, and while turning the steering wheel.

A week after the above irritating noise incident, a similar snapping noise was coming from the left front of an FC when hitting the brakes. Needless to say, my first reaction was to carefully grease the ball joints but this did not change the noise in any way. This time the noise could not be duplicated by bouncing, only by applying the brakes. I did notice that the pedal was lower than normal when applied and it was a '62 with manual adjusters. After pulling the drum I was going to remove the shoes intact with the adjuster so I could view the backing plate pads. As I remove the shoes and adjuster combination I heard the snap type of noise and found it was coming from the spring that is stretched across the star wheel – it was quite dry and due to the brakes being out of adjustment would snap across the teeth of the star wheel when the shoes moved out under pedal application. The drum amplified the noise enough to be heard while driving. A slight amount of grease applied to the star wheel teeth plus a brake adjustment eliminated the problem.

Preventive maintenance and sometimes careful diagnostic procedure will help sort out the little gremlins that pop up in our aging fleet.