

HOW TO INSPECT BALL JOINTS FOR LOOSENESS

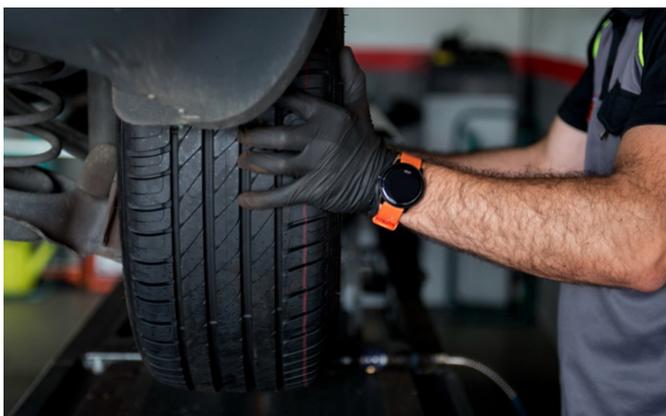
Ball Joints

Critical Component

A key part of a vehicle's suspension system, ball joints allow the suspension to move up and down, and the wheels to turn left and right. Keeping the ball joints in proper working order is crucial to a vehicle's overall performance. Ball joint looseness can cause alignment issues that affect handling and tire wear. Learn how to recognize the signs of a loose ball joint.

Checking Ball Joints for Excess Play

It's important to check ball joints for looseness at regular intervals and before performing a wheel alignment. By examining the ball joints regularly, you can replace a failing ball joint before it causes a bigger issue.

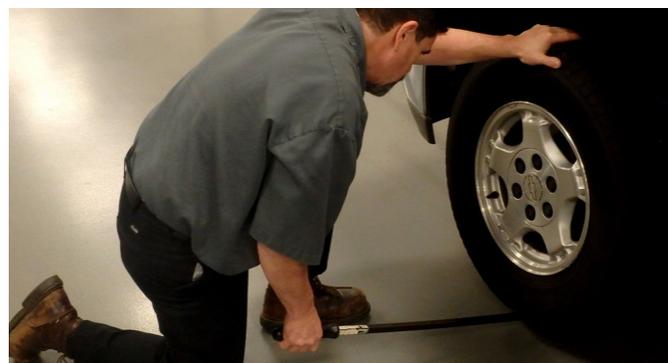


Some manufacturers may provide specifications that allow for a small amount of play in the repair manual. However, looseness that is within specification can still cause alignment and handling issues, especially if other components are loose but within specification. Use your best judgment when inspecting ball joints and other chassis components to decide if replacement is necessary to reduce tire wear and restore like-new handling.

Load-Carrying Ball Joint

To check a load-carrying ball joint for looseness, use a floor jack and raise one tire at a time so the suspension is unloaded and the upper control arm is not touching the frame.

Step 1 – Use a pry bar to check for vertical looseness between the ball joint stud and housing.



Step 2 – Check for horizontal looseness by grabbing the tire and moving it in and out.



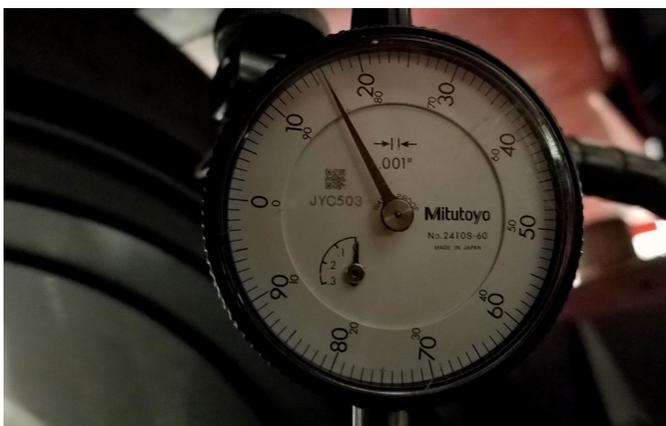
Step 3 – To inspect the ball joint on a MacPherson strut suspension for radial looseness, lift the vehicle off the ground and move the tire in and out.



Step 4 – Check for axial looseness by using a pry bar to lift up the tire.



Step 5 – If using a dial indicator to check axial and radial looseness, attach the dial indicator and measure axial looseness by using a pry bar to lift the weight off the unloaded tire and wheel assembly.



Step 6 – Measure radial looseness by pushing in and pulling out on the bottom of the tire.



Non-Load (Follower Type) Ball Joint

Inspect non-load carrying ball joints with the suspension unloaded. Check for horizontal looseness by grabbing each tire and pushing inward and pulling outward on the wheel and tire assembly.



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