

**T**he Boxster is an amazing Porsche, despite its lowly position in the Porsche lineup and smaller engine size. The mid engine configuration allows it to power through corners effortlessly, and it was designed as a true convertible instead of a modified hard top. I bought my 1997 Boxster two years ago for these very reasons. It had high mileage, a new engine, and had three previous owners. My Porsche was the polar opposite of a garage queen! The best part of the purchase was securing the car for thousands less than wholesale, which was the only kind I could afford. I knew that it would require work here and there to make it right, but I was not discouraged. In fact, I looked forward to the challenge of making a neglected Boxster run well and look far younger than it's age.



As with any model and make, the Boxster has its unique problems. I can say with great confidence that I have encountered most every problem known to this model! Because it was my first Porsche, and I had a strong desire to get the car into good running shape, I decided to take one repair at a time and do it right.

Following are the typical problems found in older Boxsters. If you own a 986, you'll no doubt find this list to include things you've paid to repair or were replaced under warranty. However, I believe you may learn about other repairs you did not know about. Knowing what might wear out prematurely or has been upgraded on newer models is always good, and I hope the following will help you look for and correct issues that will keep you from being stranded on the side of the road.

### **The horn pad**

The very first repair I made within days of taking ownership was the worn horn pad under the driver's

side airbag. The rubber grommets had worn out due to age and exposure to heat. I first noticed the problem under heavy braking when the horn sounded, due to the inertia of the airbag against the pressure plate. After a rather angry driver in front of me gave me the finger—thinking I was blowing my horn to get them out of my way—I took it straight to the dealer. \$212 later, I no longer looked like a middle-aged guy with a superiority complex. From my research online, I've determined this problem is far more prevalent with 4-spoke wheels, by the way.

### **The digital display in the instrument cluster**

Part of my digital display decided to go out on my drive home from Florida where I bought the car. Thinking it was simply a burned-out lamp, I asked the dealer to look at it when the horn pad was being replaced. Sadly, it was not a simple lamp swap, but a cluster swap and they cannot be repaired. Fortunately, I was able to secure a new, unprogrammed cluster off Ebay for a tiptronic for just \$450 and swapped my manual transmission gauge face, then had the dealer program it. From more research, I found that used clusters cannot be reprogrammed to match your car's mileage by the dealer, but Palo Alto Speedometer in California can do it for a small fee. If you choose the used cluster route, it's not much work to swap it out yourself.

### **The coolant tank reservoir**

Boxsters are notorious for expansion tank leaks and mine was not unique. They don't age gracefully, and may develop cracks within three or four years. I noticed a small loss of oh-so-expensive coolant during my driving vacation to Yosemite last year, and had it replaced last month. The problem with this issue is that it's very hard to view leaks as the reservoir is inside the trunk area and surrounded by metal. One quick way to see if yours is leaking is to pull up the carpet and base flooring of your rear trunk and look for fresh or dried coolant. By the way, when you replace your reservoir, replace the radiator cap as well to insure a good solid seal.

### **The ignition switch**

Just a few days before my big driving vacation, I discovered some very odd behavior with the air conditioning settings, the functioning of the radio, electric windows and the windshield wipers. At first, my wife decided the car was possessed, but after a quick call to my favorite person in the whole world (my mechanic), he told me it was an inexpensive switch

behind the ignition key. While the dealer wants to replace the entire locking mechanism (very expensive) the part is common on both the Audi and the Volkswagen and is about \$22 plus installation. An hour after I brought the car in for repair, my Boxster demons had been exorcised.

### **The primary radiator fan**

The Boxster has two radiators behind the front bumper cover. The driver's side is the primary, and secondary on the passenger's side typically kicks on when the AC is blowing or the system simply needs further cooling. While it's twice the parts to replace when something goes out, it's a good system that has a fail safe built in. After I noticed a consistent hotter running temperature when I was sitting in traffic, I had it checked out and the primary fan replaced. Some times, the actuator goes and this is an inexpensive fix, so if one of your fans stops working, check the actuator first.

### **Window regulators**

The window regulators on Boxsters seem to wear more than say, the same regulator in a 996 because it's a convertible. The windows are moved up and down far more than in a hard top. This causes rapid wear, and my Boxster was no exception. The pas-

senger side failed recently, and I had it replaced. There are simple ways to tell if the regulator is failing. Ask a friend to raise and lower your windows as you watch from the outside of the car with the door closed. If the front or the back leaves a gap at the top and isn't raising fully front to back, your regulator is wearing out.

### **Oxygen Sensors**

Because I have 92k on my car, I recently replaced my oxygen sensors even though I had yet to throw a check engine light for it. It's an expensive repair because you can't just replace one... there are four. Fortunately, I was able to buy Bosch sensors that are OEM equipment online for a reasonable price and do this swap myself with my new floor jack. The benefits have far exceeded the cost! My engine runs far smoother, my fuel economy has improved, and I have more power. It was the best performance modification I have made to date.

### **Seat belt receptacles**

An airbag warning light (or any warning light, for that matter) on the dash is bothersome. There's a number of reasons it could be illuminated, and a quick check with a Porsche System Tester Tool showed it was my driver's side seat belt receptacle.

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The tiny switch inside it failed due to use. So, I replaced both sides myself and had the airbag lamp turned off. This is an easy fix, and you should do it as a preventative measure if your Boxster is three years old or older. Just remember to disconnect the battery and have your radio code handy before you remove the bolts securing your seats.

### **Top mechanism switch**

If your top stops working, it may well be a microswitch or the dash switch that raises and lowers the top. On my Boxster, the dash switch went out and it was a simple, inexpensive fix of five minutes. A butter knife removed the side of the dash and was the only tool required. There are other microswitches that will prevent the top from raising or lowering as well, but these have not been a problem. They are located near the emergency brake, at the back of the top cover just in front of the third brake light, and in the center of the windshield where the top hook resides when closed (you can put your finger up into the hole and actuate it to see if this has gone out or has become too worn to make full contact).

### **Oddments tray hinge**

In the older Boxsters, the hinge on the center console breaks because it was made out of plastic. Mine was broken when I bought the car and I have the rivet tool and kit to fix it, but I'm saving the project for a rainy day due to the numerous screws to remove to take out the entire center console to work on it in my garage. This was repaired under warranty on older Boxsters, but if yours is out of warranty, the kit is available online from aftermarket parts houses.

### **Rear Windscreen Rattle**

The windscreen in Boxsters are notorious for rattling as you drive down the freeway at higher speeds. It's enough to drive you nuts! How could a car of this caliber have a rattle so close to one's ears? The fix was simple and fast. The black clips on the windscreen itself are easy to break and become brittle with age. \$6 and five minutes work made it fit tightly. The addition of some black foam strips with adhesive on one side, applied to the bottom of the windscreen were also helpful to keep the piece in place and rattle-free.

There are a number of issues that I have not had to deal with such as the dreaded RMS leak, failing oil separators, etc., so I can't share from experience on these repairs. However, I have done a number of repairs to the car that are not model specific. These

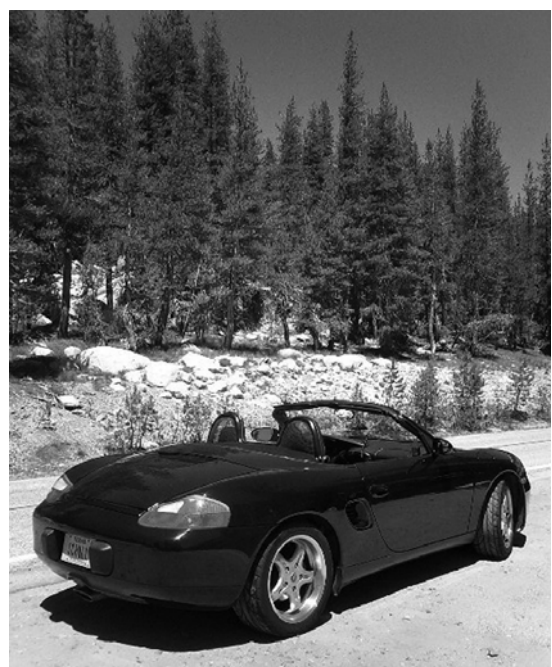
include a newer transmission, rear struts, a front control arm, and a fuel sending unit.

You may be asking yourself if it was worth my time, energy and money to repair an older, high mileage Boxster. Dollar-wise, I'd probably lose money selling the car today, but I have no intention of selling it for a long, long time! I've added quite a few updates to the car, such as litronic headlamps, and 8-way electric seats out of a late model 996 that was being reworked for track use.

I've driven the car from Miami, to Houston, and then to Northern California and back via Las Vegas and the Grand Canyon. I take early morning drives to the twisty roads just north of San Felipe (just North of I-10 near Sealy) once a month or so, and when I only have a half hour to drive, I cruise up Memorial Drive to downtown Houston and then back out of town on Allen Parkway a couple of times. Driving my Boxster is absolutely the most fun a guy can have with his clothes on, and I've yet to track the car, which I will do now that it's in good running shape.

If you have an aging Boxster, keep it maintained with this information and I'll see you around town or better yet, out on the wonderful country roads surrounding Houston one Sunday morning at daybreak!

Randall Neighbour is a new PCA member and a writer by trade. If you have Boxster-related questions, feel free to email him at: [ramdall@touchusa.org](mailto:ramdall@touchusa.org)



Enjoying the sights in Yosemite National Park