

A More Reliable Brake Light Switch for Avanti

Bill Henderson

I am a relatively new Avanti owner, and am in the process of rehabilitating a 1963 R2 (63R 2782) which has been generally well cared for its entire life. I am a firm believer in “safety first”, and I have never been a fan of the old-fashioned pressure-activated stop light switch that was standard on the Avanti and many cars in the early 1960s and before.



As mine was not working, I decided to change it over to a mechanical switch that mirrors what is used on nearly all modern cars. There are advantages to this change. First, the brake lights now activate instantly when the pedal is moved, unlike the old system where the pedal has to generate full pressure to activate the switch and light the lamps. Second, the old style switch is troublesome and a potential point of hydraulic failure as it actually taps into the brake hydraulics.

I have performed this change on several other old cars, and it was easiest by far on the Avanti. Total time from start to finish was less than an hour, and the cost was under \$10. While this topic has appeared in these pages twice before during the past twenty years, the other two articles involved multiple brackets that had to be fabricated and mounted to the brake booster under the hood. My adaptation is much easier, and carries the added benefit of moving the switch inside the car where it is better protected from the elements.



Step 1: Procure a stoplight switch from NAPA or another auto parts source. Mine carried NAPA part number #SL169 (\$4.99), and is a fairly standard application used on many older cars and trucks. This type of switch is ON (contacts closed) when the plunger is released, and is OFF when the plunger is pushed in.

The switch will mount at the top of the brake pedal, and the slightest movement of the pedal will allow the switch plunger to open, causing the brake lights to go on. Releasing the pedal causes the top of the shaft to bump against and depress the switch plunger, turning the lights back off.

Step 2: Studebaker already very thoughtfully provided a pre-drilled attachment point at the top of the brake pedal for the new switch to mount. I used a small rectangular

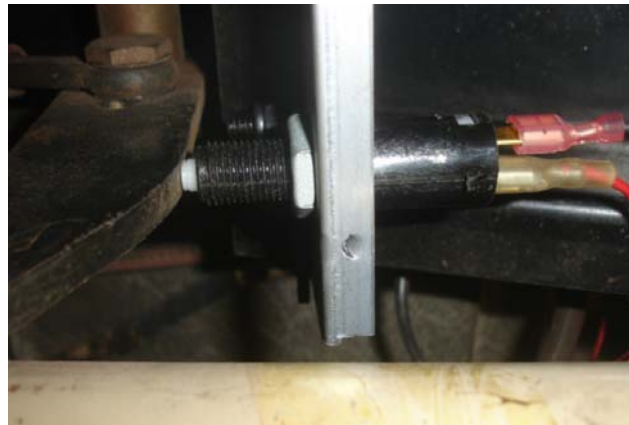


scrap piece of steel to make a bracket for the switch, measuring, marking and drilling the proper holes with my drill press (though a regular drill will work just fine if you clamp the work piece in a vice.)

Step 3: Mounting the switch to the bracket, and the bracket to the car is straight forward, using small, appropriate sized nuts, bolts and lock washers.



Step 4: While doubtlessly I could have located the feed wires to the brake lights in the loom under the dash if I wanted to, I chose the simple option of creating a simple patch cord that runs from the barrel connectors on the old switch connection under the hood, then through the hole in the firewall with the rest of the wiring harness, emerging inches from the pedal and the new switch. I secured the extra wires to the existing loom with evenly spaced wire ties for neatness, and made sure that there were no hanging wires under the dash.



That's all there is to it. Enjoy safer driving!