

Ask Ronny

by Ronny Shaver @ Ronny's Garage

Answering Your Questions About Classic Car Care Service And Restoration

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Do My Silver Cloud Shocks Need Replacing?

by Ronny Shaver

The Silver Cloud and Bentley S series have lever type shock absorbers. The front set are integral with the suspension and provide the pivot point for the upper control arm. It has a piston assembly that moves through fluid and specific passages that dampen the movement of the suspension. The rear shocks attach to the rear axle assembly with bushings and links. It also has a piston assembly that works with hydraulic resistance. The difference with the rear shocks is that they have an electric solenoid connected to a switch on the steering column which can change the hydraulic resistance inside the shock. There are two settings, "soft" and "hard". When in the "soft" position, the shocks move easier giving a softer ride and is used under normal conditions. When in the "hard" position, the shocks have more resistance and provide a stiffer ride. This position can be used when extra passengers and or luggage is in the car, or, when traveling on twisty roads.

The shocks are generally good for the life of the car, so long as they are maintained properly. They are filled with fluid and need to be checked when servicing the car. I've serviced many Silver Clouds over the years and have found that about 75% of these cars are very low on fluid and have compromised "ride quality" because of this. The original seals used on the shocks are not really seals but packing rings. Over the years the packing deteriorates and allows more "seepage" than planned for. Many times during servicing, the shocks will be topped off, then the car will have "new" leaks as the fluid drains out again.

Checking the fluid levels is not too hard. To fill the rear shocks, find the 5/8" head cap bolt on the upper shock housing facing up. Remove the bolt taking care not to allow any debris to fall inside, then fill with fluid until it runs out. I recommend a trigger type oil can with a flexible spout. Refit the cap and wipe up any spillage. Checking the front shocks is more difficult. Silver Cloud 1 and Bentley S1 shocks can usually be filled from under the bonnet. Open both bonnets and locate the shocks, look for the same type 5/8" head cap bolt. Repeat the process described for the rear shocks. On later Clouds and Bentley S models, the front wheels must be removed for access. Locate the shocks and filler bolt, attach a small rubber or vinyl hose to the end of the oil can spout and fill the shock as the others. It can be a little tricky to get the fluid into the shock without making a mess, but it can be done with patience.

The fluid I've used for many years with great results it simply "ATF" or automatic transmission fluid. There are fluids specifically designed for "lever type" shock absorbers, but they can sometimes be difficult to locate. ATF, on the other hand can be purchase almost anywhere.

Once the shocks are filled drive the car and park it. If the shocks seemed to take a lot of fluid, then be on the lookout for signs of new leaks under the car. A drip or two a week is not much to worry about, especially if fluid was spilled during the filling process. However, if puddles appear, the shocks may have more than normal "seepage".

To repair this condition, the shocks must be removed and have modern seals installed to prevent this "seepage" condition. The front shocks are somewhat difficult to remove since they are part of the actual suspension. The springs must be removed or compressed and secured in place safely, then the upper control arm must be detached from the shock. Once this process has been completed, simply unbolt the

shock and have it rebuilt or replace the seals with modern lip seals. Before unbolting the upper control arm, mark the position of the arm on the shaft of the shock, to preserve the caster alignment setting, otherwise and alignment will be needed.

The rear shocks are pretty simple to remove. Disconnect the shock arm from the link to the differential, detach the wiring to the solenoid, then unbolt the shock from the frame. The rear shocks are more difficult to reseal, I've found that the shafts tend to corrode more and require machining to repair and modified to accept modern seals.

I recommend two places to have the shocks rebuilt if needed:

1. Five Points Classic Auto Shocks, Santa Ana, CA. 714-979-0451
2. Apple Hydraulics, Calverton, NY. 800-882-7753

Thank you for the questions and keep them coming. Please send your questions to Ronny at ronnyshaver@ronnysgarage.com.

Happy Motoring!
Ronny